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Berenpas, M.

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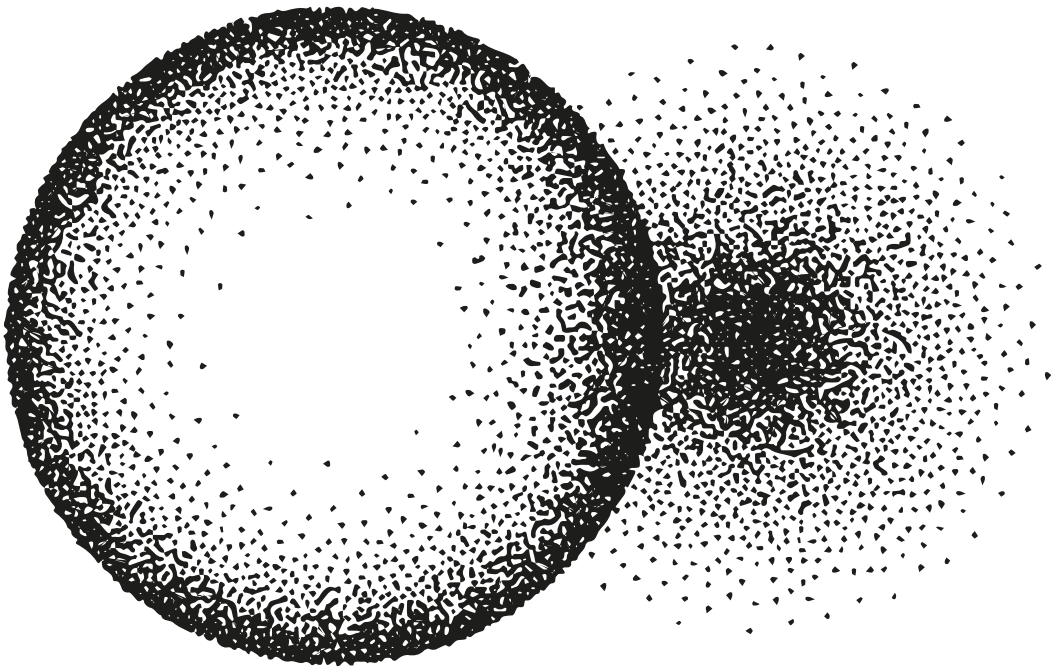

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Don't be a medium possessed by your name,
Don't be a stockroom for schemes.
Don't take the weight of affairs on your shoulders,
Don't be the man in charge of wisdom.

The Zhuāngzǐ

Maybe you will always be
Just a little out of reach

Guster- Satellite

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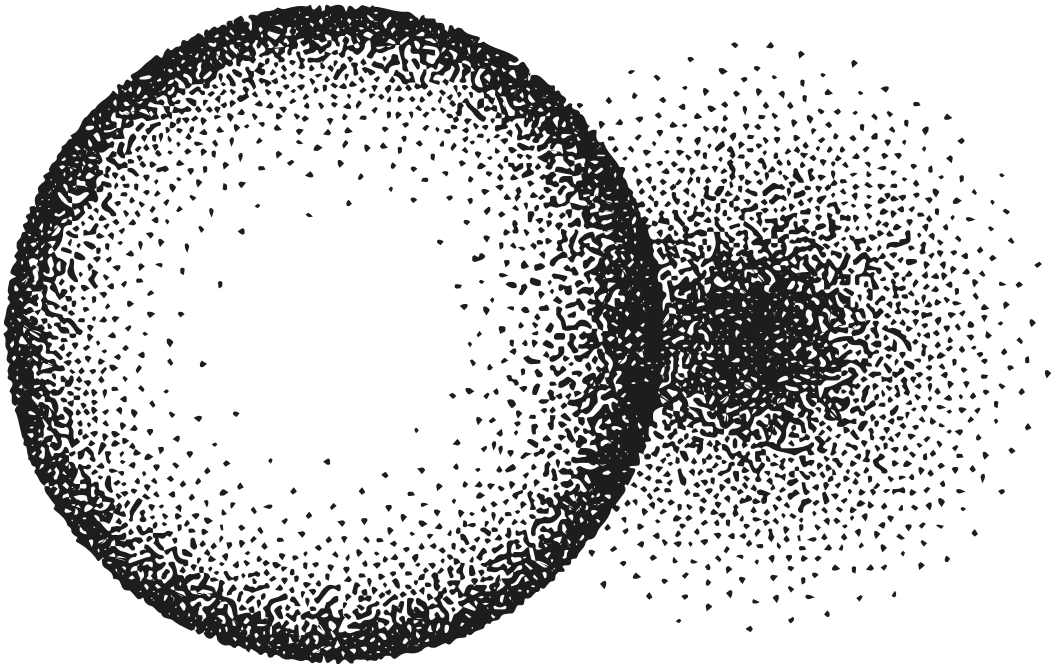

Chapter 1

Introduction

§1.1 Doing Comparative Philosophy

In this dissertation, I present Emmanuel Levinas' work on the ethical relation and the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s articulation of the "pivot of *dào*" (*dàoshū*, 道樞) as important resources to reconceptualize comparative philosophy and to be able to attune to the tension in comparative philosophy between difference and sameness. Instead of current methodologies that are based on what culturally divergent philosophical concepts or thinkers have in common, this study aims to show how the position of the person doing the comparison must be taken into account, and which calls for the need to reflect on ethical competence as a necessary precondition for comparative philosophy. Ethical competence allows comparative philosophers to approach the cultural other in the most open way possible and to attune to the otherness of the cultural other. The challenge that the comparative philosopher faces is how to create a cross-cultural encounter that avoids the theoretical colonization of the other and does not rely on biases of cultural philosophical traditions in particular. The dissertation will articulate a conception of ethical competence based on the work of Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*. Their thinking on the self-other relation can help us to reconceptualize comparative philosophy in the face of issues and challenges in the modern and post-colonial academic setting.

Comparison is a fundamental aspect of philosophical research, yet it becomes problematic when we want to compare concepts from disparate cultural philosophical traditions and the concepts we want to compare are sufficiently divergent that we can no longer assume a common ground. Several problems of incommensurability, such as linguistic, foundational and evaluative incommensurability, threaten the comparative project and call for the need to reflect on what comparative philosophy is and how we should practice it.

Comparative philosophy as an academic discipline tries to discern similarities between culturally disparate philosophical concepts, and is motivated by the desire to learn from and understand a divergent cultural philosophical tradition. The aim is to expand our culturally confined perspective and acquire new meaning(s) by engaging with another cultural philosophical tradition; which suggests that expanding our own perspective is dependent upon the relation to the other.[1] The specific nature of comparative philosophy lies in the encounter with the other; the comparative encounter is valued because this other is deemed radically different to one's own tradition.

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[1] Connolly, T. (2015). Doing Philosophy Comparatively, Bloomsbury, 22-24.

Current methodologies in comparative philosophy try to secure the comparative encounter by showing how concepts or conceptual systems between distinct cultural philosophical traditions can be seen as "quasi-universals" and resemble in some ways. Although we need to rely on these points of commonalities to initiate the comparative project, I will call attention to the importance of being able to approach others in an open, critical and reflective way. I will argue that comparative philosophy needs to cultivate a non-totalizing relation between self and other, which more specifically entails that comparative philosophers needs to overcome their rigid patterns of thinking and have the responsibility to take the otherness of the other into account.

In philosophical research, the specific perspective of the person who is doing the comparison influences what is compared and in what respect. After all, what these concepts mean and entail, is dependent upon the particular interpretation of the person doing the comparison. Scholars such as Rorty (1991) argue that comparison between disparate cultural philosophical traditions is not a workable practice because truth and falsity and our way of reasoning, are the result of differing cultural conventions and standards of assessment. In a minimal sense, we can say that comparative philosophy is challenged by conceptual relativism, which calls for the need to reflect on how we are dependent on conceptual schemes, categorical frameworks and paradigms and how this dependence influences the comparative project. Concepts can be easily compared within the same ontological tradition, but this exercise becomes challenging when we try to understand concepts from a distinct cultural and philosophical tradition and cannot assume a common ground.

§1.2 Comparing the Incomparable: The *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas

Comparative philosophy is initiated by the desire to expand one's own perspective and understand and learn from another cultural philosophical tradition. Comparative philosophers can however never approach the other in a neutral way, but always remain shackled to their own cultural perspective. They interpret and translate concepts from another tradition into their own language and their choice of methodology and concepts influence the comparison. Comparative philosophy is thus a hermeneutical practice in which comparative philosophers try to match concepts from different traditions.

Comparative philosophy seeks to justify the comparison of disparate cultural philosophical traditions by arguing that some concepts can be seen as "family resemblance categories." Slingerland (2004) and Ma and van Brakel (2016) argue for example that some concepts bear a resemblance to concepts found in many other cultural traditions because these concepts are all drawn from human interaction with reality.[2] Ma and van Brakel (2016), Kwok-Ying Lau (2016) and Chai (2020) argue that the family resemblance method is particularly suited to encourage comparison between East Asian and Western philosophy, in which, specifically, Chinese Daoism and the Western phenomenological tradition are seen as sufficiently alike to produce fruitful comparisons.[3] Several studies have compared Heidegger, Derrida and Deleuze to the early Daoist texts the *Dàodéjīng* and the *Zhuāngzǐ* and argue that these philosophies share similar philosophical insights.

Other studies have addressed the interconnection between the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*. Wu Meiyao (2014) for example provides a Daoist, Derridean and Levinasian reading of the Hundun parable that concludes Chapter 7 of the Zhuāngzǐ. Meiyao argues that the sentence "Hundun treats them very well" (待之甚善) might be understood as Hundun's ability to be purely open to the otherness of emperors Shun and Hu. These rulers continually meet in the land of Hundun, and in exchange for the latter's hospitality, drill seven holes in Hundun to "make him more human," which accidentally kills Hundun. Meiyao particularly emphasizes the relevance of the Levinasian reading of the parable and the ethical significance of the face-to-face encounter, for according to Meiyao: "after all Hundun or Chaos is also a Face, perhaps only a face, one whose original 'blankness' is destroyed."[4] Ellen Zhang (2017) provides a Levinasian reading of the ethical in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, arguing that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s transfiguration of the self is based on the encounter with the other; a "constellation," concludes Zhang, "which resonates with Levinas' theme."[5]

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[2] Brakel, J. van & Lin, M. "Comparative Relativism" Common Knowledge, 17 No.1 (2011): 1-12.; Slingerland, E. (2004). "Conceptual Metaphor Theory as Methodology for Comparative Religion," Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 72 No 4, 1-31.

[3] Brakel, van & Lin. Comparative Relativism; Kwok-Ying, L. (2016). Phenomenology and Intercultural Understanding. Toward a New Cultural Flesh, Springer.; Chai, D. (2020). Daoist Encounters with Phenomenology: Thinking Interculturally about Human Existence. Bloomsbury.

[4] Meiyao, W. "Hundun's Hospitality: Daoist, Derridean and Levinasian Readings of Zhuangzi's Parable" Educational Philosophy and Theory, 46 No. 13 (2014):1442.

[5] Zhang, E.Y. "The Face/Facelessness of the Other – A Levinasian Reading of the Ethical of the Zhuāngzǐ" Front. Philos. China, 12 No. 4 (2017):533.

The apparent resonance between the *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas is also addressed in Zhao's essay, in which she compares Levinas' notion of subjectivity to the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s "non-being self."[6] In her essay, Zhao criticizes several studies that have compared Levinas' notion of the responsible self to the responsible self in Confucius. According to Zhao, Confucius and Levinas are incomparable because the foundation upon which Levinas builds his notion of the self is irreconcilable with the foundation from which Confucius draws. Zhao argues however that Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* can be compared, because they both build their notion of the self on "pre-ego, pre-reflective experiences."[7]

In this dissertation, I want to reflect on claims made in comparative philosophy in which A and B are seen as targets of "the right comparison," that is to say, on assertions about what is comparable and not. I want to show that these assertions rely on a rigid distinction between what is comparable and not comparable and are not compatible with the nature of comparative philosophy as a discipline that is hospitable to a variety of methods, approaches and possibilities. Instead of claiming what is comparatively "so" or "not so," it is my aim to show that comparative philosophy has a much broader meaning.

It is my contention to show that comparative philosophy is part of an intercultural conversation that allows us to reconsider how we represent others and helps us in overcoming our biases. By formulating a critical-transformational intercultural position in which the comparative philosopher reflects on the self-other relation and actively tries to become open to the other, this study tries to make comparative philosophy more sensitive to the tension between difference and similarity inherent in the comparative encounter.

§1.3 Comparative Philosophy and the Problem of the Tertium

When we want to learn from the other and the other's perspectives and want to transcend our own cultural horizon, we need to reflect on the hermeneutics of comparison. Weber (2014) distinguishes four aspects of comparison: (1) comparison is always done by someone, (2) at least two relata (*comparata*) are compared, (3) the *comparata* are compared in some respect (*tertium*

[6] Zhao, G. "Transcendence, Freedom, and Ethics in Lévinas subjectivity and the Zhuāngzǐ's non-being Self" Philosophy East & West, 65 No. 1 (2015): 66.

[7] Ibid., 67

comparationis), and (4) the result of the comparison is a relation between the *comparata* on the basis of the chosen *tertium*. Weber argues that objectivity in comparative philosophy cannot be easily obtained, because the comparative process is influenced by the comparer's "pre-comparative assertion of commonality." This "pre-comparative assertion of commonality" informs the decision which *comparata* and *tertium* are chosen and serves as a privileged vantage point from which to carry out the comparison.[8]

Weber and Xinli Wang (2018) argue that the success of comparative philosophy largely rests on unquestioned notions of comparison.[9] In several studies, scholars do not offer criteria for the validity of the comparative process, nor address how the pre-comparative assertion of commonality influences the comparison. Wang, whilst providing an analysis of the incommensurability of concepts derived from different cultural symbolic traditions, also shows how comparative philosophers do not reflect on their own assumptions and commitments. He concludes that comparative philosophy has not overcome cultural relativism, but merely assumes that relativism poses no threat anymore.[10] Comparative philosophy should therefore reflect on the comparative process, and should pay attention to prejudices and assertions that influence the comparative outcome. This entails that comparative philosophy as a hermeneutical practice should reflect on the position of the persons doing the comparison and how their attitudes, beliefs and emotional commitments influence what is compared and in what respect.

Comparative philosophy is a human affair and involves thinking about and interacting with another cultural tradition, and because tradition is formed by humans there are always concepts that show similarities with the concepts that we used in our tradition. Nevertheless, what is compared with what and in what respect, as well as which method is chosen is dependent upon the specific background and emotional investment of the person doing the comparison. The pre-comparative assertion of commonality reveals the emotional investment of comparative philosophers, because it is formed by what interests them and what they see as a relevant and productive comparison.

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[8] Weber, R. "Comparative Philosophy and the Tertium: Comparing What with What, and in What Respect?" *Dao*, 13 (2014):169

[9] Ibid.,169.; Wang, X. "Incommensurability and Comparative Philosophy" *Philosophy East & West*, 68 No. 2 (2018):564

[10] Wang. *Incommensurability and Comparative Philosophy*, 566

The praxis of comparative philosophy requires thus the reflection on the persons doing the comparison and a critical assessment of their stance. Weber argues therefore that philosophers should justify their choices of *comparata* and their choice of the *tertium* to make the comparative process more transparent.[11] While reflection on the comparative process is certainly needed, merely justifying their choices will not be enough to avoid the problem of cultural philosophical hegemony, as it does not reflect upon the tension between sameness and difference. Comparatie philosophers need to do more than justifying their choices; they need an ethical commitment to become open to the cultural other and to avoid cultural imperialism as much as possible.

The comparative process is dependent upon the cultural horizon of the persons doing the comparison, which entails that comparative philosophy generates a variety of different perspectives on what is comparable and in what respect. Instead of seeing comparative philosophy as a discipline that reveals the truth about what is objectively "comparable" and what is not, we need to see comparative philosophy as a discipline that generates a variety of different, sometimes incompatible, perspectives. Truth in comparative philosophy is not related to what is comparable and what is not, but is concerned with the commitment to avoid the theoretical colonization of the cultural other, showing that comparative philosophers need to approach the other and the other perspectives in an unbiased and responsible way. The question that this study aims to address is how and in which way comparative philosophers can approach the other and the other's perspectives so that they can expand their perspective without colonizing the other. In other words, comparative philosophers need to be committed to openness in order to engage critically and transformative with regard to the other. The other is not only the cultural other who we try to understand, but also the community of comparative philosophers to whom we discuss our claims and findings. The point is that we need to allow for an open and responsible conversation with others in which we should accept to be constantly challenged and questioned in our beliefs and presuppositions.

Weber and Chakrabarti (2015) argue that comparative philosophy needs to adopt a borderless discourse that draws upon philosophical resources from across a variety of cultural philosophical traditions so that their horizons are fused and a space is created for "conceptual thinking outside all sorts of

[11] Kahteran, N. "Towards Post-Comparative Philosophy: Interview with Ralph Weber" *Asian Studies*. 9 No.2 (2012):218

boxes."[12] Weber and Chakrabarti give some compelling insights in the nature of comparative philosophy. They suggest that cross-cultural philosophy cannot claim to have reached the truth and that there is no correct way of doing cross-cultural philosophy, recognizing that no rules can be set up on the right way to approach the other and the other's perspectives. They emphasize that the person doing the comparison is allowed to appropriate elements from a variety of different traditions, but only for the sake of solving problems and/or raising problems that have not yet been considered. In line with this requirement, Weber and Chakrabarti argue that deconstruction is not a fruitful method to practice comparative philosophy, as it does not help us to solve or raise unfamiliar problems.

But is solving philosophical problems and raising new ones the only aim of comparative or intercultural philosophy? Does not the value of the cross-cultural encounter also consists in being confronted with the cultural otherness of the other; a moment in which comparative philosophers are forced to question certain commitments and beliefs they have? Comparative philosophy is more than solving philosophical problems and raising new ones; it also has an ethical aspect and is motivated by overcoming stereotypical representations of the other. When comparative philosophy wants to pay attention to this ethical aspect, it needs to reflect on the comparative philosophers who are doing the comparison and how they can approach the cultural other in the most open and sensitive way possible.

§1.4 The Problem of Theoretical Colonization

The main aim of comparative philosophy is to understand and learn from a cultural divergent philosophical tradition. Comparative philosophers can only genuinely learn and understand another cultural tradition when they approach to other as an equal valuable philosophical tradition. Privileging our own beliefs, assumptions and attitudes prevents us from transcending our cultural philosophical perspective and denies the unique value of the other cultural tradition, the latter of which is a staple of colonialism.

Western philosophy has benefited from and continues to benefit from colonization, particularly by promoting the assumed neutrality of its enlightened

[12] Chakrabarti, A & Weber, R. (eds.) (2015). *Comparative Philosophy without Borders*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 218.

"humanism," that relates to a series of commitments to human reasoning, freedom and truth. In the *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon articulated the need to call into question the colonial situation, which he described as a world based on exclusion, a world "obedient to the rules of pure Aristotelian logic."[13] The rationality of the universal refers to the belief that the Western epistemological tradition provides the tools to understand, capture and analyze the entire world. This rationality relies on a sharp demarcation between what is "self" and "other" in which that what is other is seen as inferior.

The relation between identity and difference, between same and other, has played a vital role in the Western history of philosophy and is the pervading principle behind theoretical colonization. Decolonization as a historical process that criticizes and assesses the several ways that theoretical colonization has left an imprint on human thinking, language, practices and culture, pushes Western philosophy to reflect on its assumptions and to take responsibility for its colonizing tendencies. Silva (2019) emphasizes that epistemic injustice occurs when indigenous ways of thinking are devalued through relying on the logic of an externally constituted commonality, leading to the exploitation of "any commonalities they had with the colonized and reject inconvenient differences."[14] It is therefore important to reflect upon the inherent tension between sameness and difference when we compare different cultural philosophical traditions. This study will show that a certain kind of ethical competence in which comparative philosophers embody certain beliefs, emotions and comportments that enable them to respond in an open, flexible way to the cultural other. This form of ethical competence is needed in comparative philosophy to respond to the problem of theoretical colonization and epistemic injustice.

Furthermore, as a discipline that wishes to understand and learn from another cultural philosophical tradition, comparative philosophy needs to reflect on and respond to the tendency of Western philosophy to see its standards as ultimate. Learning and understanding from another cultural philosophical tradition is not merely valuable when it can help us to solve a certain problem or in order to explore novel issues, but also lies in the encounter itself; learning from the other means being questioned by that other and critically assessing

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[13] Fanon, F. (2001). *The Wretched of the Earth*, Penguin Books, 28

[14] Silva, G.J. (2019). "Comparative Philosophy and Decolonial Struggle. The epistemic Injustice of Colonization and Liberation of Human Reason" *Southern Journal of Philosophy*. 57, Nº S1, 107-134

our assumptions and beliefs. In order for decolonization to be realized, we need to critically examine the nature of the comparative praxis and endorse a philosophical discourse of intellectual tolerance. Ethical competence is formulated in this study as the willingness to embrace a variety of different perspectives and methods and is motivated by the desire to move beyond the boundaries of one's own culture and is a necessary surplus to the existing practice of comparative philosophy.

The willingness to embrace a variety of different perspectives, does not entail that comparative philosophy should become a "borderless" philosophy or a "fusion" philosophy because this tends to a situation in which we no longer critically reflect on how our own choices, emotions and background influence the comparative process. In *Comparative Philosophy without Borders* (2015) Weber and Chakrabarti define fusion philosophy as a philosophy in which no philosopher, philosophy or philosophical tradition can suppose that they have reached the truth, but which does not lead to unproductive deconstructive consequences. This is why Weber and Chakrabarti introduce the standard of using a variety of different perspectives to sustain an argument.[15] They justify their method by pointing to the fact that this is already what comparative philosophy does at this moment. Normalizing what we already do is however not convincing, especially when we tend to do comparative philosophy based on unquestioned assumptions and do not reflect on the problem that comparing is always dependent on the specific perspective of the person doing the comparison.

While using a plurality of standards rather than one standard alone does allow us to reflect on a problem or issue from different points of view, it does not effectively address the problem of bias and theoretical colonization. Comparative philosophers who can use a variety of different standards from a variety of cultural philosophical traditions are practically competent but might not be willing to critically reflect on the way they represent the distinct cultural philosophical traditions. Comparative philosophy should be committed to challenge stereotypical representations of other cultural philosophical traditions and this aim can only be realized when we ask the question what is needed for comparative philosophers to approach the other in most respective and open way.

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[15] Chakrabarti, A & Weber, R. (eds.) (2015). *Comparative Philosophy without Borders*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 24

Comparative philosophy should therefore take the self-other relation into account and should reflect on the position of comparative philosophers, a position that entails their beliefs, comportments and commitments and influences how they approach the comparative project. The relation to the other is not only a creative moment in which we can explore new meanings and issues, but it is also a self-transformative moment that helps us to discover the contingency and confinements of our own perspective. Thinking with and through another cultural philosophical perspective helps us to move beyond the contingency and confinements of our own perspective, while at the same time being limited by it.

Comparative philosophy works within an intercultural context and needs to be seen as a form of intercultural communication aimed at intellectual tolerance, understanding of a distinct cultural tradition and respect of the otherness of the other. In this study I will show that comparative philosophers should become ethically competent and need to embody openness, flexibility and indeterminacy in which they actively try to deconstruct any emotional commitment or rigid patterns of thinking that interferes with the intercultural encounter. Comparative philosophers can approach the cultural other in the most open way possible when they take the task of philosophy as a discipline that desires to learn from the cultural other seriously. It is my contention to show in this study that Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* can help us to see how we can respond to the otherness of the other and approach the cultural other in the most flexible, open and non-colonizing way.

§1.5 The *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas: Reconfiguring the Self-Other Relation

Methodologies in comparative philosophy tend to focus on bridging the gap between two or more cultural philosophical traditions so that concepts and conceptual schemes can be fruitfully compared. Few studies consider the undeniable influence of the persons doing the comparison and the way their commitments influence the comparison. By drawing on the need to take responsibility for the self-other relation, translated as the willingness to become open to a variety of different perspectives and methods, this study seeks to broaden the conception of comparative philosophy.

Instead of comparing Levinas to the *Zhuāngzǐ*, this study will present their thinking as important resources for comparative philosophy. Levinas contributes to our understanding of the necessity of transcendence that gives comparative philosophy a prior indispensable ethical orientation. Levinas' analysis of the relation between immanence, violence provides an intercultural praxis to engage responsibly and critically with regard to the cultural other.

Levinas' primary aim is to show how the transcendence of the Other is constitutive for the self. The Other in Levinas' work is an ambiguous term that is a translation of Levinas' use of *l'Autre, l'autre* or *Autrui*. Adriaan Peperzak (1993) has paid attention to the difficulty of translating these terms and points to the fact that Levinas is not always consistent in the use of these terms.[16] In this study I apply Levinas' thinking to understand and clarify the nature and practice of comparative philosophy. I will relate Levinas' ethical relation to our approach of the cultural other, primarily because Levinas' ethical relation is not grounded in any form of commonality. The "Other" refer in Levinas' work to a relation in which "[the Other] and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say "you" or "we" is not a plural of the "I"."[17] The Other refers to any person whose radical alterity stays exterior, remains infinitely outside of what the self can know or grasp.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995) rejects an identity-oriented recognition that assumes that the subject can grasp and represent another human being entirely. He criticizes the Western metaphysical tradition, which to him amounts to a thinking that is preoccupied with conceiving truth as the encompassing of all there is. The Western philosophical tradition has the tendency to reduce everything that is other to the same, a tendency that culminates in Hegel's idealism in which the neutral term "spirit" reduces any relation to relation of self-knowledge, or self-consciousness. This conception of relationality reduces everything that is other to the same and leads to the construction of a wholly immanent world. Levinas argues that Western philosophy has failed to think transcendence or radical exteriority (the Other), as pure exteriority, a relation that precedes the opposition between difference and identity.

Although Levinas is not a philosopher of culture, he has written two essays, - *La signification et le sens* (1972) and *Détermination philosophique de l'idée*

[16] Peperzak, A. (1993). *To the Other, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Purdue University Press, 18-19.

[17] TI:39; TeI: 10

de culture (1986)-, that specifically address the variety of cultural expressions and their relationship with the encounter with the Other. In his entire work, Levinas tries to show how the ontological realm, a wholly immanent world in which nothing is exterior, needs the surplus of transcendence that gives it its ethical orientation. Transcendence is in Levinas' work translated as the infinite responsibility of the self for the Other and which gives cultures their ethical orientation. Transcendence is the higher culture that makes concretely realizing meaning of communal life possible.

Levinas rethinks the becoming of the subject to reveal that the self is already infinite responsibility to each and every human being prior to any choice or commitment. In rethinking the becoming of the subject, Levinas stumbles upon the subject's desire for the beyond being, a desire to be "otherwise-than-being." The desire for the *otherwise-than-being* is conceived by Levinas as the Cartesian relation to infinity. The relation to the infinite is a passive relation, a relation not contracted nor assumed, but that nevertheless constitutes me. Levinas interprets this relation as the divine relation of pure goodness, a relation of transcendence that is grounded in the Jewish command to be one's brother's keeper. The self as the chosen one responsible for the Other takes part in the universal and sacred history of fraternity: human fraternity is grounded in each person being his or her brother's keeper.

Levinas' articulation of the self that is infinitely responsible to his brothers originates in the ethical-religious transcendence of the Other. For Levinas, the immanent world cannot provide a non-allergic relation to the Other, because all relationality is explained in terms of a neutral term, which he classifies as "ontological imperialism."[18] Levinas' critique on a wholly immanent world is also voiced in *la Signification et le Sens* in which he criticizes both theoretical absolutism as moral relativism. "Morality," writes Levinas, "does not belong to culture: it enables one to judge it; it discovers the dimension of height."[19] Culture is not the ultimate horizon of meaning but receives its ethical orientation from the transcendental relation to the Other.

Cultural expressions are a constant re-arrangement of meaning in a totality, is always incarnate and realized in its historical context. In *Détermination Philosophique de l'Idée de Culture* Levinas argues that each culture originates in communion with being, in which cultural expressions can become esthetic

[18] TI:38/39; TeI:10
[19] CPP:100; HA:54

objects of idolization, and the approach to being becomes one of pure enjoyment. Disparate cultural traditions are as such independent totalities that have nothing in common. This would leave us without any orientation to evaluate and judge the cultural other.

Transcendence gives the cultural communal world its absolute ethical orientation, an ethical orientation that originates in the personal face-to-face-relation derived from the transcendence of the Other. Levinas criticizes philosophical theories that see meaning as wholly immanent and rejects the anti-Platonism of modern philosophy. At the same time, Levinas draws on a different understanding of how to think being that originates in the same Judeo-Greek tradition. His conception of transcendence is revealed in the Western monotheistic tradition, which is why Levinas argues that the cultural other needs to be translated into the Greek-Judeo tradition[20]. In the end, Levinas' philosophical thinking of transcendence seems to privilege Western or European philosophy because it has revealed the prior significance of the ethical relation that can provide the immanent world its ultimate orientation. Scholars such as Caygill (2002) and McGettigan (2006) argue that Levinas' Eurocentrism makes it difficult to use him for postcolonial purposes.

Although we critically need to reflect on Levinas' thinking about the cultural other and his alleged Eurocentrism, his articulation of the self as an ethical vocation to the Other helps us to reconfigure the self-other relation as an embodied personal relation that provides comparative philosophy with a discourse ethics of responsibility. More specifically, Levinas' critique on a wholly immanent world highlights the connection between knowledge of the other and the theoretical colonization of the other. Instead of solely focusing on knowing the other, Levinas calls for the need to take the otherness of the other into account, and to respond to the Other who infinitely interrupts our usurpation of the world. The self and the other are in Levinas not identical terms who have nothing to offer to each other but engage in a profound unbalanced relation in which the self is passively exposed to the speaking of the Other, a pre-original meaning that makes communal meaning possible.

Levinas' emphasis on the tension between the self and the other and his emphasis on the fact that the other cannot be known but always remains Other, helps us to consider the complex process of gaining knowledge of the cultural other and the ethical vocation to the Other in which we always already

[20] Mortley, R. (1991). *French Philosophies in Conversation*, Routledge, 18.

respond to the Other as our interlocutor. To genuinely converse with the Other implies seeing the comparative process as an embodied face-to-face encounter with an unknown alterity that infinitely interrupts our discursive activities. Levinas emphasizes the radical alterity of the other, an alterity that resists being reduced to something known to me, even though this ethical otherness produces an ontological separation that gives the self the ability to capture the other in concepts and categories. Levinas however recognizes that for practical purposes infinite responsibility for the Other needs to become an action to respond to the call, an action that originates in the self's freedom and implies that the self can refuse or ignore the infinite call.

Levinas' work is important to comparative philosophy because it shows us how the radical otherness of the other is respected when we honor the space between sameness and difference and approach the cultural other without the expectation of mutual understanding. Philosophy is not the search for the all-encompassing truth, but as an activity inspired by the desire for the Other, a desire that triggers questions about social justice and radical alterity. Nevertheless, this desire for the other is a source of trauma, a continuous disturbance of any firm belief that we know how to understand the cultural other.

Levinas' emphasizes the dialogical nature of human interaction but argues that it is the "relation to the Other" that opens primordial discourse. Ethics and transcendence precede and make cultures and immanence possible. It is the Greek-Judea tradition that has shown us the significance of transcendence for human discourse, which is why Levinas claims that other cultures who lack the articulation of the precedence of transcendence need to be translated. Instead of dismissing Levinas' work as Eurocentric, I will turn to Derrida's work on the duty of Europe to answer the question what this privilege of the Western tradition consists in. A Levinasian/Derridean reading of privilege entails the commitment to be always questioned and deconstructed in one's beliefs and presuppositions about the other.

The task for comparative philosophy is the willingness to adopt a critical-transformation attitude in which comparative philosophers try to move beyond identity. In this study, I will introduce the proto-daoist text the *Zhuāngzǐ* as the resource that can help us to see how we can adopt this critical-transformational attitude. The *Zhuāngzǐ* can be seen as a necessary surplus to the Levinasian/Derridean framework, particularly because the *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to liberate the self from its conflated sense of self-identity and proposes practical strategies to

see the interconnection between self and other without unifying self and other into a whole. One of the crucial passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is its articulation of the "pivot of *dào*"; a position in which persons approaches a variety of perspectives from a position in which they do no longer rely on objective standards of evaluations and are freed from dogmatic patterns of thinking. In the pivot, the person affirms the rightness of each perspective while at the same time denying their absolute truth, revealing that right and wrong are only locally situated value judgments that create artificial distinctions that justify their respective norms.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* favors a position in which we creatively and spontaneously can respond to different situations and are not restrained by emotional commitments and rigid patterns of thinking. When we have liberated ourselves from mental, personal and social constraints and train ourselves to become empty and wandering philosophers, we are most open to the other and the other's perspectives and can see their value while also seeing their limitations. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s rejection of disputation (*biàn*, 辯) can furthermore help us to formulate a more inclusive conception of philosophy in which we are hospitable to a variety of methods, practices and approaches.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is a collection of texts that dates from a span of time between the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE), a period also known as the period of the "hundred schools" (*Zhūzǐ Bǎijiā*, 諸子百家), a period also known as the "pre-Qin period," or the period of the "Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods," and the Western Han Dynasty (202 BCE-9 CE). The pre-Qin period was a period in Chinese history of near-constant civil war and social and political upheaval in which states and political actors were constantly fighting for prestige, authority and wealth. In this time, philosophy was seen as intellectual disputation (*biàn*, 辯), as most of the time intellectual debates were concerned with the best way to govern a state, the moral values that needed to be cultivated and which way (*dào,* 道) should be pursued.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* responded to an epistemological crisis that revolved around whether the alternatives humaneness (*rén*, 仁) or justice (*yì*, 義) should be pursued as the guiding principle of governing.[21] Instead of emphasizing the cultivation of our heart-mind (*xīn,* 心) and the ritualization of the body (*gōng*,

[21] Jiang, T. (2021). *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China. Contestation of Humaneness, Justice, and Personal Freedom*, Oxford University Press

躬) as the other major schools of the period recommended, the *Zhuāngzǐ* sought to liberate a person from mental, personal and social constraints.

The text endorses an ideal of the genuine person (*zhēnren*, 真人), the sage who has freed himself from traditional social values and approaches the different relations in which he finds himself from a flexible and adaptive attitude. It stresses the importance of self-adaptation to a world that consists of a variety of different perspectives and a universe that is constantly generating, transforming and changing the infinite number of people and things. The overarching theme in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is how we can respond harmoniously to the myriad of things that are presented to us and how we can align with them in a non-invasive way. One of the central concerns of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is the reformulation of the self-other relation. The *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks a positive affirmation of the self-other relation in which self and other are equalized in their difference, which the text calls the "great equalizer" or the "pivot of *dào*". In the pivot, persons are able to affirm themselves in relation to other things and approach the various perspectives as equal to their own, as they recognize that they are simultanesouly "self" and "other".

The *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes that we should "find the pivot of *dào*" or "stay in the middle," a position in which persons are able to shift between different perspectives, enabling them to see the situation in a clear, non-biased way. The sage who possesses greater knowledge, - a knowledge of not-knowing-, embraces indeterminacy and doubt as a way of life, and is able to harmonize the different perspectives by equalizing them and abiding in the "truth of Heaven". The "truth of Heaven" refers in the text to the way Heaven is impartial and sees the different perspectives as expressions and treats them thus as One, and "the truth of the earth" that nourishes and gives space to all of these different perspectives in an equal way.

The central claim of the text is that humankind has lost its natural spontaneity to align harmoniously with the myriad things by clinging to artificial schemes and beliefs. The *Zhuāngzǐ* observes that much of human suffering originates from the heart-mind's clinging to "so" and "not so" evaluations and our belief that we can know in advance what is wrong and what is right. Instead of privileging the heart-mind as the governor of all the other organs, we should restore our natural spontaneity through adopting a wandering, empty and mirroring heart-mind. In a state of carefree wandering (*xiāoyáoyóu*, 逍遥遊)) a person is liberated from mental, personal and social constraints and can affirm life as it is (*zìrán*, 自然).

This means that we accept the infinite flow of self-transformation in which each perspective carries out its own destiny without the need for interference.

The Sages who respond from a position of emotional equanimity to the different perspectives, occupies the best perspective because they reside in the "pivot of *dào*." The pivot of *dào* is a receptive, hospitable perspective in which a person recognizes that valuing "this" is dependent upon "that" and this person is as such able to see "both sides simultaneously." This entails that the sage has transcended the self-other dichotomy and affirms the togetherness of self and other without dissolving their uniqueness. Being free of preferences and constancy sheds an impartial light on things, giving a person the advantage of seeing things more clearly and from different angles. Self-adaptation and the ability to approach perspectives in an impartial way is preferred above perspectives that see themselves as ultimate and cling to their subjective preferences and in which the other is approach as the negation of the self.

In this dissertation, I will argue that self-adaptation and the attempt to become free of rigid patterns of thinking enables us to approach another cultural philosophical tradition as "equally different" to our own tradition. This study argues that current methodologies that are based on the assertion of commonality to bring two radical different traditions together need the surplus of ethical competence that takes the otherness of the cultural other into account. Current methodologies in comparative philosophy are based on the minimization of difference and are ill equipped to take the incompleteness and indeterminacy that marks comparative philosophy into account. Based on the readings of Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, this study provides an alternative understanding of comparative philosophy in which comparative philosophy is seen as a form of intercultural communication in which ethical competence as the need for self-transformation is incorporated. This study will outline what ethical competence consists in and how we can make comparative philosophy more sensitive to critical-transformational discourse.

§1.6 Pursuit and Relevance of the Study

Comparative philosophy seeks to identify similarities and differences, raises philosophical problems and tries to raise novel issues by making use of a variety of perspectives from disparate philosophical traditions. Comparative philosophy is based on the self-other relation in which the other cultural

philosophical tradition is, presumably, valued and approached because of its otherness. Nevertheless, current methodologies all rely on the assertion of commonality and tend to erase differences between disparate cultural philosophical traditions.

The main problem in comparative philosophy is the theoretical colonization of the other by privileging our own assumptions, beliefs and judgments, a tendency that originates in the erasure or neglect of the value of differences. The relation between self and other is a relation of difference that at the same time can be related as similar in a multiplicity of various aspects. This study looks for a way to take the tension between difference and sameness in the comparative project into account.

In this dissertation, I will reflect on problems and issues in comparative philosophy in the light of the self-other relation. The main challenge to comparative philosophy is not to reduce differences to unity, as this inevitably leads to the dichotomy of "comparable and incomparable" and a neglect of aspects that do not fit in a given category. Instead, I will show how meaning in comparative philosophy is produced in relation to the other, a relation in which self and other can be related in their difference. I will show that this calls for the need to reflect on how and in what way comparative philosophers can become ethical competent and can resist the tendency to rely on static conceptions and rigid patterns of thinking. I will show that ethical competence is the willingness to transforming ourselves as an attempt to move beyond identity. Ethical competence entails furthermore that we should see comparative philosophy as a discipline that consists of a variety of different, sometimes incompatible, perspectives. Perspectivism enables us to reformulate the self-other relation and to affirm the togetherness of self and other in their difference.

Perspectivism emphasizes that knowledge is not objective but contextual and is the result of human practices. This leads to the achievement of epistemic humility; the assertion that when our knowledge of the world is filtered, interpreted and constructed by our faculties, dispositions and situations, there is no such thing as "real," "pure," or "objective" knowledge.[22] Perspectivism does not claim that there is no such thing as correspondence with reality, but argues that this correspondence is always specific, situated within the perspectives in question. In holding that "all knowledge is dependent upon a perspective"

[22] Matthews, D. (2006). "Epistemic Humility. A View from the Philosophy of Science" In: J.P. van Gigch (eds.). *Wisdom, Knowledge, and Management*, Springer, 105-137

it presupposes the objectivity of dependence, situatedness and the limitations that these entails.

Ethical competence thus consists in recognizing that there are a multitude of perspectives available to comparative philosophy, but also urges for the need to deconstruct our conflated sense of self-identity and self-centeredness, as this will give us the opportunity to see the richness and diversity of cultural others and are more inclined to take cultural others they are. In this dissertation I will concentrate on answering the following question:

> *How can comparative philosophy employ a critical-transformational discourse that helps us to approach the cultural other in an open way?*

This study argues that Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* can help comparative philosophy to articulate a critical-transformational discourse grounded in responsibility and provisionality. Adopting a critical-transformational discourse also enables us to formulate a more inclusive conception of comparative philosophy that is hospitable to a variety of different methods, practices and approaches. The study itself also will be an attempt to practice ethical competence by comparing Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* in respect to self-transformational discourse while attempting to approach them on their own terms.

Levinas' thinking is of fundamental importance to comparative philosophy because he sees philosophy as a liminal practice that oscillates between ethics and politics. Ethics is the personal relation between two unique people in which the *I* bears absolute and infinite responsibility to the particular, unique other person. Levinas' thinking on cultural formation shows how cultural expressions are dependent upon communal being and has the tendency to erase differences. Levinas' thinking provides comparative philosophy with the insight that we should consider the ethical dimension of the comparative project and to take the embodied relation between the self and the cultural other into account. This is a relation beyond the powers of the self, a relation that questions those powers and is as such a form of ethical competence in which the self is *non-competent*. This study will show how the Zhuāngzǐ's articulation of the "pivot of dào" (*dàoshū*, 道樞) enables us to give us valuable insights in what ethical competence without being competent might entail.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* complements Levinas' perspective by showing how "this" is always simultaneously created with "that," and that what is "this" or "that" is the result of a certain perspective affirming it as "this" or "that." The *Zhuāngzǐ* shows how our clinging to preferences and *shìfēi* ("so" and "not so") distinctions prevent us from enlarging our perspective. Adopting an all-encompassing perspective is the best way to relate to a multitude of perspectives, because the person who embraces this perspective stands in relation to the whole and sees that each perspective has some rightness to it. Emptying the heart-mind and seeing the variety of different perspectives from the "pivot of *dào*," enables the comparative philosopher to adopt a perspective in which the philosopher affirms the uniqueness of each of these perspectives but also understands how these perspectives are limited and dependent upon each other.

The current dissertation combines the insights of Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* to articulate a form of ethical competence aimed at self-transformation and critical thinking in which the comparative philosopher is committed to respond to a variety of perspectives in an open, less-biased way. The argumentative structure of this dissertation is as follows: I will start with a reflection on comparative (intercultural) philosophy and its history. In this second chapter I will discuss the general theory of comparison and how the comparative process is a constructed process and depends on the background, choices and interpretations of the person doing the comparison. I will show how different methods available to the comparative philosopher cannot eliminate nor reduce this subjective involvement. I will specifically pay attention to how current methods tend to erase differences. The chapter will conclude that the subjective involvement calls for the need to investigate the ethical aspects of the self-other relation.

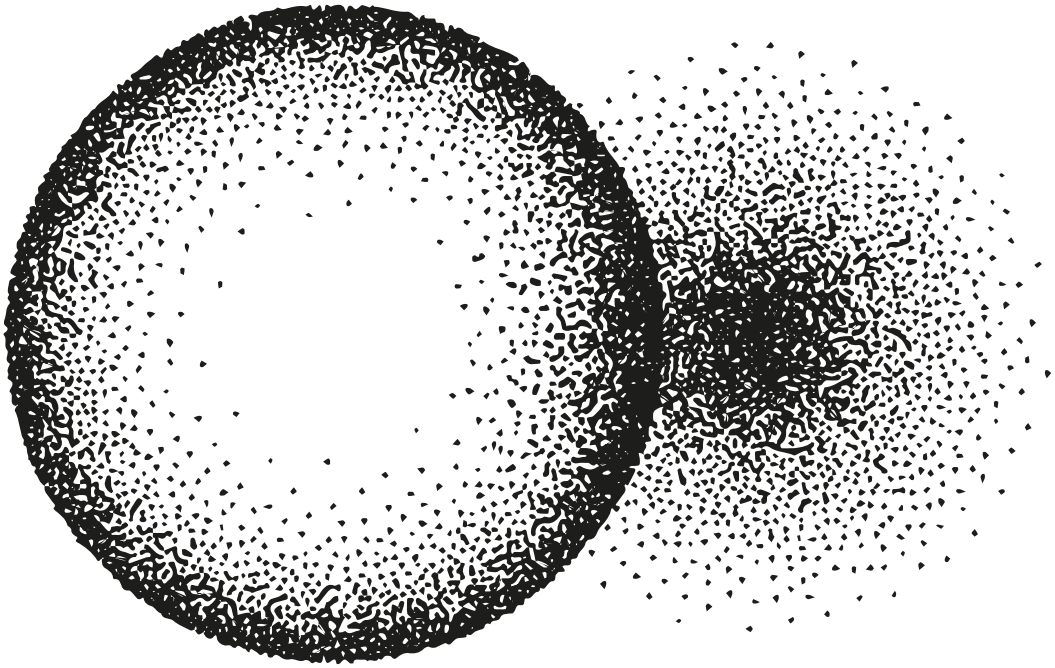
In the third chapter, I will trace the movement in Levinas' work to rethink the relation between self and other. I will specifically focus on the relation between transcendence, immanence and culture. The main aim of this chapter is to answer the question of whether Levinas can sufficiently take the otherness of the cultural other into account especially in the light of his alleged Eurocentrism. I will outline how Levinas indeed privileges the Greek-Judeo-tradition and how transcendence as the relation of pure goodness is related to sacred fraternity. In contrast to McGettigan (2005) and Drabinski (2013), I will conclude that Levinas' Eurocentrism is the result of his critique on a wholly immanent world that cannot give the relation to the cultural an ethical orientation which is not based on any commonality. In the last part of this chapter, I will investigate how

Levinas redefines transcendence as the tension between self and Other within the self. By relying on Derrida's view on Europe, I will try to show how seeing Europe as the privileged place or tradition can be translated as the infinite task to move beyond identity. I will conclude that this task calls for an embodied form of ethical competence in which the comparative philosopher tries to take this task serious.

Chapter Four is introduced as an answer to the question how we can embrace ethical competence as the willingness to move beyond identity. I will show how ethical competence calls for a position in which comparative philosophers have deconstructed their egocentric self and have dissolved the self-other dichotomy. Self-transformation in the *Zhuāngzǐ* restores the natural spontaneity and freedom of the self and is done to free the self from artificial constraints so that the natural interconnection between self and other is restored. The pivot of *dào* is the position in which the person responds to the other and the other's perspectives with the most clarity (*míng*, 明), mainly because the self is no longer disturbed by intense emotions. In this chapter, the philosophy of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is presented as a quest for liberating human beings from mental, social and personal constraints that will as a consequence help us to approach the other and the other's perspectives in a responsive and adaptive way.

In the fifth chapter I will answer the question of how the readings of the *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas can help us to understand the nature of comparative philosophy in the light of the self-other relation. I will show that comparative philosophy will always be marked by undecidability, provisionality and struggle, which is nevertheless a "fine risk to run," as the encounter enables us to transcend our confined perspective and adopt a broader, more encompassing position. In this chapter I will introduce ethical competence as necessary for comparative philosophers and outline what ethical competence entails. Ethical competence as the responsiveness to the otherness of the other entails that we as philosophers become aware of our biases and reflect critically on our motives and preferences in the light of the encounter with what is other. I will show how comparative philosophers can become responsive to the infinite task to move beyond identity by abiding to the pivot of *dào*. Abiding to the pivot entails that comparative philosophers quell expectations and disputations by taking infinite responsibility to deconstruct their views on language, knowledge, truth, morality and conventional logic so that they can approach the other and the other's perspective in the most open way. In the end, I will reflect on a few limitations of the current study, which mainly revolves around the question of

whether comparative philosophers should eschew debates and how they need to respond to other perspectives that are incompatible with the central task of comparative philosophy.



Chapter 2

The Theory of Comparison and its Methods

In this chapter I will criticize the unexplored presuppositions and biases in the prevailing methodological approaches to comparative philosophy and will conclude that comparison is bound to the interpretive perspective of the person doing the comparison. I will conclude that we need to see comparative philosophy as a form of intercultural communication in which philosophers need to become ethical competent. It is my aim to show that is not only important to reflect on methods of how we can compare concepts and conceptual schemes from different cultural philosophical traditions, but that it is equally important to reflect on the role of comparative philosophers and how their biases influence the comparative process.

This chapter will discuss methodological and hermeneutical approaches to comparative philosophy and will give a short overview of its development as an academic discipline. I will discuss the variety of challenges and issues of comparison and will reflect on the hermeneutics of comparison. I will accomplish the aims of this chapter first through a critique on overtly thematized approaches to comparative philosophy that have mostly developed in the last century. I will also arrive at the chapter's conclusion through a rehearsal of the development of philosophical hermeneutics through Heidegger and Gadamer, since hermeneutics is so essential to the methodological approaches that comparative philosophy, as a modern academic discipline, embraces. That is to say, both an analysis of the methodologies adopted by the modern comparative philosopher and of the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer, on which comparative philosophy has heretofore been based, will help us see how deliberate methodologies of comparative philosophy remained shackled in the perspective of the person doing the comparing. The hermeneutic circle, which always ensures that the comparative interpreters will to a significant degree remain within the borders of their own cultural presuppositions, leaves comparative philosophy with no way to adequately address its self-chosen hermeneutic limitations. This problem alerts us, then, to the need for a more fundamental transformation of the philosophical attitude of openness to the perspective of the other, an openness that can best be achieved through the ethical obligations to otherness that Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* provide us.

§2.1 Comparative Philosophy as a Discipline

Philosophy, as the love of wisdom[23] is reflective in character and always involves a certain degree of comparison. Philosophers develop their thinking not in a social and historical vacuum but are participants in the cultural traditions to which they respond. Neither does a cultural philosophical tradition emerge in isolation; it is always affected and influenced by other traditions, due to human migration and military conquest.

Although intercultural philosophy is not a mere Western initiative and philosophy has been seen in merely all traditions as a universal enterprise, I will focus my critique on the modern Western approaches to comparative philosophy. Comparative philosophy should not only aim for comparing concepts and conceptual systems and discerning similarities and differences between disparate cultural philosophical traditions but should also aim to promote intercultural understanding. The aim of this study is to encourage cross-cultural ethical competence as a way to avoid stereotypes or clichés about cultures and disparate philosophies and as a necessary precondition for cross-cultural or intercultural conversation. The focal point of my argument concerns the need to expand the debate over the significance of the position of the persons doing the comparison and the ways their beliefs, comportments and emotions influence the comparative process.

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[23] The term "philosophy" already foreshadows the challenges of translation and interpretation and raises the question of whether we can refer to Chinese "philosophy". Philosophy in the Western world does not have a univocal meaning; it can refer to a general way of living, but also to specific branches of philosophy such as epistemology and ethics. Just like ancient Greek philosophers, ancient Chinese thinkers were concerned with how to harmonize human relations and which qualities, conduct and virtues needed to be valued. They were also concerned with the inclinations of human nature and the question of evil. Although their rhetorical style and argumentation differ, the questions that they try to answer are, I would say, philosophical in nature. "Philosophy" is translated as 哲學. The meaning of the word 哲 gives us an understanding of the differences between "Chinese philosophy" and "Western philosophy". The *Hànyǔ dàcídiǎn* (漢語大辭典) explains 哲 as: (1). Illuminated wisdom, (2) a person who is worthy and clear-sighted, (3) to know, to understand. (*Hànyǔ dàcídiǎn,* edited by Luó Zhúfēng (Shanghai: Cishu chubanshe,1993), 3:350-3).. The *Oxford Dictionary* explains the word as "The study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as an academic discipline." (lexico.com). We do however need to consider that哲學 is a modern neologism introduced by the Japanese scholar Nishi amane. Amane introduced the term *tetsugaku* to mediate the Western sense of philosophy in Chinese and Japanese. See: Nakamura, H. (1988). "The Meaning of the Terms "Philosophy" and "Religion" in Various Translations" In: G.T. Larson & E. Deutsch, *Interpreting Across Boundaries. New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, 149.

Doing philosophy in the age of globalization begs the need to take cross-cultural influences into account and to reflect on the philosophical implications of globalization.[24] While cross-cultural philosophy has always been part of the history of philosophy, it has hitherto never been questioned as a troublesome activity. In the postmodern era, philosophers are more aware of the implicit colonization or what Edward Said called "orientalism" when engaging with another cultural philosophical tradition. Otherwise said, philosophers who engage in cross-cultural philosophy are now more inclined to reflect on the self-other relation and the need to approach the other as an equally valuable tradition.

Comparative philosophy is an attempt to leave the beaten track and to move across the boundaries of culturally distinct philosophical traditions. Comparing different traditions that developed their thought systems in relative independence from one other is an effort that raises questions as soon as we start comparing. One of the first set of concerns that we face is whether the term "philosophy" is not uniquely tied to Greek thinking and whether we can fruitfully engage with other traditions if we use this (narrow, parochial) Greek conception of what philosophy should be.

As the pursuit of wisdom involves adopting a questioning attitude, philosophy is a universal human practice. Deleuze and Guattari (1991) argue that the essential characteristic of philosophy is the development of fragmentary concepts that do not perfectly align with one another. Deleuze and Guattari also argue that philosophical concepts are "contingent" on their external contexts.[25] For this reason, Rorty asserts that when we try to understand a philosophical concept, we must understand its historical context, and take into account the cultural, political, social and historical environment.[26] However, since we can never completely understand the context in which a philosophical concept arose, particularly in the ancient world, we always need to assume and interpret what a philosophical concept means.

Philosophy is a hermeneutical practice but is not a mere Western human activity. When we want to engage with another cultural philosophical tradition, we need to reflect on how we see philosophy, as our biases of what philosophy entails

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[24] Smid, R.W. (2009). *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy: The Pragmatist and Process Traditions*, State University of New York, 2

[25] Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1991). *What is Philosophy?* Columbia University Press, 35

[26] Rorty, R. (1990). *Solidarity or Objectivity?* Cambridge University Press

might lead to dismissing the theories of the cultural other as "not philosophical". When doing philosophy comparatively, we should therefore try not to rely on a definition of philosophy that it is framed to fit only the Western metaphysical tradition. The tendency to classify other traditions as "non-philosophical" is a harmful bias based on the exclusion of the other who is seen as opposed to a norm, a tendency that theoretically colonizes the other.

In our postmodern era, it is important to decolonize philosophy, which entails, especially for cross-cultural philosophy, to de-essentialize the concept of "philosophy" and approach the disparate cultural philosophical tradition as equally valuable. We should refrain from regarding philosophy as a fixed concept because any pre-established notion of philosophy might lead to focusing solely on the features of other traditions familiar to us, and with this we risk ignoring less-familiar features that are nonetheless fundamental and crucial to other traditions.[27] Theoretically decolonizing philosophy helps us to engage in comparative philosophy.

Comparative philosophy is generally defined as a comparative examination of thinkers or ideas from two distinct intellectual traditions, one of which is usually Western.[28] The first systematic study of comparative philosophy was Paul Masson Oursel's dissertation in 1923 entitled *La Philosophie Comparée*. Oursel, who was strongly influenced by the French positivist school, argued that we should not compare single events, but should place these events in their proper historical relations. Oursel believed that a comparative study of thought patterns among culturally distinct traditions was possible because the histories of Europe, India and China were intertwined.[29] Oursel used the method of analogy to relate the development of philosophical thought in the West to that of India and China and argued that China and India should be viewed as belonging to a "*philosophia perennis*," the fusion of self and other into an organic, all-encompassing whole.

As a result of increasing contact and interest between different cultural traditions, scholars have become ever more eager to engage in comparative studies.[30] Attempts at comparative thinking were, for example, conducted in Asia, where scholars studied Western philosophy. One of the most popular and

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[27] Connolly, T. *Doing Philosophy Comparatively*, 17

[28] Swan, L.K. (1953). *Methods of Comparative Philosophy*, Universitaire Pers Leiden, 21

[29] Masson-Oursel, P. (1923). *La Philosophie Comparée*, F. Alcan, 39

[30] Swan-Liat. *Methods of Comparative Philosophy*, 8

well-known early comparative works was Fung Yu Lan's book *A Comparative Study of Life Ideals*, published in 1923. In his book, Fung compares the general ideas of thinkers such as the *Zhuāngzǐ* Schopenhauer, Mozi and Descartes. Fung uses a classification system to compare these thinkers, classifying them as "nature philosophies," "civilization philosophies" and "philosophies who try to take nature and civilization into account."

In 1946, in the aftermath of World War II, the American philosopher F.S.C. Northrop published *The Meeting of East and West: An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding.* Northrop was the pupil of William Ernest Hocking, a pragmatic idealist who greatly influenced the development of cross-cultural comparison by providing critical reflection on the nature of comparison. Northrop followed in his teacher's footsteps and developed an innovative comparative method.[31] He divided the world into two pairs of realms: that of man and nature and that of the aesthetic and the theoretic and argued that civilizations differ in the way they have developed these realms. He asserts that differences between cultures result from different accents that are placed on the different realms. Northrop's conclusion was that the civilizations of China, India and the West are prone to one-sided incompleteness and proposed the synthetization of the different civilizations to a new philosophy.[32]About the same time that Northrop published his study, Charles A. Moore founded the journal *Philosophy East and West* (1951) and organized the East-West Philosopher's Conference, which generally continues to take place every five years.

Especially at the beginning of the history of comparative philosophy as an academic discipline, there was a strong desire for a synthesis of culturally distinct traditions. The goal was to construct one "world philosophy" or a "fusion philosophy" that accounted for the meaning of every philosophical tradition. The problem with this self-other approach is that it is too demanding and neglects fundamental differences between cultural traditions. Today, scholars are aware of the need to make careful, informed generalizations when engaging in comparative philosophy. These generalizations should be neither essentialist nor universalist and should recognize that any comparative project begins with certain anticipations that arise from our own cultural framework.[33]

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[31] Smid. *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy*, 42

[32] Northrop, F.S.C. (1946). *The Meeting of East and West, An Inquiry Concerning World Understanding*, Macmillan, 432

[33] Mattice, S.A. (2014). *Metaphor and Metaphilosophy. Philosophy as Combat, Play, and Aesthetic Experience*, Lexington Books, 8

The need to see the other as different to us but not opposed to us became thus more important.

Different scholars have tried to articulate a more apt approach to doing comparative philosophy amid all the issues of incommensurability. The work of Roger Ames and David Hall constitutes one of the most extensive approaches to comparative philosophy. Their collaborative work not only critically assesses how to think about other cultures, but also highlights methodological problems in the translation of philosophical texts of other cultures.[34] Ames and Hall concentrate their work on the comparison between the Western tradition and the Chinese tradition. They emphasize the limitations of a purely philological approach to translation and argue that an adequate translation of a term also needs to align with the general philosophical meaning of a given text in its larger context. Thus, recognizing our philosophical assumptions and presuppositions and the way they influence our interpretation in cross-cultural translation is necessary, as Ames articulates:

> *In a sustained effort to allow Chinese philosophy to have its own voice, over the past century our best interpreters of Chinese culture have been struggling to construct an interpretative context for reading the canons. This interpretative context begins by clarifying the cultural presuppositions we are likely to bring to the Chinese texts, and then continues by attempting to articulate those uncommon assumptions that make Chinese cosmology distinctive and different from our own philosophical narrative.*[35]

Comparative philosophy as a discipline became more aware of the challenges that comparing distinct traditions posed and became more critical with respect the foundation of its own meaning. The Leiden scholar Kwee Swan Liat concluded in his dissertation *Methods of Comparative Philosophy* (1953) that one of the goals of comparative philosophy should be to "rethink, critically and systematically, its own premises and basic concepts."[36] Swan Liat was, together with the American scholars Ames and Hall, one of the first who wrote systematically on *how* to engage in comparative philosophy.

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[34] Smid. *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy*, 82/83

[35] Ames, R.T. (2004) "Indigenizing Globalization and the Hydraulics of Culture: Taking Chinese Philosophy on its own Terms" in *Globalizations* 1, Nº 2, 24

[36] Swan Liat. *Methods of Comparative Philosophy*, 30

Comparative philosophy not only focuses on the actual practice of comparing different cultural traditions, but also refers to reflecting critically on the methods that make such a comparison possible. These two aspects accompany each other; an analysis of the methods that make comparison possible provides us with insights into how we can practice the method, but the practical comparative study of specific ideas and arguments also offers useful insights into which methodology has the most potential for cross-cultural fertilization.

The general consensus among scholars is that comparative philosophy always involves some sort of bias and (unconscious) presuppositions. Comparative philosophy faces the problems of contingency and a lack of neutrality, and one needs to be aware of the specific assumptions and presuppositions that anyone practicing it inherently has when interpreting a text of a culturally distinct tradition. Comparative philosophy involves interpretation and is, as such, hermeneutical in nature. Understanding how our cultural assumptions and linguistic framework influence our judgments is a necessary step toward understanding the nature of comparative philosophy.

§2.2 The Problem of Incommensurability and Objectivity

Comparative philosophy as an engagement between cultures has been ongoing throughout history; Persian culture and particularly the teachings of Zarathustra had for example a significant influence on Greek and Roman philosophy, and perhaps on South Asian traditions as well. South Asian traditions had a significant influence on East Asian philosophy through the migration of Buddhism. Christianity itself should be considered a synthesis of Jewish and Hellenistic ideas. However, as a specific, modern academic discipline, comparative philosophy emerged in the 19th- century in a Western world marked by colonialism and is, as a philosophical discipline, in many regards "an outcome of colonialism."[37]

In the last decade, postcolonial studies and decolonial theories have revealed the nature of Eurocentrism through a critique on constructed categories such as "history," "culture" and even "philosophy." One of the most influential writers on colonialism was Edward Said, who addressed in his book entitled *Orientalism*

[37] Weber, R. (2013) "How to Compare? On the Methodological State of Comparative Philosophy" in *Philosophy Compass* 8, Nº 3, 594

(1978) the relation between imperial and colonial forms of power in the study of the "Orient." The book spurred a renewal of literary and cultural studies and spawned many studies that focused on dismantling representations of other cultural traditions as "non-Western" that tended to reproduce the image of a completely superior and dominant Western discourse. The different modes in which a dominant and superior Western world is (implicitly) affirmed is among scholars frequently called "Occidentalism" and all refer to a lack or neglect of appreciation for the ways other traditions produce their own valid practices of knowledge.

Theoretical decolonization as the process of examining presuppositions about other traditions and cultures has changed the way comparative philosophy is conceived, and it has instilled the need to reflect critically on biases and methodology. Recognizing that ideas and thought systems depend on a specific cultural, social, political and political context is still important but is today redefined as the task of "giv(ing) common voice to various philosophical traditions while remaining as faithful to each of those traditions as possible throughout the process of comparison."[38] The task of comparative philosophy is to critically assess the unarticulated assumptions we have when engaging with other cultures, which entails that we reflect not only on how we relate to the other, but also that we are open to being questioned by that other and changing our prejudices, beliefs and attitudes in the light of the encounter.

Critical reflection on how to do comparative philosophy is therefore needed to understand the challenges and limitations that comparison of two different philosophical traditions faces. The assumed assertion of comparative philosophy is that the challenges and limitations can be overcome by choosing the right methodology and that cultural relativism is no longer a threat. This belief is however unwarranted, particularly when we consider that what is compared to what and in what respect are always dependent upon the specific background, knowledge, interpretation, and choices of the person doing the comparison. We are always to some degree confined to our own perspective, which shows that our thinking is always relative to our cultural and socio-political context.

When we engage in comparative philosophy, we are confronted with comparing two (or more) cultural philosophical traditions that do not share the same culture and symbolic system. This raises the question of incommensurability, and how we are able to compare cultural philosophical traditions that do not

[38] Smid. *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy*,10

share the same horizon of meaning. Connolly distinguishes in his book, entitled *Doing Philosophy Comparatively* (2015), three types of incommensurability. Linguistic incommensurability refers to the differences between languages, which often reveals that no shared meaning can be assumed, as traditions from different cultures depend on distinctive languages that cannot be translated into one another.[39] Translation is always interpretation and is always dependent upon the person doing the translation. A philosopher will for example give a different translation of the *Zhuāngzǐ* than a Sinologist.

The second form of incommensurability refers to the different foundations upon which traditions make sense of the world around them.[40] This moderate version of cultural relativism, as Fleischacker (1994) calls it, argues that knowledge depends on a background of shared assumptions and standards. These assumptions and standards as well as judgments on what counts as evidence differ among cultures, making it difficult to compare terms that emerge from different foundations.[41] In order to take foundational incommensurability into account, Connolly (2015) argues that the comparer "has to defend the interpretive accuracy of the categories we use against other plausible alternatives."[42] Comparative philosophers need thus to be able to shift between different perspectives and justify their chosen perspective. The problem is how we can determine which rules and standards we need to use to defend our perspective.

This brings us to the last form of incommensurability that Connolly distinguishes which is evaluative incommensurability. Evaluative incommensurability is the assumption that there are no neutrally rational grounds for deciding whether a view from one tradition is superior to a view from another.[43] Connolly argues that there is a lack of shared evaluative standards when we compare two disparate philosophical traditions, especially when we want to use a standard that has to label one of these perspectives as the right or better perspective.

Although we have to reflect on these forms on incommensurability when engaging in comparative philosophy, this does not warrant the conclusion that comparison between disparate cultural traditions is not possible. To a certain degree, we are able to understand and identify different foundations among

[39] Connolly. *Doing Philosophy Comparatively*, 72
[40] Connolly. *Doing Philosophy Comparatively*, 72
[41] Fleischacker, S. (1994). *Integrity and Moral Relativism*, Brill, 21
[42] Connolly. *Doing Philosophy Comparatively*, 92
[43] Connolly. *Doing Philosophy Comparatively*, 72

traditions, even when these traditions developed in relative isolation to each other. Chinese thought developed independently from the Indo-European tradition, which makes it the best test case to see whether, and how, we are able to initiate a dialogue with the wholly other. Graham (1989) argues that the particular linguistic challenge of understanding early Chinese language often amounts to a pointless game of demonstrating that some central concept of our tradition is missing in Chinese thought, a comparison that yields little interesting results and shows little interest in genuinely initiating a dialogue with the other.[44] This reveals that comparison that treats a Western philosophical concept as the privileged signifier hinders cross-cultural understanding and is a very narrow, so not impractical, approach to comparative philosophy.

We should value another cultural philosophical tradition because it differs from our own, even when we at the same time can identify points of commonality. Philosophers often claim that, without a universal normative standard we cannot distinguish legitimate claims from socially specific prejudices or self-interested claims of power.[45] In line with thinker such as Young (1990) and Khader (2019), I argue that imposing standards on perspectives in the name of social justice does not consider the specific preferences and needs of a particular perspective and should therefore be avoided. When we want to avoid imposing standards on that other, we need to consider that in comparison; we always bring ourselves into the context. We cannot obtain a neutral position that will uncover the pristine "truth" of the foreign without – in one way or another – bringing it into the horizon of our own understanding. Therefore, intercultural comparison should consider the way the particular perspective of the person doing the comparison influences the comparison.

This entails taking responsibility for the way our perspective influences the comparative process. What we see as "similarity" and "difference" is for example dependent upon our philosophical background and the particular point of view from which we approach another philosophical tradition. Von Sass (2021) argues that it is therefore important to appreciate the extent to which comparison is the result of a constructive process, a process that can easily lead to the unwarranted privilege of one's own presuppositions and beliefs. Von Sass particularly points to the danger of comparative injustice and argues that:

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[44] Graham, A.C. (1989). *Disputers of the Tao. Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*, Open Court, 396

[45] Young, I.M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, 4

> *Comparative injustice takes the form of experimenting with possible comparative constellations while giving one of them unwarranted privilege or it takes the form of prioritizing one relatum over all others without explicitly integrating this valuation into the comparison in question.*[46]

While comparative philosophy does reflect on how to compare two different philosophical traditions, it does not reflect on the unique role of the person doing the comparison. Comparative philosophy is not only comparing two or more distinct cultural philosophical traditions but is also a form of intercultural communication that requires comparative philosophers to become sensitive to cultural differences and the way our socio-cultural and historical background affects the comparison process.

§2.3 The Comparative Process

In this section, I will concentrate on the hermeneutics of comparison and the role of the philosopher who does the comparison. Comparative philosophy is often thought of as the application of comparative techniques to approach another philosophical tradition in order to describe and evaluate similarities or differences between the different traditions compared.[47] Connolly argues that a specific comparison is either done to (1) mutually clarify the two things that are being compared, or (2) to evaluate the relative merits of the objects of comparison.

Comparison is, in this framework, always dependent upon some degree of similarity; the comparability of two distinct *comparata* is not an intrinsic property of these *comparata* themselves but results from relating them comparatively in reference to a *tertium comparationis*, the respect to which the *comparata* are being compared.[48] The *tertium comparationis* asserts a point of commonality without which no comparison is possible by connecting the two concepts that are being compared.[49]

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[46] Hartmut, S.von. (2021). *A Philosophy of Comparisons: Theory, Practice and the Limits of Ethics.* Bloomsbury Academic, 62

[47] Connolly. *Doing Philosophy Compartively*, 29

[48] Hartmut, von. *A Philosophy of Comparisons*, 24; Weber. *Comparative philosophy and the Tertium: Comparing what with what, and in what respect?*,152

[49] Weber. *Comparative philosophy*, 155

The comparative process is dependent upon the pre-comparative assertion of commonality, an assertion that determines the comparer's construction of the *comparata* and the *tertium*. The comparative process is not an objective comparison, but a construction of the comparer; a subjective "act of the mind by which the comparison concentrates attention on two mental contents in such way as to ascertain their relation of similarity or dissimilarity.[50] Before the comparison is done, the philosopher who does the comparison already assumes that there is a certain resemblance between concepts from two disparate philosophical traditions and that the comparison is of interest, revealing the emotional investment of the philosopher in the comparative process. Commonalities in the comparative process are not ontologically given, but comparatively constructed; it is dependent upon the efforts and interpretations of the person doing the comparison.

Weber argues that even when we rely on family resemblance, we still face the problem of the assertion of commonality. Instead of asserting one point of commonality, we now assume several points of commonality. Even when the term is seen as a quasi-universal that relates two *comparata* through identifying so-called "family resemblance," we can discern a *tertium* that is in this case not one point of commonality but involves several commonalities. Games such as chess and badminton are comparable because they share several commonalities such as both being leisure activities, both having a winning element and both having specific rules on how to play it. Relying on family resemblance is always open to being challenged by focusing on the aspects in which the *comparata* are different, which shows that each comparison is a limited perspective.

We have to take the interpretive comparer into account when we want to engage in comparative philosophy. The *comparata* as the *tertium* are chosen for the sake of justifying the pre-comparative assertion of commonality, a process that is motivated by the belief that the more the comparer is able to give arguments why the two *comparata* are alike in the light of the *tertium*, the more they are comparable. Comparative philosophy is as such a hermeneutic practice that tries to map out the underlying common structures of concepts from different philosophical traditions. Questions of translation, interpretation and the ambiguity of language pose inescapable challenges when engaging with another philosophical tradition and should be considered when we reflect on how to do comparative philosophy.

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[50] James Sully quoted in: Hartmut, von. *A Philosophy of Comparisons*, 5

Nevertheless, these challenges do not make the comparative endeavour futile or meaningless. While each philosophical inquiry is initiated by what we already know, we can gain new insights and change or initial presuppositions during the comparative process. In participating in and not only commenting on the comparative process, our initial presuppositions and assumptions might change, our expectations might be challenged and our hypotheses on what we initially saw as resonances or similarities might in the end become differences. The self-knowledge that we gain is not produced within ourselves but is triggered by and the result of the encounter with the other who questions our implicit beliefs and assumptions. In order to understand the relation between the role of the comparer and the comparative process, it is important to pay attention to hermeneutics and the role it plays in the comparative encounter.

§2.4 Heidegger and Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Comparative thinking can never be objective or neutral, not only because we can never fully grasp the specific cultural, political, historical, and social context of another (cultural) perspective, but also because we cannot entirely make our own assumptions and biases visible. However, in the cross-cultural comparative process, we can learn things about ourselves that we did not see without the encounter with another tradition. This requires that we are open to the cultural other and enter into a dialogue with another tradition.

An "authentic dialogue" involves epistemological modesty, recognizing the inevitable prejudices and biases we carry with us. Comparative philosophers should, therefore, recognize how their interpretation depends on their historical and cultural situatedness and how translation as interpretation is always shaped by their cultural and historical horizon of understanding. Taking one's cultural and historical situatedness seriously entails recognizing that comparative philosophers translate and interpret another disparate tradition and that they can therefore never claim to comprehensively know what this tradition is about. Reflecting on language by making use of language is however a paradoxical activity. "Speaking about language turns language almost inevitably into an object," says Heidegger in *On the Way to Language*.[51]

Heidegger searched for a method that would disclose existence in terms of itself and hoped to construct a hermeneutics that would enable him to illuminate

[51] Heidegger, M.(1959). *On the Way to Language*. Harper Collins, [1982], 50

the presuppositions upon which the Western conception of Being was based. Being is the concealed prisoner that Heidegger hoped to reveal through the phenomenological method. This method that Heidegger developed in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) is frequently called "hermeneutic phenomenology." Heidegger's quest is marked by the fact that mankind is always completely embedded in the world, leading to Heidegger's conclusion that *Dasein* is always *being-in-the-world.*

Heidegger's conception of phenomenology as a method consists of a combination of *phainesthai* (bringing into appearance) and *logos* (a preliminary perception of the world that leaves a trace in verbal language), a method aimed at letting things become manifest as what they are, without forcing our own categories on them.[52] This is important to comparative philosophy especially when we want to approach another cultural philosophical tradition as an equally important but different tradition. Heidegger shows that hermeneutics should not be conceived as a technique, but as the very constitution of being human.[53] Heideggerian hermeneutics is the "primary act of interpretation which brings a thing from concealment."[54] Hermeneutic phenomenology is thus not a technique that reveals a hidden meaning behind a text but is a method to clarify what constitutes existence itself.

Heidegger's fundamental contribution to hermeneutics lies in his disclosure of understanding that is always grounded in *Dasein's being-in-the-world*. Understanding emerges from the horizons of meaning in which man already finds himself. *Dasein* is never neutral in its stance in the world but is situated and attuned in a particular way. Understanding is not a mere reflection on the object that is at hand but operates within a horizon of meaning that provides the ontological possibility of words to carry meaning.

The phenomenological method draws attention to the fact that the being of *Dasein* is historically contingent, limiting the possibility that we can understand thinkers who are culturally different than our own. Applying this to the specific challenges of comparative philosophy, it means in the minimal sense that we never can initiate a dialogue without bringing our own historical situatedness into play. Some scholars argue therefore that Heidegger's analysis warrants the conclusion of cultural relativism, rejecting the possibility to understand

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[52] Palmer, R.E. (1969). *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer,* Northwestern University Press,128-129

[53] Guignon, C.B. (1983). *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowing*. Hackett Publishing, 71.

[54] Palmer, *Hermeneutics*, 129

traditions that are separated in time, space, and culture from our own. Heidegger's conception of hermeneutic phenomenology in his early work seems to block the way from initiating a comparative dialogue.

However, scholars have drawn attention to the later Heidegger, whose inquiries were devoted to getting behind the reality-founding event, conceptualized as the idea of *Auseinandersetzung* as a keeping, or gathering of difference.[55] His later work might pave the way for an engagement between cultures. In *A Dialogue on Language* (1959), Heidegger engages in a conversation with a (fictive) Japanese person. The dialogue is a fictional reconstruction of an actual meeting that had taken place between Heidegger and Tezuka Tomio (1903-1983). The dialogue is centred on an inquirer (Heidegger) and a Japanese person who knows Heidegger through the work of Count Shuzo Kuki.

Interestingly enough, this Count Kuki wrote a book attempting to understand the nature of Japanese art from a European aesthetic framework.[56] The prelude of the essay concentrates on the Japanese aesthetic notion of *iki* and revolves around the danger that it's meaning cannot be understood from European languages. In the dialogue, Heidegger explicitly questions the validity of Kuki's method as follows:

> *The name "aesthetics" and what it names grow out of European thinking, out of philosophy. Consequently, aesthetic consideration must ultimately remain alien to East-Asian thinking.*[57]

For Heidegger, "language is the house of Being," which is to say that language is the way we dwell in Being. This suggests that a dialogue between East and West is for Heidegger not possible, given that language is related to being, understanding and temporality. The danger of not being able to grasp an East-Asian experience from Western language applies as well to the dialogue itself. The language of the dialogue might confine what can be said about experiences from a culturally different tradition. This is exactly what Heidegger means when he argues that "the danger of our dialogues was hidden in language itself, not in *what* we discussed, nor in the *way in which* we tried to do so."[58]

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[55] Burik. *The End of Comparative Thinking*, vi
[56] Heidegger. *On the Way to Language,*2
[57] Heidegger, *On the Way to Language,*2
[58] Heidegger, *On the Way to Language,*4

What Heidegger wants to show is that no specific method or cautiousness about the content of a dialogue can fully prevent us from misunderstanding other cultural traditions that do not share the same linguistic origin. However, while Heidegger sometimes seems to emphasize the radical difference between the Eastern and the Western tradition, the essay also suggests their "sameness." The dialogue also shows us an opportunity, especially when we look at the way the inquirer and the Japanese person together try to reinterpret "language" in Japanese.[59] While words are embedded in their cultural and linguistic context, they can be translated in a different language, even though this translation will eventually misrepresent the full disclosure of the foreign word. Inherent in translating a foreign word is also the inability to fully know if we have fully disclosed the meaning of a word.

Even though Heidegger's dialogue shows that we can converse with another cultural philosophical tradition, it seems that the dialogue is essentially a one-way relation that hinders in the end cross-cultural philosophy. As Ma Lin (2008) argues in her elaboration on the nature of the dialogue between the inquirer and the Japanese person, Heidegger only focuses on the danger involved in translating Japanese experiences or concepts into European languages. Lin shows that Heidegger's thinking is guided by his notion of the "Same," which means *belonging-together* as the gathering of Being and thinking.[60] When engaging in cross-cultural dialogue, we have to make sense of this notion of the "Same," which for Heidegger is in the end tied to the possibility of each tradition to retrieve its own beginnings.

For Heidegger, sameness is not what is discovered in a dialogue between self and the other, but in the self-discovering of its own ground while conversing with and through the other. I agree with Ma Lin's conclusion that Heidegger's presupposition about the singularity of the historicity of Being, his belief that the relation between thinking and Being as shown in his immersion in Western historicity, makes it nearly impossible for him to engage with Eastern ideas. Heidegger shows how a cross-cultural dialogue can help us to retrieve our own origin but fails to see how we can transcend our own perspective in engaging with ideas from another cultural tradition.

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[59] Heidegger. *On the Way to Language,*13

[60] Lin, M. (2008). *Heidegger on East-West Dialogue. Anticipating the Event*, Taylor & Francis, 204

§2.5 Gadamer and the "Fusion of Horizons"

Heidegger's phenomenological hermeneutics of existence is of interest to comparative philosophy because it shows that interpretation and understanding are historically contingent and are dependent on our *being-in-the-world* as the specific way we are related to our past and to the horizon of meaning that constitutes the world in which objects appear. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) has tried to disclose what it means to belong to a tradition and how we can initiate a dialogue with a foreign person or text. He does so by criticizing the modern conception of experience that is too much oriented toward knowing as a perceptual act or as interactions among physical substances.[61] In his work *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960) Gadamer showed how scientific knowledge is derived from the truth of experience itself, defined by Gadamer as the "experience of one's own historicality."[62]

The dialectical hermeneutical method that Gadamer developed originated from the idea that reality always stands in a horizon of still undecided possibilities.[63] This implies that we should understand our experience as happening, an event or an encounter in which the influence of history and dialectics plays out as a (mis)adventure of language for human beings. Understanding is never a pure subjective relation, but always an encounter of consciousness with an object, in which experience does not have its dialectical fulfilment in knowing, but in its "openness to experience." "Essential to experience," argues Gadamer, "is that it cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or grasped as its meaning."[64]

Based on his analysis of experience, Gadamer formulates a historically operative consciousness that comes to understand its own heritage in "holding oneself open in conversation."[65] This hermeneutical experience is the specific encounter between an interpreter and a text or a person that is characterized as a dialogue with ethical implications. The encounter as dialogue needs to recognize that the horizon of meaning that forms the background of all our thinking is both a possibility as a limitation.

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[61] Palmer. *Hermeneutics,* 194
[62] Gadamer, H.G. (1992). *Truth and Method*, Transl. D.E. Linge, University of California Press,340
[63] Gadamer. *Truth and Method,* 112
[64] Gadamer. *Truth and Method,* 58
[65] Gadamer. *Truth and Method,* 356

Gadamer conceptualized a horizon as the collection of experiences that makes up our world prior to any explicit or tacit analysis. A horizon corresponds to what Heidegger calls *being-in-the-world*, referring to our anticipatory and pre-informed interpretations that help us in making sense of the world. One's horizon is for Heidegger a limit in the sense that no understanding can take place without this *being-in-the-world*. As Heidegger's dialogue with Tezuka suggests, different cultures have different horizons, suggesting that their *being-in-the-world* might also differ.

Gadamer understood this incompatibility of horizons as the task of interpreters to attune to the text, allowing the text to speak through the interpreter's retaining, despite his projections, an "authentic openness." This openness of experience has the structure of a question that is orientated towards the recognition of not knowing. Questioning refers both to the horizon from which the questioning arises, but also refers to the possibility of true dialogue and its dialectical structure makes a fusion of horizons possible. This fusion is possible because questions and answers are in a sense universal and grounded in being. Both the question as the answer light up their specific horizon, leading to self-disclosure and understanding. In other words; the fusion of horizons refers not to a transcendence of one's lifeworld, but rather to a possibility to extend one's horizon by allowing oneself to be challenged by what is other.

Gadamer stresses the importance of a dialogical understanding of an equal and mutual relation between the interpreter and the other.[66] For Gadamer, language is not an instrument to understand the world, but it is a being immersed in language, a living in language. We are born into a certain tradition and, therein, come to form our own thought that is dependent on an implicit, tacit horizon of meaning. We always enter a dialogue from this implicit, tacit horizon of meaning and our questions, answers and understanding emerge from this horizon. We cannot escape our prejudices or pre-judgments because they are necessary to make sense of our world. Yet, we can become aware of them when we initiate a dialogue with that which is other. Gadamer argued however that it is not completely possible to become aware of all our pre-judgments or prejudices; we are always ontologically situated in a cultural tradition, and we cannot adopt a neutral position.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the dialogue with the other should not be initiated or is destined to fail. "Every conversation," says Gadamer, "presupposes

[66] What is other can be a text, but also a culture or a foreigner.

a common language, or better, creates a common language."[67] When we enter into a dialogue with a cultural other, we must make our prejudgments transparent, - we need to be open and committed-, so that we can value the otherness without denying the proper meaning of the other's experience by allowing our unrevealed prejudgments distort it. Only then are we able to extend our own horizon and come to a more sensitive understanding of our own language and our prejudgments.

Ma and van Brakel (2018) argue that Gadamer's hermeneutics points to the various choices and constraints of the interpreter that come into play in understanding a text. The different choices that interpreters makes and the way these choices are influenced by their cultural background constrain as well as guide their interpretation of that which is other. Ma and van Brakel see this "hermeneutical relativity" as the main cause for the variation of competing interpretations and argue that the comparative process is the result of implicit or explicit choices that interpreters make when they initiate a project in comparative thinking.[68] The choices that affect our interpretation are for example the choice of language in which we express our research, our commitment to a philosophical method, as well as more practical concerns such as choices of translations that are used and the texts that should be studied.

§2.6 Family Resemblance Concepts and Quasi-Universals

Studies that try to compare two different philosophical tradition often justify the comparison by referring to how the chosen *comparata* "resonate with each other", "bear similarities" or "share family resemblance." Ma and van Brakel (2015) argue that Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance plays a necessary role in interpreting, comparing, and explaining concepts from a different tradition. They also believe that the notion of family resemblance is able to overcome the "false antinomy of universalism versus relativism," offering us a pragmatic approach to cross-cultural research, aiming not for a perfect correlation of concepts or ideas but looking for concepts that bear similarity but of which no fixed analytic definition can be given.[69]

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[67] Gadamer. *Truth and Method,*371

[68] Lin, M. & Brakel, J. van. (2018). "On the Interpreter's Choices: Making Hermeneutic Relativity Explicit" in *Dao* 17, 455

[69] Lin, M and Brakel, van J. (2016). *Fundamentals of Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy,* SUNY Press, 96

The basis of the concept "family resemblance" is formulated in Wittgenstein's recognition that a concept word covers a highly complicated network of various similar or different meanings. As Vattimo (2002) aptly explains it, the recognition of "family resemblance" is not realized logically as a conceptual necessity, leaving the definition of a concept that is generated through family resemblance as somewhat impure. This does not however mean that we are confused about the concept, these concepts will be "rationally legitimized on the basis of meanings, links, persuasiveness generated in the course of its development."[70]

Wittgenstein pointed to the fact that in practice, language is always more or less vague, mostly because our assertions are not as precise as logic would demand of us. In his later work, Wittgenstein introduced the notion of "family resemblance" to clarify how we think about the sense and meaning of words. Language is a social activity that can be understood as language *games*; the meanings of words cannot be understood by giving analytic definitions, but by giving examples. The concept *games* is such a family resemblance concept: in order to understand what a *game* is, one has to become familiar with the different sorts of games such as chess, checkers, sports, and hide-and-seek. All these games do not share one common aspect, but share similarities and affinities:

> *Don't say "They must have something in common, or they would not be called 'games'" – but look and see whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them, you won't see something that is common to all, but similarities [Ähnlichkeiten], affinities [Verwandtschaften], and a whole series of them at that.*[71]

Games share "multifarious relationships," a "complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail."[72] Similarities of detail refer according to Ma and van Brakel (2015) to similarities according to the conceptual schemes with which the interpreter is familiar, while overall similarities refer to similar ways of fitting in the embedding life forms of another tradition.[73] Identifying similarities is a hermeneutic practice that is dependent upon the point of view of the comparative interpreter.

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[70] Vattimo, G. (2002). *After Christianity.* Transl. L. D'Isanto, Columbia University Press, 23

[71] Wittgenstein, L. (2009). *Philosophical Investigations*. Transl. G.E.M. Anscombe. Blackwell, 31

[72] Ibid., 31/32

[73] Brakel, J. van & Lin, M. (2015). "Extension of Family Resemblance Concepts" in *Dao* 14, 480.

The reliance on family resemblance helps us to initiate the comparative endeavour; it helps us to engage in a dialogue. But during the comparative process we might find that the family resemblance we presuppose are actually differences, which not only highlights that relying on family resemblance is a necessary presupposition that helps us to initiate the cross-cultural endeavour, but also shows that these presuppositions are not static and can change by the encounter with the other. While we need to rely on the family resemblance theory to initiate the comparative encounter, we thus at the same time want to remain open to being challenged in our assertions about the cultural other.

Ma and van Brakel argue that all concepts involved in comparative and intercultural philosophy are family resemblance concepts, in none of the comparative or intercultural studies we can rely on concepts that are identical. Concepts that can be compared are so-called "quasi-universal concepts;" concepts that describe basic human relations and modes of being.[74] Quasi-universals are family resemblance concepts that have no core and are open-ended in their use, they connect notions from a limited number of traditions by means of family-resemblance-extension. They are working hypotheses and are revisable as a consequence of the continuing process of interpretation. Quasi-universals fulfil a necessary role in interpretative practices, but Ma and van Brakel argue that not all concepts can be classified as quasi-universals. The notion of quasi-universals presupposes that, although traditions are culturally distinct, we can recognize them as human practices, supervening on the "most basic assumption that "the other" is a human being, living in communities and having a learnable language."[75]

When we try to learn from and understand another cultural philosophical tradition, we need to assume that our beliefs, assumptions, intentions, and attitudes share some similarities; otherwise, we become locked up in our own perspective and will never be able to learn anything new. Nevertheless, we do need to critically examine our assertions of commonality and be open to the possibility that this assertion might be false. Furthermore, in engaging with the other we might also discover new quasi-universals that we did not yet know of. The question that becomes more and more important is how we can keep ourselves open in the cross-cultural dialogue and how we can approach the other and the other's perspectives in the best way possible.

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[74] Ibid., 478

[75] Lin & van Brakel. *Fundamentals*, 494

Quasi-universals are according to Ma and van Brakel also necessary to make comparison between two different traditions possible. They argue that "one can compare only after having assumed a number of quasi-universals in terms of which the *comparata* can be investigated," implying that only these quasi-universals can serve as *tertia comparationes*.[76] But identifying multiple quasi-universals between two distinct traditions does not make these concepts objectively comparable; they are still dependent upon the person doing the comparison and who identifies similarities from his or her own perspective. Although Ma and van Brakel do recognize the hermeneutic aspect of comparison, they do not discuss how family resemblance concepts are dependent upon identifying many rather than one points of intersection.

To summarize, although the family resemblance concept theory helps us to understand how we can, to a certain degree, make sense of another perspective, it does not pay attention to the fact that it is the interpretive comparer who decides what concepts can be seen as family resemblance-concepts. Assuming family resemblance helps us to initiate the encounter; it helps us to move towards the other and the other's perspectives, but it does not tell us anything about when and why we have to give up the reliance on family resemblance; it does not pay attention to the dynamical nature of the self-other relation that sometimes causes us to change our initial assertions and presuppositions.

In many contemporary studies of comparative philosophy, philosophers tend to solely focus on what way concepts or thinkers A and B are comparable and fail to see that what makes them comparable is dependent upon the pre-comparative assertion of commonality. Problems occur when we cling too much to the assertion of commonality, when we focus too much on why certain concepts share similarities or resonate with each other and fail to see in which respect(s) they differ. This requires that the person doing the comparison does not cling to his or her beliefs, attitudes, and presuppositions, it requires an open, unbiased attitude that is not addressed by the family resemblance method, even though Ma and van Brakel do recognize that there are limitations to the method. Quasi-universals do not solve the problem of the self-other relation, they do not help us in understanding how we can expand our perspective and learn something new from another cultural philosophical tradition without colonizing the other, because they only entail that we should assume some concepts are quasi-universals.

[76] Ibid., 487

This brings us back to the main problem with comparison in philosophy, which is the problem of constructivism: the commonalities that are assumed even on the basis of family resemblance are not straightforward but are guided by the preferences and background of the comparative interpreter.[77] When we do not take into account how our preferences influence the comparative perspective, we tend to split into endless discussions in which the comparer eagerly tries to defend why their assertion of commonalities that is of interest to them, might be interesting for their scholarly peers.[78] This approach however fails to take into account the dynamics of the comparative process and does not make us reflect on how we can approach the cultural other in its difference.

When we initiate the intercultural encounter, we have to assume that we share some basic similarities, but this does not prevent us from changing and reformulating what we assume or assert. Our perspective is not invulnerable to change; the comparative process is not a mere "knower-known relation" in which we investigate the other as an object and deem it comparable but is a dynamic relation in which we come to understand that tradition and in which we are being confronted with a new way of looking at things and urges us to transcend our confined perspective. Understanding and learning from the cultural other always requires the openness of comparative philosophers which is to say that they need to be open to question their assumptions and beliefs and a willingness to understand and evaluate cultural others on their own terms.

When we see comparative philosophy as a mere epistemological practice, we can only affirm that some concept or idea from another cultural philosophical tradition resembles or does not resemble a certain concept. Comparative philosophy is however more than this shallow identification of differences and similarities between concepts from different traditions. It is also a self-transformative practice in which we become aware of the limitations of our presuppositions, intentions and beliefs and become aware of our own bias. Our philosophical attitude, and more particularly our openness to learn from and thinking with the other, is the driving force of the success or failure of comparative philosophy and even the factor that determines what counts as failure or success.

While the current tendency in comparative philosophy is to delineate the field in terms of methodologies, techniques, issues and solutions, the vital role of

[77] Weber. *Comparative Philosophy*, 166
[78] Ibid., 169

the interpretive comparer is neglected. Instead of trying to answer the question of how to do comparative philosophy by introducing standards or by defining comparative philosophy in a specific way, we should reflect on the problem of bias and the way comparative philosophers influence the comparative process. In other words: interpretive comparers need to take responsibility for the way their emotions, presuppositions and beliefs influence their approach to the other and the other's perspectives. This requires that comparative philosophers are ethical competent and are willing to take responsibility for the way they approach and interpret cultural others.

Comparative philosophy as a form of intercultural conversation that aims to overcome stereotypical and cliché representations of the cultural other requires a kind of ethical competence in which a philosopher can openly but critically judge a variety of different perspectives and cultivates an openness towards the other. These points of attention will serve as a basis for my own discussion of comparative methodology in chapter five, based on my reading of Levinas (chapter three) and the *Zhuāngzǐ* (chapter four). I will show that these characteristics are best guaranteed when we reflect on the self-other relation and do not merely see the self-other relation as an intellectual relation, but also as an interdependent relation that is ethical in nature.

§2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a short overview of the history of comparative philosophy as a branch of modern academic philosophy. I have discussed how comparison is always dependent upon a particular perspective and is the outcome of the choice of two or more *comparata* that are being compared in respect to a *tertium*. Our hermeneutical embeddedness does not have to lead to cultural relativism but highlights the need to reflect on the way we approach the other and the other's perspectives.

Comparative research however always starts with the person who thinks that two concepts or thinkers from disparate philosophical traditions are similar and are interesting to be compared. While this assertion of commonality is necessary to initiate the comparative endeavour, it does not entail that this assertion is a rigid presupposition; during the comparative process we might conclude that we are wrong and that the similarities are actually difference. While comparative philosophy is thus a hermeneutic practice whose primary

act is interpretation of a yet unknown philosophical perspective, we can expand our confined perspective in the encounter with the other. It is in the relation to the other, who is different from us, that we can learn novel ways of looking at phenomena. Furthermore, in the encounter of the other we come to reflect on our own presuppositions, beliefs, and attitudes, indicating that the comparative process is also important to becoming more open to different perspectives.

There is no specific method that can prevent us from misunderstanding another philosophical perspective; we are immersed in our own horizon of meaning that constitutes our ways of thinking and questioning and we always approach the other from our own perspective. Furthermore, Gadamer points to the fact that experience cannot be exhausted in what we can say, there is as such always something that has not been said. While we can never be certain that we fully understand a disparate philosophical perspective particularly when we do not share the same language, we can initiate a dialogue with another tradition by assuming some point(s) of commonality and being as open as possible to the other. Nevertheless, the comparative philosopher can move towards the other's perspectives by "holding oneself open in conversation," a philosophical attitude that is receptive to a different way of thinking and which originates in the openness of questioning.

As the effort of comparative philosophy is dependent upon the comparative interpreter, we must, rather than merely reflecting on deliberate steps of methodological approach, recreate the philosophical attitude as a kind of ethical competence in which we are open to and think with the other instead of approaching another cultural philosophical tradition as an object. In the following chapters, this study seeks to discern how we can cultivate ethical competence as critical openness towards the other and the other's perspectives.

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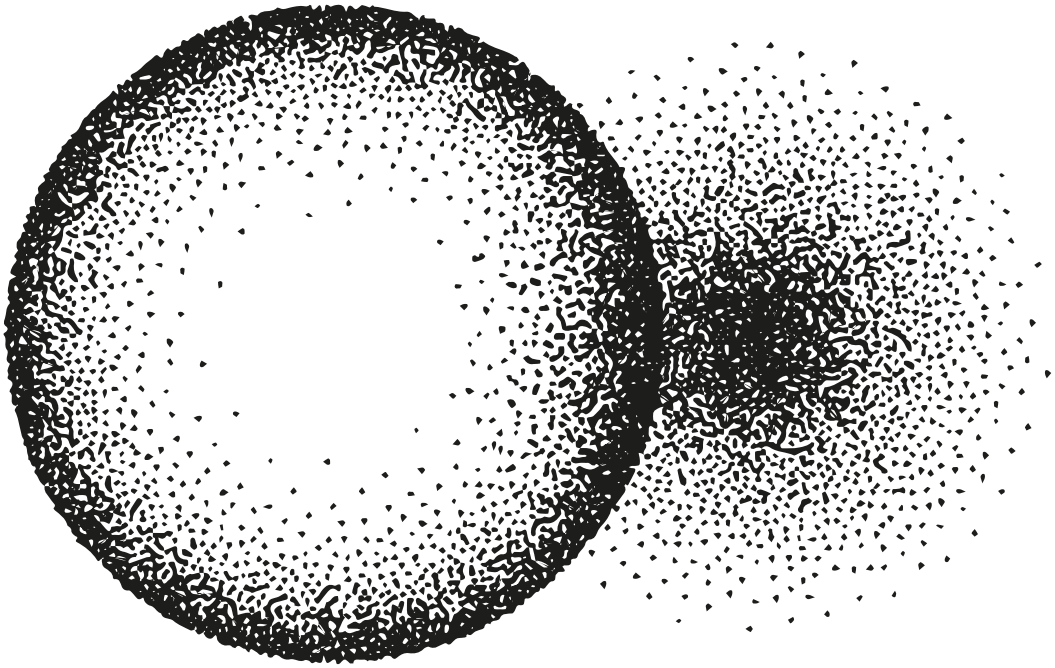

Chapter 3

Rethinking the Relation to the Other: Levinas on Culture, Immanence and Transcendence

The main aim of this present study is to highlight the need for ethical competence for practicing comparative philosophy. Comparative philosophy should actively contribute to the decolonization of philosophy and should initiate a cross-cultural dialogue based on a critical-transformational discourse that helps comparative philosophers to approach the cultural other in an open way. The question is how comparative philosophers can approach the cultural other in its particularity while at the same time bringing this other under their own familiar philosophical concepts. While comparative philosophers have to assume a common ground to initiate the comparative encounter, they should at the same time be sensitive to the otherness of the cultural other.

In this chapter I introduce Levinas as the thinker who can show us why comparative philosophy needs to reflect on the ethical nature of the self-other relation and needs to recognize the close connection between knowledge and imperialism. To shed light on this connection, I will investigate Levinas' thoughts on culture and how these thoughts relate to his conception of transcendence as the necessary surplus for a wholly immanent worldview. From this, I will move on to a more general discussion on Levinas' troublesome political statements and the way Levinas expands his general critique of Western metaphysics to the political structures derived from them. Scholars such as Sikka (1998), Caygill (2002) and McGettigan (2006) and Drabinski (2011) argue that Levinas troublesome political claims agree with his phenomenology and exclude the cultural other.

The difference I am putting forward is that scholars who argue that Levinas privileges the Judaic and Greek tradition as the essence of Western civilization are in some way right, but fail to ask the question of what this privilege consists of in. In analysing Levinas' changing conception of transcendence throughout his work, I will show how Levinas' main critique on other cultural traditions as well as the Western tradition originates from his belief that a wholly immanent worldview is a form of primitivism that cannot attune to radical alterity. With the help of Derrida's reflections on Europe in which he relies on Levinas' later notion of transcendence as "transcendence-in-immanence", I hope to articulate a valuable approach for engaging with other cultural philosophical traditions in which I localize the main task of European comparative philosophy as the infinite attempt to move beyond identity.

Part I: Escaping Primitivism: Transcendence as Paternal Fecundity

§3.1 Levinas' Critique on the Western tradition and the Metaphysics of "Vision"

Before investigating the relation between Levinas' thinking on the formation of cultures and the relation to the cultural other, I will first provide the necessary background and context of Levinas' thinking. This helps us to understand and clarify important steps in Levinas' thinking and how his thinking is inspired by but also tries to break with the Western philosophical tradition. I will focus on Levinas' conviction that a wholly immanent philosophy cannot provide the ethical orientation that is needed to evaluate and do justice to the cultural other. A philosophy without the notion of transcendence leads to violence and neglect of that what is radically other and is as such a "pagan culture". Levinas privileges the Monotheistic tradition because it sees persons as free and responsible unrestrained by time and history. Levinas contrasts this with the "pagan view" of man as determined and restricted by time and history, a view that is for Levinas a form of "primitivism" as the unethical acceptance of the natural order.

First, I want to clarify Levinas' notion of the "absolutely Other" (*autrui*), the other (*l'autre*). In this chapter I will take the other (*l'autre*) as the cultural other, which can refer to a text, concept, or person from another cultural philosophical tradition. In Levinas' thinking, the relation to the other is always marked by the logic of economy and non-economy or radical alterity. The economical relation to the cultural other is here the relation in which I am able to understand and grasp the cultural other and can access another cultural philosophical tradition (a text, concepts) by identifying what Ma and van Brakel call "quasi-universals." The economic relation to the cultural other rests upon the logic of the same and is motivated by the self's need (the comparative philosopher) to compare that what is incomparable (another cultural philosophical tradition, see figure 1). Levinas however argues that the cultural other (*l'autre*) always exceeds our comprehension, because the cultural other always already refers to that what is Other (*Autrui*). The radical alterity of the cultural other is in Levinas' thinking related to the nakedness of the Face and its relation and ethics as movement to radical transcendence. I will elaborate more profoundly on these themes throughout this chapter.

Emmanuel Levinas was born in Kaunas, Lithuania and began to study philosophy in 1923 at Strasbourg University. In 1928 Levinas went to Freiburg to study phenomenology under Edmund Husserl. Husserl's methodological disclosure of how meaning is constituted became the starting point of the phenomenological movement. The phenomenological method allows consciousness to understand its own activities from the horizon of intentionality; a philosophical turn in which human beings were no longer understood theoretically, but existentially. During Levinas' time in Freiburg, he became acquainted with the work of Martin Heidegger, whose thinking about human beings as *Dasein*, who are always *in-the-world,* would have a lasting influence on Levinas' own thinking.

Levinas' phenomenology, - his philosophical work as well as his Talmudic work -, is a response to thinkers such as Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, but primarily needs to be seen as a response to the political situation of the twentieth century. Levinas' fundamental critique on Western metaphysics, a tradition that he associates with violence, is an answer to the question of how philosophy allowed the Holocaust to happen. For Levinas, the entire metaphysical tradition centres on the egocentric subject that brings the phenomena to light. Western philosophy is an ontology of the free, thinking subject that, in representing and recollecting the outside world, reduces everything that is other to the same. Levinas relates violence multiple times to primitivism[79], which is defined by Levinas as a philosophy that concentrates on instincts and immersion and is as such anti-Platonic and Pagan. In *Le lieu et l'utopie* (1950)[80] Levinas defines paganism as a philosophy that seeks the satisfaction of the self before the other, a philosophy of sameness and immanence.

Levinas' entire thinking is motivated by the desire to overcome the violence of the same in which the particular is only approached in its correspondence to a universal, neutral term. The philosophy of the same is for Levinas a "totalitarianism" and imperialism, a philosophy that conceptualizes and neutralizes the self's relation to other human beings. More specifically, Levinas

[79] In *The Philosphical Determination of the Idea of Culture*, Levinas defines the Greco-Roman Western culture as "an intention to remove the *otherness* of Nature"; a tendency which he in *God and Philosophy* describes as "the destruction of transcendence" (CCP, 154). In this essay, he introduces transcendence as the surplus to "the intelligibility of immanence," (Ibid., 155). In his essay "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism", Levinas claims that Hitlerism originates in a primitivism that is related to a wholly immanent worldview. In *Entre Nous*, Levinas arguest that a Pagan world is a world that cannot attest to the relation to Infinity as the face-to-face relation (EN:48).

[80] DF:99; DL:133

argues that philosophy approaches the other as an *alter ego* of the self and not as a unique singular person who has his or her own significance independent from the self. From the very beginning, Western philosophy is concerned with being that can be represented, thematized and grasped. For Levinas, Hegel's philosophy, a watershed in modern reflection, is the very prototype of the totalizing tendency to reduce everything that is other to the same. Truth for Hegel is not a semantic concept but is a metaphysical notion (*Idea*) of all reality. For Levinas, the Hegelian system represents the philosophy that revolves around "presence" and "being" and the "same."[81]

Western philosophy is a systematization of the intelligible which is a bringing into agreement between thought and being, a tendency that Levinas calls "vision."[82] Vision is grounded in the agreeableness of sensibility and is motivated by a "contentment with the finite," which opens upon a "perspective, upon a horizon."[83] Vision makes the world *worldly*, it allows consciousness to grasp, master and possess the phenomena that have been given to him. Vision is the "sphere of intelligibility" in which everyday life as well as philosophy and science maintains themselves, it is also for Levinas the domain of the Heideggerian holistic understanding of *being-in-the-world,* the assumption that *Dasein* is always already familiar with the world.[84] Philosophy as "vision" or "light" centres around the autonomous, thinking subject that perseveres in its being and "weaves among incomparables a common fate; it puts them in conjunction,"[85] a tendency in which all that is exterior is reduced to or returns to the immanence of subjectivity.[86]

Levinas criticizes the Western metaphysical tradition and gives a novel description of human life which he derives from his Jewish religious heritage and the heritage of Greek philosophy. In rethinking the Cartesian idea of the infinite, Levinas finds an opening to pure exteriority, a transcendence that remains exterior to the thinking subject which exposes the subject to a thinking that thinks *more* than itself. In the articulation of this relation to infinity that Levinas describes as a relation to the Other, Levinas discovers in his early work the possibility of the self to have a genuine future as the time as eschatology. The time as eschatology is a personal, paternal relation that enables the self to

[81] EN':71; EN: 88/89
[82] EN':112; EN:47
[83] TI:191; TeI: 208
[84] TO:97; EN:165
[85] OTB:4; AE:14/15
[86] EN': 123; EN: 147

transcend its own individual and biological existence which affirms that being is essentially plurality and not unity.

In his early work and in his important work *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas articulates transcendence in terms of the temporal as the sensuous, which is in his early work presented as the promise of fecundity.[87] Transcendence gives a surplus of meaning that cannot be thematized; a meaning that as such does not come from the self but from what is Other (*Autrui*). The surplus of meaning refers in Levinas' work to ethical subjectivity; a subjectivity that is neither rational, nor instinctual, but is a vulnerability and hospitality to the Other. In the next section, I will shortly outline how Levinas seeks to reconfigure the self in order to overcome a wholly immanent, primitive, and pagan world.

§3.2 The Embodied Self as Transcendent and Immanent

In this part I will primarily focus on how Levinas' phenomenological analysis of indolence, shame, insomnia, and enjoyment reveals the desire of the self to escape being, but also reveals the failure of a genuine evasion of being and the desire for transcendence. In Levinas' early works *De l'Evasion* (1935) and *De l'Existence à l'Existant* (1947), Levinas began to outline an ontological elucidation of the becoming of the subject in which beings can be thought separately from Being. Levinas shows that we phenomenologically can gain access to Being without beings through analysing the experience of insomnia. The genesis of the existent, argues Levinas, is a break with pure being (*il y a*), an event in which the existent takes up his existence as a mastery over anonymous existence.

Levinas calls the event in which an existent assumes its own existence, an event prior to *Dasein*'s *being-in-the-world*, "hypostasis." Hypostasis marks the mystery of "creation," a creation that originates from the existent's ipseity.[88] Hypostasis is the pre-intentional and pre-cognitive event that describes how an existent emerges from anonymous being, an event that affirms the independence and solitude and *me*-ness of the self. Levinas describes hypostasis as a contract, taking a *stance* against anonymous Being (*il y a*) by positing myself as a separate existent; a being affected by existence, as a "situation where an existent is put

[87] Bergo, B. (2005). "Ontology, Transcendence, and Immanence in Emmanuel Levinas" Research *in Phenomenology*, 35, 141-180.

[88] ELP:206

in touch with its existing."[89] In hypostasis the *I* takes a position, referring to the body as the first act, - the act par excellence-, of privatization. A privatization produced by the resting of the body, a resting on a base, of standing.[90]

In our everyday *being-in-the-world* we can gain access to this pre-ontological event of hypostasis by analysing insomnia. The liminal experience of insomnia reveals the impossibility of the subject to take charge of its own being. The terror of not being able to fall asleep is the confrontation of the horror of the night, a confrontation with the anonymous rustling of the *there is* (*il y a*), in which the self no longer has mastery over being but experiences the darkness of the pure presence of Being. The phenomenological analysis of insomnia reveals that consciousness is a modality of wakefulness (*veille*). In wakefulness the self loses its mastery over the *there is* and loses *itself*: it is not *my* vigilance in the night but "a vigilance without refuge in unconsciousness, without the possibility of withdrawing into sleep, into a private domain."[91] Insomnia reveals that the self sometimes loses its mastery over being and is "held by Being, held to be."[92]

The hermeneutical-phenomenological analysis of insomnia reveals that the self does not primarily flee from its own death but tries to escape from the rustling of pure Being. The becoming of the subject is a drama of being, it is the effort of overcoming the *there is*; a continuous effort of taking a position against it. This taking charge of existence, which is tied to getting one's fatigued body of out bed to begin the day, is a taking charge of existence that is utterly *mine*. The positing of the body is the privatization of the subject; it is the emergence of *mineness.*

The subject is the being that constantly has to assume its own existing and has to take a stance against pure Being. This repetitive conquest reveals the fundamental ambiguity of the activity of the subject as both a mastering of being and the burden of being chained to itself. This tension between mastery and hesitation produces the internal dialectic of the instant that is "free with respect to the past, but a captive of itself, breathes the gravity of being in which it is caught up."[93] The existent has transcended anonymous being but at the price that it always must be chained to itself in its *having-to-be*. Transcendence is here tied to the weight of the physical body and is conceived as the desire to escape Being.

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[89] TO:51; TA:31
[90] CC:179
[91] TO:49; TA:28
[92] EE:61; DEE:86
[93] EE:78; DEE:135

Levinas argues that the self suffers from being chained to his physical body, because in its perpetual *having-to-be*, the self fatigues himself.[94] In fatigue, the subject is physically exhausted; fatigue is a "slackening," in which one's muscles are strained. The *I*'s investment in its embodied self is a demand in each instant to "take up oneself newly."[95] Fatigue creates a delay with respect to the instant, but also creates a delay with respect to being oneself. Fatigue is not only a hesitation to take a stance against being, - a hesitation to begin-, but it also is a hesitation to take up *my* existing once again.

Closely related to fatigue is indolence or dilatoriness (*paresse*), which is the reluctance to effectuate a beginning. Indolence is the impossibility of beginning and the weariness of getting up and taking one's strained body out of bed.[96] Fatigue and indolence reveal the burden of the personal self which everyday has to assume his own existing. Beginning as a hesitation is taking a risk, because there is always something to lose; "if only the instant itself."[97] Indolence reveals the burden of existence as a joyless repetition of anonymous, unique, and separate instants, revealing the solitude of the existent that is not able to synthesize past, present, and future. This observation already preludes the possibility that time can come from the self but comes from the Other.

Fatigue and indolence reveal the weariness of being; a weariness "of everything and everyone, and above all a weariness of oneself."[98] Weariness is the suffering of the self as an excess of being and a need to escape one's corporeity, a need to escape the identity between the *moi* and the *soi*. Levinas argues that shame originates from the "solidarity of our being, which obliges us to claim responsibility for ourselves."[99] In contrast to Sartre, who relates shame to the existence of other human beings, Levinas interprets the feeling of shame as something that originates from the structure of the subject. Shame, writes Levinas, reveals a being ashamed of one's existence, an existence that is *my existence*. This "being ashamed of oneself," reveals the proximity of the *I* and its physical body, - a relation between self and other, which is nevertheless a relation of self-referencing.

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[94] EE:11; DEE:32
[95] EE:76; DEE:133
[96] EE:13; DEE:34
[97] EE:14; DEE:36
[98] EE:11; DEE:32
[99] OE:63; EV:85

Llewelyn (1995) argues that shame reveals that the nakedness of the self is not the result of doing something wrong but originates from the existential need of an *apologia* for one's existence.[100] Although I do think that this interpretation is correct, shame is more than a mere need for an *apologia*; it primarily reveals the metaphysical desire for the beyond being. The need to escape oneself calls for a desire to start afresh, a desire for transcendence; a transcendence in which the *I* is saved but is no longer chained to its physical body. Shame, which reveals the desire for transcendence, is for Levinas the self's "very need for time as for a miraculous fecundity in the instant itself, by which it recommences as other."[101]

In Levinas' early work, it is everyday affectivity that offers Levinas a way to think transcendence as something beyond being. Bergo (2005) argues that without Levinas' analysis of subjective life as a continuum from consciousness to unconsciousness, his later conception of transcendence as "transcendence-in-immanence" would have been impossible.[102] In his more mature work *Autrement qu'être*, we will see that that the self is always already a *being-there-for-the-Other* as a *being-for-itself*. In this study I will show how Levinas argues that an immanent world needs transcendence to overcome the violence of being. We see in his early work that existence as effort is a suffering that reveals my embodied vulnerability and passivity, a suffering that opens the desire to escape being. Transcendence, argues Levinas, does not originate from a need to unite with a higher being, but is the desire to break with being, which Levinas interprets as a desire for the Good:

> *It signifies that the movement which leads an existent toward the Good is not a transcendence by which the existent raises itself up to a higher existence, but a departure from Being and from the categories which describe it: an excendence. But excendence and the Good necessarily have a foothold in being, and that is why Being is better than non-being.*[103]

Transcendence is a sensual vulnerability that arises from the solipsist dualism of the self; the *I* is in its solitary, unique existence riveted to its own time and will long for an escape from Being. In Levinas' later work *Totalité et Infini*, transcendence is accomplished through eros and fecundity and is described

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[100] Llewelyn, J. (1995). *The Geneology of Ethics*. Routledge,18

[101] EE:96; DEE:164

[102] Bergo, *Ontology, Transcendence*, 144.

[103] EE: xxvii; DEE:9

as the birth of the son who is both *same-and-other* and whose birth opens a genuine new future as the "time of the Other".

Levinas shows that transcendence as the son who is both same and other gives us a genuine future in which we can overcome our egological confined perspective and can move towards the other without becoming one with the other. In his later work, Levinas describes the encounter with the Other (*Autrui*) as the accomplishment of transcendence, as it is only the epiphany of the Face that interrupts and transcends the self's egological culture. Only the epiphany of the Face interrupts human egocentric spontaneity without limiting or destroying it. The tension between the Other and the self's freedom and possessions stands at the basis of Levinas' understanding of ethical subjectivity. The tension is also present in the relation between the cultural other and is also important to address when we want to understand Levinas' understanding of culture. Culture and nature are in Levinas' work egological, but as we will see in the next section, this egological culture is a necessary precondition for the ethical encounter.

§3.3 Preconditions of Responsibility: Enjoyment, Dwelling, Labour, and Possession

The main aim of the first part of this chapter is to understand how in *Totalité et Infini* Levinas frames transcendence in light of the self, Being and fecundity. Fecundity and the opening of a sacred history, which is the history of the Monotheistic religion of God, transcendence, the infinite and the Holy, are the most important themes that have led scholars to conclude that Levinas' thinking is Eurocentric, as it takes the Western monotheistic tradition and grants universality to it. In this chapter I will shed a new light on Levinas' alleged Eurocentrism by outlining how his Eurocentrism originates in his belief that a wholly immanent worldview leads to a culture of identity that is hostile and oblivious toward radical alterity.

In this present section we gain more insight in the most fundamental categories of the self as *being-in-the-world*. The phenomenological analysis of enjoyment, dwelling, labour, and possession do not only serve as an analysis of everyday human life but are in Levinas also interpreted as fundamental preconditions for the infinite responsibility to the Other.

§3.3.1 Enjoyment

Existence as effort creates the need for pleasure, in which pleasure is the affectivity of an attempt to break with being.[104] Levinas argues that the world is not primarily encountered as an equipmental whole but is encountered as elements that the self enjoys. We do not use things like soup and bread, but we live from them.[105] Nourishment as living from the elemental world turns "that which is other into the same," it turns the element into an *aliment*.

Levinas beautifully describes enjoyment as "the love of life," a love that is not concerned with mere Being, but "loves the happiness of being."[106] Enjoyment is the escape from effort, a positive affirmation of the self who masters his existence. Levinas defines enjoyment not as a mode of being, but as a sensibility (*psychism*) that constitutes the very egoism of the *I*. The ego is as "joyous *force which moves*."[107] Enjoyment is however a finite affectivity that is a holding on to the instant, a mastering of existing that is not recaptured until the moment when enjoyment is broken. Enjoyment as sensibility is always broken off due to the volatility of the elemental world and offers as such only a temporarily escape from being.

Enjoyment is to Levinas an essential event in the constitution of subjectivity that cannot be seen as an event of "inauthenticity," or "alienation." It affirms that the self is not only a separate being, but also a being that is *at-home-in-the-world*, a being that lacks nothing. Human beings enjoy having needs and this happiness of enjoyment constitutes their independence and separation from the world. The self that enjoys the world appears here as a conscious being, an ego that sees its *being-in-the-world* as a *being-there-for-him or her.* The world is there for *me* but in this mastery or possession of the world is already a vulnerability present that threatens this *being-there-for-me*. The sun can warm me but can also burn my skin; my existence is enjoyment threatened by suffering and death. This is why Levinas sees dwelling, labour, and possession as ways to endure my enjoyment of the world and to protect myself from harm.

§3.3.2 Dwelling

The reclusion of the self who tries to secure enjoyment is what Levinas calls the *being-at-home-with-oneself* as "dwelling." Dwelling is synonymous with the

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[104] EV:60; DEE:81
[105] TI:110; TeI:112
[106] TI:115; TeI:118
[107] Levinas, E. "Signature" Transl. A. Peperzak, *Research in Phenomenology* 8, (1978):183

home, - with inhabitation -, the self is in its corporeity at home with itself and is the self's protection against the threats of the elemental world and grounds the base from which the self can master the elemental world through labour.[108]

Dwelling completes the separation between the subject and the outside world, in which the interiority of the self is now absolutely separated from the external world. At the same time, dwelling is also the moment in which the self can encounter that which is other. But as Derrida points out, this encounter is not an encounter with absolute resistance, - which is the Face of the Other-, but an encounter with something other that already gives itself.[109] Dwelling is an encounter with something that is other which is already brought to light. The light of Being is the brightness of intelligibility itself and is the encounter with exteriority in its meaningful context: "light makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us."[110] Consciousness brings objects to light by its intentional structure that announces representation, recollection, and knowledge.

Dwelling as habitation marks the break between the separated existent and its natural being, the phenomenological moment in which naïve enjoyment turns into care. Habitation is associated with warmth and intimacy, it *being-with-oneself* as a withdrawal from the elemental world in which one's habitat is the limit of interiority and exteriority.[111] Dwelling also makes labour and possession possible and is at the same time the moment in which the self becomes open to the feminine Other.

§3.3.3 Labour and Possession

Labour as the intentional activity of the commencement in action, is the activity in which the subject interrupts time and marks the "now" as the beginning. The "now" as beginning allows for the grasping and possession of the world and affirms the self-mastery of the subject that can start over.

The economic self that can master the outside world through labour and possession and rules over its household (*oikonomos*). The economic self is defined by physical needs and seeks to overcome the volatile and hostile world. Need is defined as a dependency on "living from" what is other. The relation

[108] TI:158; TeI:131
[109] Derrida, J. (1967). *Writing and Difference*. Transl. A. Bass. Routledge, 116
[110] EE:40; DEE:51
[111] TI:161;TeI: 135

between the self and other in need is a relation characterized by mastery in its dependency, a tension between pleasure and pain.[112] Labour and possession suspend immediate naïve enjoyment and enables the self to turn goods into something that affirm my egocentric enjoyment. Dwelling as the possibility for labour and possession give rise to an autonomous existence and a common economical culture of consumption and production and creates the distinction between the private and public realm.

§3.3.4 Egological Economical Culture

Enjoyment, dwelling, labour, and possession give rise to a common culture and are therefore phenomena that help us to understand how Levinas sees cultures and the relation to the cultural other (*l'autre*). Enjoyment, dwelling, labour, and possession affirm the identity of the *I* in its egoism, an egoism that is positively marked by the self's mastery and responsibility of his or her own life. The subject as egological economical culture is free; it is not passively at the mercy of the volatile elemental world, but actively takes charge of his or her own well-being and encounter the other as the same, as an alter ego that can be known and grasped. Levinas writes in *Totalité and Infini* that only a self that fully takes charge of his or her own social and material perseverance can become responsible for the Other, which indicates that Levinas does not want to change or reject the egological economical culture but does argue that it needs the surplus of the ethical relation to the Other.

§3.4 The Encounter with the Other

§3.4.1 The Welcoming of the Feminine

In the last section I have discussed enjoyment, dwelling, labour, and possession as important phenomenological structures of the self that are simultaneously the necessary preconditions for ethical responsibility. Dwelling as the withdrawal from the elemental world and the separation of the subject is always already a wandering that is always hospitable to the Other:

> *No human or interhuman relationship can be enacted outside of economy; no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home. Recollection in a home open to the Other – hospitality – is the concrete and initial fact of human recollection and separation; it coincides with the Desire for the Other absolutely transcendent.*

[112] TI:145; TeI:113

> *The chosen home is the very opposite of root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering [errance] which has made it possible, which is not a less with respect to installation, but the surplus of the relationship with the Other, metaphysics.*[113]

The welcoming of the Other is a welcoming, - a celebration-, of radical alterity, a welcoming of the feminine that is encountered in the intimacy of one's home. More specifically, dwelling as the completion of the thinking subject is the constitutive moment in which the subject not only emerges as a solitary existent, but also finds itself as already a host of the Other. The welcoming structure of the Other is the structure of the feminine, the feminine Other who creates a home for the masculine self in which he is able to be at home with himself.[114]

Levinas draws upon traditional stereotypes of women and describes the feminine as a "gentle" and "hospitable" structure that is encountered in the *oikos*, - the home-, of the subject. It is the woman in the home who, even in the absence of an individual woman, as Levinas is eager to point out, opens up the dimension of masculine interiority. The feminine Other is however different from the ontological thematization of the (feminine) other, as the welcoming of the feminine Other signifies the Other who cannot be reduced to the intentionality of the subject but who nevertheless affects the subject on a sensuous level.

The feminine face is the first welcome that gives dwelling its specific orientation. The welcoming of the feminine makes the home inhabitable by enabling recollection. The feminine Other opens the masculine self to the meaningful world, as the feminine Face is the first welcome. The feminine Face does however not speak, which is why Levinas argues that this is not yet the revelation of the Face of the Other who accuses me of murder. Nevertheless, the feminine Face as pure hospitality will become important for the ethical relation when the subject finds itself both as host as well as hostage. Only a being that is hospitable to the Other and is susceptible to him can substitute himself for the Other. As we have seen, the self is hospitable to the Other despite the fact that it has taken his or her place in his or her home. To be more precise, the moment that the self becomes a homeowner is also the moment that the self becomes hospitable to the feminine Other. The self's sense of identity is as such also the moment that this identity can be interrupted by the otherness of the Other.

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[113] TI:172; TeI:189

[114] TI:158; TeI:

§3.4.2 The Face of the Other

In this section I will trace how the Face of the Other and the ethical relation are related to transcendence. Levinas seeks to formulate a transcendental philosophy against paganism of immanence and the anti-Platonism of contemporary philosophy.[115] Transcendence as the relation to infinity and ethics as the way to transcendence are the themes that need to be clarified in order to understand how Levinas sees the relation to the cultural other and to investigate Levinas' understanding of cultural formation. These themes will also be important to understand Levinas' alleged Eurocentrism.

Levinas' aim is to show that ontology or the realm of being needs the surplus of transcendence which Levinas interprets as the relation to infinite goodness. Ontology as egological culture is a joyful dependency and mastery of the world, the possibility to fulfil one's needs for the sake of enjoyment. Enjoyment is the fundamental structure of the self, a sensibility that is prior to consciousness and the subject-object relation and is independent from any particular need. In Levinas' thinking, ontology or everyday life is seen as the primitive situation in which that what is Other is objectified and incorporated in the self's egological activities. The self that values and gives meaning to what is other is however also affected by that what is other, which gives rise to an inquiry in the signification of the Face. The Face is not a phenomenon, is not vision, but is the first ethical gesture.

The radical alterity of the Other is for Levinas something more than the mere experience of the way the other differs to us; the Other has a Face. The Face does not refer to what we can perceive; it is more than his nose, eyes, mouth, and facial expression. The radical alterity of the Face refers to his look, his expression, and his holiness. The face as pure expression of the Other is what stays most naked, is most destitute, and what affects the self immediately on a sensuous affective level. The face-to-face encounter with the Other is a relation in which the Other looks at me and addresses me; his Face *speaks* to me, and I respond to him. The self is sensible to the radical otherness of the Other, it is vulnerable to being affected by the Face who addresses the self on a personal level. The Face of the Other reveals the self's passiveness, its inability not to be affected by the Other and forces the self to respond, a responsiveness that is not chosen nor willed.

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[115] CPP:83; Levinas, E. (1964). "La Signification et le Sens" *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 69 N°2, 137.

The holiness of Face is for Levinas transcendence as the beyond being and gives ecological culture an essential ethical orientation. The self-other relation in its primal form is for Levinas discourse, an ethical discourse that summons the self to responsibility. The first teaching of the Other is the Face that speaks to me, revealing the epiphany or Height of the Face. The pure exteriority as first teaching is a moment in which the self is in contact with someone who is exterior to its being, a teaching of radical exteriority that cannot be reduced to something *for-the self*. In contrast to the feminine Other whose speaking is "silent," the speaking of the Face of the Other is a call to take the Other into account. The Face of the Other is not silent but accuses me of usurping the world and questions my egocentric spontaneity.

The epiphany of the Face gives resistance to the egocentric spontaneity of the self but does not limit or negate it. The Face is an invitation, or better a temptation, to abuse the other for the self's own egocentric needs, or in its utmost limit, a temptation to kill the other. But the moment that the self realizes that it can kill the other is also the very moment in which the self realizes that what it can do, it should not do. Transcendence thus gives the self a teaching that affects its very subjectivity. As Levinas says in a conversation with Richard A. Cohen, the encounter with the Face of the Other breaks with the autonomous, active, and thinking subject and transforms the subject into a conscience who is responsible to the vulnerability of the Other:

> *I am exposed as a usurper of the place of the other. The celebrated 'right to existence' that Spinoza called conatus essendi and defined as the basic principle of all intelligibility is challenged by the relation to the face. Accordingly, my duty to respond to the other suspends my natural right to self-survival, le droit vitale.*[116]

The Face resists my egocentric joyous spontaneity, not by destroying it or restricting it, but by questioning it. It is in this particular sense that Levinas argues that the "pagan" egological culture needs transcendence. For Levinas, transcendence is a personal relation to the Other in which the self is guilty prior to its own activities. In the face-to-face encounter the self is no longer a happy spontaneity, but finds itself capable of murder.

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[116] Cohen, R. E. (2001). *Ethics, Exegesis and Philosophy. Interpretation after Levinas.* Cambridge University Press, 24

The encounter with another human being is a transformative experience that liberates the self from its egocentric concerns and gives the self the surplus of infinite goodness. The Face is always the encounter in which I am the wealthy man who has everything, and the Other is the widow, the stranger, and the orphan.[117] Being human signifies more than persevering in one's being, being human also means to go to extraordinary means for the other. The relation between the Other and the self is an asymmetrical relation in which the Other questions me and disturbs my egocentric spontaneity prior to my intentions, I am forever and always responsive to the Face, a responsiveness as an infinite openness to the Other.

Levinas' notion of transcendence as the resistance of the Face originates in Jewish religion. The height and the holiness of the Face of the Other is his hunger, the hunger of the Other marks the "holiness of the holy" and is the quintessential experience of the ethical relation. Sacredness, argues Levinas in *Carnets de Captivité*, is the domain where the natural categories are no longer valid,[118] a sacredness of infinite giving to the Other, a giving that strikes me in what is most personal to me, a giving of my food and water.[119] The Face is thus in Levinas' work the interruption of primitivism, a moment in which the pagan world receives the gift of sacredness or holiness.

The call for responsibility is a command inscribed in the Face of the Other that is not contracted but is the origin of the self before the self is at home with himself. This means that the self is never a being who is rooted in his place but is a self that is always disturbed in his taking up of its place. The Face of the Other haunts the subject who wants to be at home with itself and constantly puts the self, in its *me-ness* of taking a position, in accusation.

§3.5 Transcendence and the Birth of the Son

In the previous section, I have shown that Levinas' entire phenomenological project is motivated by the desire to rethink genuine transcendence in order to overcome primitivism. Levinas argues that a wholly immanent world is a despiritualized world and that only the relation to infinity as the face-to-face

[117] TI:245; TeI:271
[118] CC:54
[119] NTR: 98; DSS 17

relation can bring genuine peace.[120] Levinas sees the self not as a being that is defined by needs, but as a being that longs for the beyond being. Levinas is well aware that he is breaking with a long philosophical tradition by privileging difference over unity. Levinas firmly criticizes the tradition that never has been able to aptly think transcendence:

> *As classically conceived, the idea of transcendence is self-contradictory. The subject that transcends is swept away in its transcendence; it does not transcend itself. If, instead of reducing itself to a change of properties, climate, or level, transcendence would involve the very identity of the subject, we would witness the death of substance.*[121]

The problem of the Western metaphysical tradition is that it has concentrated on cognitive and intentional relations of the thinking cogito and has concentrated on political and social structures to articulate a universalism that has violated everything that is other. Rethinking transcendence is for Levinas not a mere metaphysical project, but aims at reformulating the relationship between history, philosophy, politics, universalism, and particularism.

Levinas' notion of transcendence seeks to give significance to the self (*moi*) beyond death and attests to a relation in which self and other remain absolutely separated, yet are asymmetrically involved. Levinas describes the relation to the other which transcends the evidence of time and history as made possible by the father-son relation. The concretion of transcendence is accomplished in the birth of the son who is both self and Other. Fecundity and the birth of the son embody the evasion of the burden of being and reveal that desire for otherness is the gift of time. The birth of the son is the genuine recommencement of time and is at the same time the "birth of the Face" that summons the self to take the Other into account.

The birth of the son is the event in which the self is liberated from its materiality but in which the *I* is not annihilated. Levinas finds in the birth of the son an "ethics of heteronomy" that offers "an awakening predestinating identity to transcendent purity."[122] The self who becomes a father transforms commencement in *re*-commencement, a recommencement of the time of the

[120] EN':49; EN:74
[121] TI:274; TeI:306
[122] OS:121/122; HS: 149

Other.[123] The father recognizes himself in his son, but the son is also radically separated from him, as Levinas writes: "Je suis mon fils, sans être soi-même."[124] The son is the *I* as *otherwise-than-being*, a relation of transcendence beyond the self's own death. The son is not the father's *alter ego*; his time is not the father's time, yet the father is invested in his son's future; invested in a future that is beyond his own existence.

Levinas' rethinks everyday family life, - need, desire, and paternal love-, in their 'excess of meaning,' in the way these relationships transcend ordinary "biological life," as an attempt to break with primitivism. Biological (animal) or ontological life is for Levinas the will to power, the perseverance in being that is synonymous with the life of the "same" (*le même*). For Levinas, humans are endowed with the ability to transcend being, to be in a disinterested relation that breaks with "this for that" logic.

Paternity is a metaphor for such a disinterested relation and gives us some important insights on the fundamental characteristics of the ethical relation. Paternal love is first of all a radical personal relation; it is the bond between two unique human beings. Paternity shows us that before we can generalize to objective terms such as "parents," "mothers," and "fathers," we are first in a personal relation.[125]Secondly, paternity reveals how the relation to the child is not a relation that is caused or willed by the father. Metaphysical transcendence is for Levinas a passive vulnerability. We can long for a child, but we cannot deliberately "make" a child, not can we "will" the child; the birth of a child is a passive reception of the Other who is radically exterior to the parents.

Thirdly, the birth of the son gives the father the surplus of conscience. Consciousness becomes "sincere" in the birth of the son, it the moment when, facing one's child for the very first time, one feels the weight of infinite responsibility for this fragile, vulnerable tiny human being. Infinite responsibility to the child is a disinterested, asymmetrical relation in which I am responsible for my children's existence, their actions and even their own responsibility, it is an infinite responsiveness to the needs of my child. Paternity transforms the egoistic self into a giving self, a self that despite himself keeps responding to the child's needs. The relation to the son is an ethical relation, not an ethics that is

[123] TI:86: Tel:85
[124] CC:282
[125] QEV:96

derived from rational norms or standards, but from a pre-original, pre-rational (non-rational) sensibility.

The fourth characteristic of transcendence conceived as the father-son relation is that the child individualizes the self and opens the self up to future generations to come as "time of the Other". The relation to the son is able to open a deeper layer, a spiritual layer as it opens the idea of fraternity and the sacred history of humanity. The birth of the son is an "ever recommencing alterity," an event in which the father is *elected* as the one called to infinite responsibility, he alone is the father of the son, and he alone bears the infinite responsibility for his son. Paternity realizes a pluralistic existence in which the self becomes other through the son.[126] Levinas calls this transcendence "transubstantiation," a creation of the discontinuous time of the *I as Other* that makes recommencement possible. The son gives the father a future beyond the father's projects and possibilities.

Paternity is for Levinas a metaphor for human history, a history that is not a repetition of the same, but which is a constant renewal of youthfulness, an infinite time of pardon and hope in which the particularity of each *I* lives through the future sons. Hope is awaiting a new future, a future that radically breaks with the identification of the *I* and its materiality. Hope is the desire for renewing, for fecundity as pardon and a desire for time. True temporality, argues Levinas "presupposes the possibility not of grasping again all that one might have been, but of no longer regretting the lost occasions before the unlimited infinite of the future.[127]

The birth of the son is also the birth of a face, the face of the Other that summons me, the elected one, to infinite responsibility for each and every human being. Transcendence as the birth of the Face of the Other is a paternal relation of responsibility that enables the self to move beyond being. The ethical relation is not identical to transcendence, but is an attestation of transcendence, which I will discuss in the next section.

§3.6 The Relation to the Other as the Attestation of Transcendence

Levinas shows that the relation of responsibility to the Other is revealed in human thinking itself, as the Cartesian idea of the Infinite. Levinas returns to

[126] TO:92; TA:87
[127] TI:282; TeI:314

Descartes' *Meditations* to formally analyse the idea of the infinite itself, an idea that is not correlative to infinity. The subject who thinks the idea of the infinite and infinity can never form a totality; the *ideatum* surpasses the idea. For Levinas, the relation to the infinite reveals a dia-chrony, reveals a relation of pure exteriority:

> *The idea of the Infinite must be thought independently from consciousness, not according to the negative concept of the unconscious, but according to the perhaps most profoundly thought thought, that of dis-interestedness, which is a relation without hold on a being, or anticipation of being, but pure patience.*[128]

The idea of the infinite, as Descartes analyses, cannot come from a finite substance but has to originate from God as the perfected Being. The observation that a finite substance cannot be the source of the idea of the infinite led Descartes to the proof of God's existence. Levinas seeks to correct this negative relation by reinterpreting the relation to the infinite as a surplus, as the *otherwise-than-being*.

In *La Philosophie et l'Idée de l'Infini* (1957), Levinas argues that Western philosophy has failed to pay attention to the idea of the Infinite that is present in human thinking, an idea that never can correlate with Infinity and reveals a relation to pure exteriority. To think the infinite is already being open to radical alterity, an openness that is characterized by a transcendence of the subject's being.[129] Instead of searching for a synthesis between the immanent subject and the objectivity of transcendence, Levinas emphasizes the dis-correlation between the idea of the Infinite as ontological proof of the relation to the Other.

The idea of the infinite bears a trace of the encounter with the wholly Other, a relation that breaks through the ontological sphere and must be seen as a relation to transcendence. Levinas draws on Plato's description of the Good beyond Being, as this relation breaks with seeing being as an all encompassing unity. The relation to the Good is for Levinas beyond any need, a beyond the totality and beyond history, yet which is reflected within human experience.[130] What makes a human *human* is that it can be *otherwise-than-being*, that it can

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[128] TO:135; Levinas, E. (1982). "L'Ancien et le Nouveau" In : J. Dore. *L'Ancien et le Nouveau,* Cerf, 23-37.

[129] DEHH :239; CPP:47

[130] DEHH :243; CPP:51

suspend its joyous spontaneity and give to the Other, a giving that cannot be rationalized or justified by relying on the "selfish gene," or the desire to keep one's next of kin alive.

The relation to the Infinite as transcendence that bears a trace of God and is Holy, saves thus humanity from primitivism as the inversion of the self's *conatus essendi*, an inversion that does not destroy the self, but opens the relation to Goodness.[131] For Levinas, the Good is as Plato says on "the hither side of good and evil;" the good is good in itself and is a luxury with respect to needs (*besoins*).[132] In *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas sees the relation to Infinity as the relation that attests to the time beyond death. The temporal structure of consciousness results from "an elementary gesture of being that refuses totalization,"[133] a time that exceeds my own finite time. The relation to Infinity as the relation of pure goodness gives the egological culture of the same the surplus of the *otherwise-than-being*. In the next part of this chapter, I will outline why Levinas thinks that this surplus of transcendence is necessary.

Part II: Levinas on Cultures and the Cultural Other

In this section I will concentrate on Levinas' conception of culture and how he argues that culture is essentially egological and therefore primitivist. Levinas argues that the ethical relation is the "higher culture" needed to give culture its ethical orientation. The ethical orientation allows us to approach the cultural other "without context," without assuming a common ground.

In this section, I will outline Levinas' conception of culture. I will concentrate on two texts in which Levinas explicitly writes about culture: an essay entitled *La Signification et le Sens* (1972) and *Détermination Philosophique de l'Idée de culture* (1986). After the discussion of these texts, I will address the problem of Eurocentrism in Levinas' thinking by clarifying the relation between transcendence and sacred history as the Monotheistic religion of transcendence, God, the infinite and the Holy, and by entering into a dialogue with scholars who have accused Levinas of Eurocentrism.

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[131] TI :102/103; TeI:105
[132] TI:211; TeI:233
[133] TI:281; TeI:313

§3.7 *Meaning and Sense*

Derrida noted that Levinas' entire thought is inspired by the priority of the Other: the other (*l'autre*) is other (*l'autre*) only if its alterity is absolutely irreducible; only when its alterity is infinitely irreducible.[134] It is the absolute alterity of the Other (*Autrui*) that gives the Face its ethical weight; the Face is thus the attestation of transcendence. In *Totalité et Infini*, Levinas appeals to the notion of transcendence that relates yet also fundamentally separates human beings. The encounter with the other (*l'autre*) accomplishes (*résoudre*) the transcending self's openness without being entirely contained by it. The relation to the Other is a non-maieutic teaching, a surplus or gift in which the first teaching is offered that conditions language. The Face that speaks to the self, forces the self into discourse, it is forced to respond to the Other as interlocutor. It is in this context that we need to understand the text *La Signification et le Sens* in which Levinas tries to show that meaning is conditioned by ethical discourse (*sens*). Sense is absolute and transcendent and precedes all possible meaning, including cultural expressions.

In *La Signification et le Sens*, Levinas articulates his account of meaning in which meaning is conditioned by the ethical surplus of the relation to the Other. The dense essay argues for the necessity of a primary orientation (*sens*) that undergirds all meaning and which provides the inspiration for approaching and judging other cultures and the cultural other. Sense originates thus in the encounter with the Other as the attestation of the infinite and is the ethical discourse that calls the self's egological being into question. In order to understand the need for sense as the necessary precondition for meaning, we first have to address Levinas' distinction between meaning and sense.

Levinas makes a distinction between the contents given to receptivity in experience and the constitution of meaning. He sees the origin of meaning as the move beyond the given, a conclusion he draws from the function of the metaphor as "the reference to absence," which "belongs to an order quite different from pure receptivity."[135] The question that Levinas tries to address is if this definition of meaning as moving beyond the given as the reference to absence is a potential content or that it is an absence irreducible to any potential content. Levinas rejects this first theory that he calls "intellectualism," and argues that there must be already meaning before receptivity, because only in this case would

[134] Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and Difference*, Transl. A. Bass, Routledge Classics, 154.
[135] CCP:77; Levinas, *La Signification et le Sens*, 127.

it be possible to transcend that what is received. "Words," writes Levinas "do not refer to contents which they would designate, but first, laterally, to other words."[136] In line with Heidegger, Levinas argues that the world is structured by culture and language as the horizon in which meaning arises.

Levinas argues that the world as totality can neither be entirely the "free and creative arrangement" of the subject, nor can it be entirely objective, as it is the activity of the subject in which meaning is constituted. By drawing upon the work of Merleau-Ponty, Levinas claims that the embodied subject welcomes beings, but this subject is embedded within a cultural horizon that extensively re-arranges the world as a plural unified totality. Important to notice is that Levinas defines cultural objects such as poetry and painting as incarnate expressions of being that Levinas interprets as "the active modes of this celebration or of the original incarnation of the Same and the Other," and contrasts with the objective. Nevertheless, culture as expressions of art remains a culture of dwelling and thus immanent.[137] The cultural domain is the intersubjective domain that is constituted by the public sphere of expressions of a specific community and because the multiple ways in which expression can re-arrange the world, there are different cultures. Levinas not only affirms cultural diversity, but also sees these cultures as heterogeneous, as cultures themselves are produced by a variety of expressions. [138]

The most important section of this essay is §3 *The Antiplatonism of the Contemporary Philosophy of Meaning*, in which he criticizes modern movement of thought that see the truth not as transcendental but as historical. Levinas particularly focuses on philosophies of meaning of his time such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and de Saussure, which were influenced by the structural and phenomenological tradition. Levinas particularly rejects the idea that meaning is a self-sufficient entity, meaning entirely derived from the sensory given, a view of meaning that is wholly immanent:

> *Whether it be of Hegelian, Bergsonian, or phenomenological origin, the contemporary philosophy of meaning is thus opposed to Plato at an essential point: the intelligible is not conceivable outside of the becoming which suggests it.*[139]

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[136] CPP:78; 129
[137] EN;:165; EN:189/190
[138] EN':164/165; EN:189/190
[139] CPP:83; Levinas, *La Signification et le Sens*, 133

In the first part of this chapter, we have seen that Levinas ultimately reconfigured the subject from the experience of a revolt that the weight of Being inspired; a need for evasion as an attempt to move beyond Being. Levinas' critique on contemporary theories of meaning is precisely their inability to pay attention to this "transcendence in immanence" of the self. These contemporary theories that celebrate multiculturalism despiritualize meaning and reduce meaning to the same, something that Levinas sees as a form of violence.

For Levinas, only transcendence as the disinterested ethical relation can provide immanence with the language of peace, as it gives the ethical surplus that orients language towards goodness. Anti-Platonism is a denial of the possibility of this higher culture of pure goodness, the neglect of a higher culture that serves to inspire and judge cultures. The problem for Levinas is not the existence of different cultures, but is more the way contemporary theories of meaning place all cultures on the same plane, which for Levinas leads to a primitive immanent world that is "[an] essential disorientation" and is "the modern expression of atheism."[140] A purely immanent world is for Levinas a pagan world in which the multiplicity of meanings is reduced to the self's needs, a world in which everything is reduced to something that can be grasped and understood by the self's joyful activity.

The main problem of this immanent view of meaning is that it leads to violence because there is no judgment, no language of peace that orients meaning. Levinas finds the necessary precondition that produces and interrupts cultures in the ethical relation; a relation that preserves the dignity and equality of each individual irrespective of any racial, sexual or religious affiliation. The ethical meaning or "sense" is thus a supplement that interrupts the lateral traversal and translation between cultures and makes communication between cultures possible. Sense moves beyond the self-identical ego, moves beyond the Same in which Being is not relieved of its alterity but infinitely interrupted and put into question.

In *La Signification et le Sens* we thus find Levinas' critique of paganism, a philosphy that seeks to eradicate all otherness and seeks the satisfaction of the self before the Other. The main problem for Levinas is that philosophy is anti-Platonic and aims for a complete and self-conscious understanding of the world. This despiritualized world lacks any ethical orientation and will result

[140] CPP:86; Levinas, *La Signification et le Sens*, 136

in a violence in which "speech refers to war,"[141] an indifference to that what is absolute Other and radically different.

Sense as the unifying higher culture that makes judgment between cultures possible is the infinite movement beyond the identical. Levinas sees sense as a "liturgical orientation of a work" which cannot be thought in terms of the activity of the self but which is "a movement of the Same towards the Other which never returns to the Same."[142] Liturgical work prepares the self for work that cannot be reduced to the needs of the self, a work that is without any expectation of achievement and aims for the "time of the Other."

In §8 *Before Culture*, Levinas argues that all culture and all meaning presupposes the ethical surplus of responsibility. The ethical relation to the Other does not belong to culture but gives culture its ethical orientation and weight. The encounter with the cultural other, the encounter with a concrete human being, is an encounter in which we approach the other through our cultural gestures. Nevertheless, this encounter is made possible, or is produced, by the ethical encounter with the Other, an ethical encounter that disrupts the totalities of meaning of the world. The ethical relation is an unmediated relation, a distressing relation that precedes culture and can in no way be represented, but nevertheless "signifies as a trace."[143] This trace appeals to the beyond being of the third person, which Levinas calls *illeity*. This articulation of the trace that refers to *illeity* will become the focus of section 3.9 in which I will discuss the alleged Eurocentrism. I will first discuss another important text that gives us insight in how Levinas sees cultures and the cultural other: the essay *Détermination philosophique de l'Idée de culture* (1986). In this paper, Levinas gives a more positive conception of culture by articulating an "ethical culture". This paper will help us to show how the ethical relation or transcendence as "the higher culture," gives cultures the surplus of an ethical orientation that enables us to evaluate the cultural other.

[141] CPP:89; Levinas, *La Signification et le Sens*, 138-139
[142] CPP:91; Levinas, *La Signification et le Sens*, 140
[143] CPP"103; Levinas, *La Signification et le Sens,* 151

§3.8 *The Philosophical Determination of the Idea of Culture*

The essay *Détermination Philosophique de l'Idée de Culture* is an adapted version of a speech given by Levinas at a conference in Montréal on "Philosophy and Culture." Levinas analyses in this essay the relation between culture and nature and between culture and ethics. For Levinas, nature is the weight of being, the horror of the *il y a* that is overcome by the existent that assumes in each moment its existence. We will see that Levinas associates culture with the natural domain that revolves around the self that approaches the other as the same, or from a common identity. We will however also see that Levinas associates culture with art, which sheds light on why culture can lead to a neglect of social relations.

As we have seen in §3.3, Levinas sees dwelling that makes labour and possession possible as the creative moment of a common culture. Human labour and possession make it possible for humankind to secure the enjoyment of the elemental world and to create a "culture of human autonomy," which Levinas classifies as a form of atheism. Atheism is for Levinas a necessary precondition for infinite responsibility: the culture of egocentric enjoyment; a culture of human freedom and autonomy makes it possible to give to the Other.

Culture as the overcoming of crude Being, as the overcoming of nature, is defined by Levinas as "a breach made by humanness in the barbarism of being,"[144] a breech that is nevertheless incomplete as culture still bears traces of barbarism or primitivism. Culture is driven by the recognition of identity, a cultural identity that is in the West based on human freedom and autonomy. This cultural identity originates in "the culture of knowledge," in which human thought equalizes and interiorizes that what is other in universalizing expressions. In this essay, as throughout his work, Levinas emphasizes that a culture of immanence in which everything is reducible to representation and knowledge, is a culture in which multiplicity would be eradicated either by the unity of knowledge or by force. A culture, writes Levinas, "in which the subject in his identity persists without the *other* being able to challenge or unsettle him."[145] Levinas wants to show that the other is not only the participant in the creation and expression of culture, but is also the interlocutor who summons me to responsibility and infinitely unsettles my egocentric enjoyment of the world.

[144] EN':168; EN:193/194
[145] EN':163; EN:188

Through the ethical encounter not only is the freedom of the self invested, but it is simultaneously given the ethical purpose of being oriented to the good. Culture is in need of transcendence as an argument against the primacy of the Same and the unquestioned unity of culture, and a way to put the freedom of representation and knowledge into question. We can idolize culture, as culture is closely associated with expressions of art. "Art," writes Levinas "does not know a particular type of reality; it contrasts with knowledge. It is the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow."[146] Cultural consciousness is not only marked by technology and knowledge and bringing phenomena to light, it also is a mode of art that obscures reality. The metaphor of shadow and the relation to culture seems to be related to culture's tendency to become wholly particularistic and "exotic." In *La Réalité et son Ombre* (1948) Levinas draws attention to art's tendency to withdraw into itself which Levinas sees as the tendency to withdraw from social life. Cultural expressions can become irresponsible idols of identity and unity that are used as standards to assess who is a member of a particular community and who is the stranger. It is thus the exclusion of the other based on the neutral standard of identity.

Levinas calls for the need to move beyond identity and appeals to a culture "that challenges that very identity, its unlimited freedom and its power, without making it lose its meaning of *uniqueness*."[147] This culture that precedes and produces the variety of cultural expressions finds Levinas in the idea of sacred history that refers to transcendence, God, the Holy and the infinite, notions that are articulated in the Western monotheistic tradition. I will first clarify how Levinas appeals to sacred history to give cultures, which are immanent and are totalizing unities, a surplus of ethical meaning that makes orientation possible. After, I will discuss the problem of Eurocentrism inherent in Levinas' work.

§3.9 History and Paternal Brotherhood

The aim of this part of the chapter is to answer the question of how Levinas sees cultures and how Levinas conceives the relation to the cultural other. We have seen that the cultural other can be thematized, but also has a Face that signifies more than the self can express and questions the self in its egocentric spontaneity. The Face expresses first discourse, revealing that the infinity of sense and its transcendence is produced amidst the ethical relation. The call to

[146] CPP:3; Levinas, E.(1948). "La Realité et son Ombre" *Temps Modernes*, 38, 786.
[147] CPP:168; Levinas, E. (1975). "Dieu et la Philosophy" *Le Nouveau Commerce*, 30-31, 97-128.

responsibility is a break with immanence that draws attention to ethics as prior to culturally embedded language.

We have seen that for Levinas, cultures arise out of man's withdrawal from the elemental world and the safety of habitation that makes possession and labour possible. Man's freedom and autonomy to secure one's enjoyment of the world gives rise to cultural expressions. Cultural expressions are driven by the desire for knowledge, grasping and bringing to light. Levinas argues that cultures need transcendence to overcome the violence of the same. Transcendence as the higher, holy culture interrupts the immanent world of hegemonic, exotic, and Same-based cultures without destroying cultures or negating them.

In a time of decolonisation and the confrontation with the diversity of cultures and the relativity of values, we need a shared ethical orientation to evaluate and judge the cultural other that originates in a personal vocation rather than in hegemonic universal standards. Levinas calls for the need for an ethical surplus that can orient cultures, a language of peace that enables us to approach cultural others not only lateral, but also from the Height of their Otherness. Levinas argues that this ethical relation can challenge the very identity of cultures, without making it lose its meaning of uniqueness. In order to understand this claim, we have to outline Levinas' notion of sacred history and fraternity. Key to understand the relation between culture and the surplus of transcendence is the fact that the Face of the Other is a peaceful opposition, a peaceful discourse that suspends all war, because it transforms me into my brother's keeper and makes genuine freedom and autonomy possible.

Levinas' conception of humanity in terms of fraternity and paternity arises from Levinas' conviction that the Jewish religion can serve as a necessary surplus for the Greek, egological tradition as the universal culture that reduces everything other to the Same. For Levinas, fraternity is the pre-original commonality between all persons, a fraternity based upon the infinite responsibility to the Other which they have in common without the need to rely on a genus. Justice is a personal vocation, a vocation that affirms my unique responsibility, a responsibility for each and every person, a unique vocation nevertheless that each person has and is as such universal.

It is here important to notice that the Other does not refer to a particular Other but is neutral in the sense that it can refer to any person, the Other refers to anyone. The Face of the Other individualizes the self, but the Other remains

outside of the relation. The question that arises is how the self can recognize the other as unique person when the Other does not refer to this particular unique other. This is an important issue when we want to approach the other in its uniqueness while at the same time affirming our own uniqueness and bringing the other under our own categories. Jean-Luc Marion raises the problem of the neutrality of the Other in his article *From the Other to the Individual* (2005):

> *In this way, however, we enter into an exemplary hermeneutic circle: only the Other can challenge the anonymity of existence, but the Other becomes accessible to an I who has already extricated himself from this anonymity by undergoing the ordeal of this same other."* [148]

While the Face of the Other is able to individualize the self, the Face does not individualize the Other, but remains anonymous. The face, argues Marion "appears as no other person."[149] The Face expresses the divine command, but is characterized by Levinas as "the stranger, the widow and the orphan," abstract biblical terms that do not refer to the particular Other. Marion suggests that in order to approach the Other as Other, this Other must have to be individualized more than I individualize myself."[150]

Marion's critique addresses the problem between the relation of the Other, the Face and the personal other to whom the self bears infinite responsibility. It seems that the Face is not anonymous but has religious significance; the Face bears a trace of the *illeity* of God. Only because of the Face's trace of *illeity* can the personal encounter with the other be recognized as an *il*. To tackle this problem in detail, it is first necessary to draw attention to two events of individualization that can be distinguished in Levinas' work. First there is the ontological individualization of the *I* that is produced when the *I* assumes his own existence. This individualization as creation ex nihilo is auto-affection, the emergence of the subject from anonymous pure being (the *il y a*). Ontology is thus defined by a plurality of unique individuals who in each instant have to assume their own existence. Levinas however qualifies these unique selves as beings capable of bearing a name, a name that is *given* to them. The ontological singularization is thus for Levinas a preparatory event that makes the self susceptible to passively participate in the relation to the Infinite, it is also the event that makes it possible for the self to refuse the call of the Other.

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[148] Marion, J.L. "From the Other to the Individual." in *Levinas Studies* 1, (2005):103.
[149] Ibid., 107
[150] Ibid., 111

I will try to show that the Face is not anonymous but bears a trace of God, because God gives each human being a name. The self-other relation in Levinas is not a relation of difference but is dependent upon the transcendence of the Other that originates in Monotheism. By relying on William Large's paper on *The Name of God* (2013), which I will interpret somewhat differently than Large in favour of my own purpose, I will show how the personal encounter with the other (*l'autre*) is dependent upon the transcendence of the Other (*Autre*). I will then argue that the name of God is a rigid designator whose sacredness has to be performed. Levinas argues that God cannot and should not be named, but only "shows" Himself in the Face of one's neighbour. In my understanding, this suggests that transcendent uniqueness is the event in which God baptizes the unique person, a naming that precedes the ontological individualization of the *I*.

In his paper, William Large draws an interesting relation between Saul Kripke's theory of names as "rigid designators," and Levinas' thinking regarding how to talk about the word "God." Kripke argues that proper names such as "Donald Trump" do not refer to a set of characteristics but refers to one particular person "in all possible worlds." This implies that, even though we can imagine a world in which Donald Trump did not win the 2016 elections, he would still be Donald Trump in that particular world.[151] Kripke argued that, after the "initial baptism" in which a person receives his name from other(s), the name is passed down from one speaker to the next with whom there is "some historical connection."[152]

Kripke assumes that a name only has a unique reference because a community of speakers uses names in that way. For Levinas, it is not the community of speakers that is the origin of the name as rigid designator, but the trace of God that reveals itself in the Face. As Large argues, the sacredness of the name is not derived from the relation between a signifier and a signified, but "of the materiality of the word."[153] While Large does not relate the sacredness of the name that has to be performed to the encounter with the Face, I think Large's analysis shows that God's name is materialized in the proper name of each unique individual. The Other who is in closest proximity of God is individualized more than me because the Face materializes the sacredness of God's name. This aligns with Derrida's tentative suggestion that Levinas might subscribe to

[151] For this particular example, I'm indebted to Jan Sleutels, who in his Metafysica Tutoring Syllabus used this particular example to teach Kripke's theory of rigid designators to first-year students.

[152] Large, W. "The Name of God: Kripke, Lévinas and Rosenzweig on Proper Names" in *Journal of The British Society for Phenomenlogy*, 44 Nº 3, (2013):327.

[153] Ibid., 329

the ambiguous sentence from the *Book of Questions* by Edmond Jabès in which Jabès writes: "All Faces are His; this is why HE has no face."[154] The diachronical relation is ethical because it bears witness to the proper name of each and every other, a bearing witness of the Face as the materializing event of God's name.

This entails that non-in-difference to the Other originates from the revelation of the idea of divine goodness, in which the Face of the Other expresses the proper name of each one of my brothers. Election means being singled out by the Good, it means being the preferred son of God. Being me, argues Levinas, is "excluding others from the paternal heritage," an exclusion that, as election, means that the I is summoned to do God's work and be my brother's keeper. Levinas' articulation of fraternity as the chosen self who is responsible to each of its fellows draws upon the religious interpretation of the Face as the bearer of the trace of God. Brotherhood, defined as each person's unique responsibility for the Other, is the condition of our shared humanity, a "shared humanity," that does not rely on any assertion of commonality, since my responsibility is not the responsibility of my fellow man.

My uniqueness does not originate from being recognized as a free being by another human being, but in my being elected among brothers; in my infinite responsibility to be my brother's keeper. Infinite responsibility as personal assignment is a difficult freedom, as it obliges me to take each and every person into account, which in the end requires Levinas to mitigate infinite responsibility.

§3.10 Questioning Levinas

In *Violence et Métaphysique* (1964), Derrida argues that Levinas' notion of the ethical relation opens the space of transcendence and liberates metaphysics by providing a Messianic eschatology. Derrida nevertheless also draws attention to the possibility that Levinas' thinking might return to the ontological totalization of violence because Levinas draws from the very realm of war from which Levinas seeks to move away from. Levinas argues that the eschatology of Messianic peace must superpose itself upon the ontology of the Same, so that ethics prevails over violence. Eschatology institutes a relation with the beyond being, but this ethical-religious relation cannot be thematized, but makes thematization possible. Levinas however does rely on religious categories from the monotheistic Western tradition to describe the Other who eludes

[154] Derrida. *Writing and Difference*, 135.

thematization; does this not pose the problem of an implicit fidelity to the Western metaphysical tradition, a fidelity to faith and philosophy as articulated in the Greek and Judaic tradition?

Bearing in mind Derrida's critical reading of Levinas, as well as the worries of scholars such as Sikka (1998), Sandford (2000), McGettigan (2006), Ma Lin (2008) and Drabinkski (2011) who accuse Levinas of Eurocentrism, this chapter seeks to understand Levinas' thought on cultural formation and his views on approaching the cultural other in the light of his phenomenology of transcendence. We have seen in the discussions of the two essays on culture that Levinas associates cultural formation with the economy of the same, but also outlines how cultures can become the object of aesthetic idolization. We have also seen that the ethical relation gives sense and orientation to cultures. It gives the self the possibility to form a judgment of other cultures and provides a language of peace in which we approach the cultural other in its otherness. We however still have to discern what this entails: the ethical relation as first philosophy cannot be thematized, has no specific content and does not provide us with standards on how to approach the cultural other. This raises the question how the ethical relation reveals itself. We will later on see that the ethical relation is revealed in discourse; a discourse that originates in the facing of the Other prior to any rational discourse.

The ethical relation as the precondition for culture, for philosophy and for politics cannot be thematized, but its metaphysical underpinnings are however issued from the culture of monotheism. The "culture of transcendence" as ethical-religious responsibility originates from the phenomenology of Judaism, which gives universal Greek thinking the surplus of an ethics that does not limit human autonomy and freedom but makes it possible. It is therefore that Levinas in an interview dares to say that for him:

> Europe, that's the Bible and the Greeks. It has come closer to the Bible and to its true fate. Everything else in the world must be included in this. I don't have any nostalgia for the exotic. For me Europe is central.[155]

It is difficult not to read this statement as a troublesome form of Eurocentrism: Levinas clearly thinks that Western thought has the privileged position to

[155] Rötzer, F. (1995). *Conversations with French Philosophers*, Transl. G.E. Aylesworth, Humanity Press, 63.

express a universalism to which other cultural traditions need to accommodate. McGettigan, but also Caygill try to demonstrate that Levinas' remarks on the exoticism of other cultures and the dismissal of their significance is fundamentally connected to his conception of transcendence. Both scholars argue that Levinas' notion of transcendence relies entirely on sacred history as the monotheistic relation to the Holy and to God, which leads to seeing non-Western traditions as inferior or primitivist. This claim resonates with my earlier argument on the relation between immanence, primitivism, and transcendence; it is indeed the case that Levinas classifies a wholly immanent world as 'primitivist.' Levinas endeavours to show that meaning (*signification*) as particular and determined content tied to the thinking cogito is preconditioned by sense (*sens*) as the "significance of signification" that transcends any content. Sense is an ethical, personal vocation, a weight that orients being towards the good and is an invitation to act in a sincere, responsible way to the cultural other.

Levinas claims that transcendence as the ethical relation is solely revealed in the Cartesian relation to infinity and the Jewish religion, which is why Levinas prioritizes the Western tradition. Drabinski (2011) criticizes Levinas' conception of Europe which he argues is presented as "a single philosophical culture," an essentialization of European philosophy that neglect those outside of European narrative:

> *Levinas's work is caught between two very different, very tense aspirations. There is, on the one hand, the language on first philosophy, subjectivity-time-space-embodiment as such, and so on. [..] Levinas's work clearly aspires to a certain kind of universality This is what it means to come to moral consciousness. On the other hand, there is the emphatic specificity of Levinas's work, which is rooted in the drama of European history and the Western tradition of navigating ideas.*[156]

When we want to show how Levinas can provide comparative philosophy with a critical-transformational discourse that helps us to approach the cultural other in an open way, we need to critically access Levinas' troublesome remarks and his reliance on the Western tradition as the sole source that can give humanity a shared ethical orientation. I will first concentrate on how Levinas thinks that Greek and Jewish thinking is able to provide all cultures with a necessary

[156] Drabinski, J. E (2011). *Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other,* University Press, 3-4.

ethical surplus that is not based on a shared identity but is based on the very particularity of the self.

Levinas qualifies the *I* as ethical responsibility, a "being-for-the-other" which he also calls the principle of absolute individuation; the Height of the Face is the only event that chooses *me* to become absolute and infinitely responsibility to each and every human being. Levinas relates the Jewish notion of Messianism in which the self is the chosen one to be responsible for his neighbour, to the Greek principle of individuation. It is the sacred history of brotherhood that differentiates the West from other cultural traditions and which privileges Europe as the place that has thought the infinite and has articulated transcendence as the relation to Goodness.

Sacred history as the relation to the infinite opens a different temporality and gives history the surplus of eschatological time. The significance of the eschatological dimension of human history is derived from the monotheistic Jewish heritage, a heritage, which, as Stella Sanford suggests gives Levinas the possibility of rethinking transcendence as first principle.[157] Human culture and the human egocentric spontaneity or its *conatus essendi* are fundamentally and necessary implicated in a prior ethical-religious relation that is revealed in the monotheistic Western tradition. Levinas privileges the Western monotheistic tradition because it has thought transcendence as goodness and has thought the relation to the infinite, notions that Levinas believes to be absent in other cultural traditions. The Western tradition does not constitute this ethical orientation, but only has revealed the significance of transcendence for humanity.

In *Détermination philosophique de l'idée de culture*, Levinas raises the question how we can be in a relationship with another human being who does not share the same cultural identity. Morality is most of the time derived from a common identity or from a collective cultural convention, but as Levinas argues in his essay on Hitlerism, any morality based on a common identity or "Blut und Boden" principle violates that what is other. At the end of the paper, Levinas criticizes ethnocentrism and a totalitarian cultural identity and argues that culture needs a universally significant culture that challenges the insistence on that very identity:

[157] Sandford, S. (2000). *The Metaphysics of Love. Gender and Transcendence in Levinas*, The Athlone Press, 2.

> *A universally significant culture, like that of knowledge and technique in modernity, and like the one that, emanating from the university, has opened itself to the forms of cultures not belonging to the Greco-Roman heritage. But a culture in which, contrary to that of knowledge, technique and the arts, it is not a matter, for the Same of the human I, of confirming itself in its identity by absorbing the other of Nature, or by expressing itself in it but of challenging that very identity, its unlimited freedom and its power, without making it lose its meaning of uniqueness.*[158]

Levinas remarks on the higher culture of transcendence that challenges identity, is however difficult to reconcile with one of his most cited comments on the Asiatic heritage that is to say the least, political troublesome:

> *The Yellow peril! It is not racial, it is spiritual. It does not involve inferior values; it involves a radical strangeness, a stranger to the weight of its past, from where there does not filter any familiar voice or infection, a lunar or Martian past.*[159]

I agree with Ma Lin (2008) and McGettigan who both argue that Levinas thinks that the Asiatic (I would say, all the other cultural traditions) lacks genuine significance, because it has not thought the dimension of transcendence.[160] However, both scholars fail to address how the question of transcendence is related to Levinas' conception of culture and to his critique of an immanent worldview. The above statement about the radical strangeness of Asia, which Levinas classifies as being "a stranger to the weight of its past," refers to Asian philosophy's immanent worldview, a worldview that is not like modern Western philosophies "anti-platonic" but a radical stranger to Platonism.

As we have seen, Levinas criticizes an immanent worldview, because he associates it with violence and cultural disorientation. The de-spiritualized immanent world is a pagan world that seeks the satisfaction of the self before the other. Levinas' strong belief is that the ultimate consequence of a de-spiritualized immanent is Hitlerism. In his essay *Quelques Réflections sur la Philosophie de l'Hitlérisme* (1934), Levinas gives a phenomenological

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[158] EN': 168; EN:193

[159] Levinas, E. (1960). "The Russo-Chinese Debate and the Dialectic" Cited in: Ma, 605.

[160] Ma L. (2008). "All the Rest must be Translated: Lévinas's Notion of Sense" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 605.

account of the relationship between politics and philosophy and shows how the philosophy of Hitlerism results from the very logic of an immanent worldview. While the essay was written when Levinas was only 29 years old, it does show how Levinas argues for transcendence as a necessary surplus to an immanent world or the "ontology of a being concerned with being."[161] *Quelques Réflections* was translated and published in English in 1990 and the essay begins with a short introduction in which Levinas himself reflects on his essay in the light of his philosophical project. Levinas writes that the essay stemmed from his belief that the source of the bloody barbarism of National Socialism originated from "the essential possibility of *elemental Evil* into which we can be led by logic and against which Western philosophy had not sufficiently insured itself."[162]

The source of the horror of Nazism is for Levinas not a mistake of human reasoning, but the very consequence of a form of logical reasoning that enables humans to enact evil, a form of evil that results from the essence of human beings. The logic that can lead humans to enact such evil is the Heideggerian logic of existential ontology and the ideology of the free subject of transcendental idealism. While the first logic is the immanent worldview of the ontology of a being concerned with being; the immanent subject of transcendental idealism results in the conviction that the subject is free before everything, a claim that is for Levinas identical to "gathering together and dominating."[163] Later on in the essay, Levinas fiercely criticizes philosophies that emphasize the radical powerlessness of human beings and who take the identity between self and body as the primal essence of human experiences, primarily because these theories also articulate a wholly immanent world. The consequence of its anti-Platonism is the de-spiritualization of the Western culture, a de-spiritualization that allows for a biological truth anchored in the "Blut und Boden" ideology.[164]

Levinas believes that only in returning to the Judaic heritage combined with Greek universalism, we can find a notion of transcendence that can overcome the violence of primitivism or paganism. For Levinas, Judaism is thus seen as a necessary trans-historical, universal surplus for both Jews and non-Jews. An ideal that gives "sense" to all cultural expressions, a sense of ethical weight that makes it possible to approach the cultural other as interlocutor. It is thus important to make it clear that Levinas does not see other cultural traditions

[161] Levinas, E. & Hand, S. (1990). "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" *Critical Inquiry*, 17 N° 1, 63.
[162] Ibid, 63.
[163] Ibid, 63.
[164] Ibid, 70.

as inferior, particularly because these cultures are all preceded by and produced by the ethical relation to the Other. Levinas privileges the Western metaphysical tradition or European culture because it has thought the infinite and transcendence and has as such revealed that what a wholly immanent worldview cannot accommodate and stays radically exterior.

This brings us back to the question of whether (1) Levinas' thinking is Eurocentric and (2) if Levinas' philosophy is hostile to the cultural other. Ma Lin argues that Levinas' thinking is Eurocentric because Lin concludes that Levinas:

> *treat[s] Judaic and Greek traditions as the core of Western civilization, Levinas ascribes absoluteness and universality to these two traditions, especially the former, which is in fact only one among other traditions."*[165]

Based on my reading of Levinas, we can see that the latter claim of Ma in which she argues that the Judaic tradition is only one among many, entirely misses the Levinasian relation between transcendence, an immanent worldview and violence. It is precisely by reducing the Jewish tradition as "one among others" that an immanent worldview devoid of transcendence is articulated.

The problem of Levinas' apparent Eurocentrism is not that he ascribes universality and absoluteness to the Jewish and Greek tradition but is a question of whether we are willing to accept that a wholly immanent worldview needs the surplus of transcendence as revealed in the Greek-Judaeo tradition. We have to notice that Levinas' reasoning is true if we accept the authority of the Jewish tradition, but what Levinas tries to show is that (Western) philosophy needs the surplus of the Jewish ideal to overcome paganism. It is here that we need to critically reflect on Levinas' notion of transcendence in *Totalité et Infini* and have to ask the question of whether this notion of transcendence can be accepted by the cultural other who does not share the monotheistic heritage.

In the next sections, I will contextualize Levinas' alleged Eurocentrism within his thinking of transcendence, language, and immanence as violence. I will reflect on Levinas' Messianism that enables us to rethink the question of the task of the European community as being responsive to the friction between the logic of identification and ethical responsibility.

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[165] Ma L., *All the Rest must be Translated*, 606.

§3.11 Transcendence, Immanence, and the Cultural other

My contention in this chapter is that for understanding Levinas' political statements on culturally different traditions and to understand his alleged Eurocentrism, we need to elaborate on his conception of transcendence as a necessary surplus to an immanent worldview that is prone to violate that what is other. I will show how Levinas' thinking on culture, violence, dialogue and Messianism offers us an ethical-transformational discourse that does not relapse into the logic of identification in which singularities disappear within a cultural common identity.

Levinas is profoundly influenced by Heidegger and Husserl, but in contrast to these two thinkers who insisted on immanence, Levinas insisted on the necessary surplus of transcendence. Culture that consists of labour and habitation, recollection and egocentric enjoyment leads to economy, politics, arts, and religion that a historically embedded in a unifying comprehensive philosophical meaning. For Levinas, this culture of assimilation that expresses the ultimate "meaning of being" does not have the last word but is preceded by a personal relation between self and other in which the self is constituted in its being guilty of simply being an egocentric spontaneity. Transcendence as eschatology is a relationship with that what always remains exterior to totality, but which is nevertheless "reflected within the totality and history, within experience."[166] In *Totalité et Infini*, the locus of transcendence is on the Other who interrupts the self's egocentric spontaneity.

For our present purposes, Levinas' philosophy of the other illuminates that comparative philosophy as a discipline that wants to understand and learn from another cultural tradition, is always already a personal dialogue with the other. Comparative philosophy is always a form of cross-cultural conversation, and, as Levinas shows, it is always from the beginning ethically oriented. Levinas does not abandon ontology but argues that a philosophy of Being cannot give resistance to evil. This is also the main question for Levinas formulated in *Autrement qu'être*:

> *The present study puts into question this reference of subjectivity to essence which dominates the two terms of the alternative brought out. It asks if all meaning proceeds from essence. Does subjectivity*

[166] TI:xi; TeI:23

> *draw its own meaning from it? Is it brought out as a struggle for existence, to let itself be seduced by the power of powers, in the violences of nationalism, even when it hypocritically pretends to be only at the service of essence and not to will? The true problem for us Westerners is not so much to refuse violence as to question ourselves about a struggle against violence which, without blanching in non-resistance to evil, could avoid the institution of violence out of this very struggle.* [167]

Levinas' fundamental project is aimed at showing that meaning when meaning is entirely immanent, we risk reproducing violence. Levinas points to the fact that often violence is overcome by revolutions and utopias that are destructive justify violence in the name of peace. What we need is a "patient" revolution, a revolution in philosophy that is radically different to our current approaches.

Ontology needs the surplus of transcendence for a language of peace that orients the self towards the good. The pre-original experience is for Levinas the encounter to the Other, which is an encounter with alterity (*Autre*) and transcendence. The absolutely Other (*Autre*) is the Other (*Autrui*) as the face-to-face relation. The face-to-face relation as the ethical relation is here the revelation of transcendence, which indicates that ethics is the phenomenological attestation of transcendence. In line with Stella Sandford (2000) I would argue that the face-to-face encounter as the ethical-religious command that interrupts the self's *being-at-home* is moving towards transcendence. Levinas already said in a footnote in the essay *God and Philosophy* (1975) "It is the meaning of the beyond, of transcendence, *and not ethics*, that our study is pursuing. It finds this meaning in ethics."[168]

Critics contended that Levinas' notion of transcendence in *Totalité et Infini* is based on the articulation of an ethical relation, as the pre-ontological event that goes beyond totality and history, does violence to historical other who are racially and culturally embedded. In the light of my analysis, the question that is most interesting is how the cultural other, whose tradition does not have any notion of transcendence and who is a radical stranger to transcendence, is included in Levinas' ethical relation. Do cultural others need to convert themselves to the Western metaphysical tradition to understand the pre-ontological event of the ethical relation? For Levinas, this would amount to a

[167] OTB:176/177; AE:271/272
[168] CPP:165

translation of ontological content into an ethical dialogue of responsibility and peace. Is Levinas Eurocentric when he thinks that only the Western tradition can provide the surplus of the language of goodness? Levinas argues in an interview that "humanity consists of the Bible and the Greeks, *All the rest can be translated*, - all the exotic – is dance." (my emphasis)[169] This statement is troublesome, especially in its refusal to grant other philosophical traditions sincerity. For Levinas, sincerity is only found in transcendence, never in being or immanence.

Critics however do not relate Levinas' Eurocentric statements to his fundamental project of providing a language of peace that does not negate or interfere with freedom but gives the free subject the weight of the ethical relation. A weight that is expressed in language as an ethical, passive, responsiveness, an experience in which the self is passively affected by a relation that does not originate from its own being. Levinas' notion of transcendence oscillates between the self and the other as the finite and the Infinite as two separated events that never can be unified. The strict transcendence of the Other in Levinas is a transcendence to which no reference can be made, which highlights the fundamental problem of Levinas who tries to articulate the possibility of transcendence while this notion of transcendence resists any conceptual structure.

Levinas' notion of transcendence primarily draws upon the Cartesian relation to the infinite that has left a trace in human thinking as an idea; an idea that cannot be thought and thus resists thematization. This doubling of the infinite is the entire inspiration of Levinas' conception of transcendence in *Totalité et Infini*, a transcendence that is built upon pure exteriority is felt in language as the oscillation between the *saying* (*le dire*) and the *said* (*le dit*), which I will discuss in depth in §3.13. At this point we have to agree with McGettigan (2005) who argues that in Levinas' thinking, Western thought is privileged as it contains the germ of the value given to the subject as the "finite site of the incarnation of the Infinite."[170] Levinas' understanding of Europe seems, at face value, to be problematic for its tendency to dismiss the possibility of the cultural other to gain access to the pre-ontological ethical relation without recourse to the Western metaphysical tradition. I agree with Ma Lin, who argues that Levinas' thinking is somewhat similar to Heidegger's position that I have outlined in §2.4, with respect to the origin and status of Western philosophy. Where Heidegger

[169] Mortley, 18.

[170] McGettigan, A. (2006). "The Philosopher's Fear of Alterity. Levinas, Europe and Humanities 'Without Sacred History'" *Radical Philosophy,* 15-25.

argues that the cultural other can only discover its own origin in the intercultural dialogue, Levinas seems to claim that the intercultural dialogue will call for the need to translate the cultural other into the monotheistic Western philosophical tradition.

While I do think that scholars such as McGettigan and Ma Lin rightly criticize Levinas' troublesome reliance on the Western Judeo-Greek tradition, I also think that there are some questions that should be investigated further before we conclude that Levinas' thinking is hostile to the cultural other and needs to be "decolonized", as Drabinski suggests in his book *Levinas and the Postcolonial* (2011). First of all, we need to consider that the accusation of Eurocentrism in Levinas' thinking is entirely based on his notion of transcendence as articulated in *Totalité et Infini*. But as Bergo (2005) has shown in her article on transcendence and immanence in Levinas' thinking, Levinas' notion of transcendence changes throughout his philosophical career and is even radically reconceived in his later work *Autrement qu'être* (1974). Furthermore, Levinas does not seem to deny culture but urges for the need of the surplus of transcendence. It also needs to be read as a critique to Hegel who argued that consciousness first must alienate itself from that what is other and then internalize it in order to be able to contribute to culture. Levinas want to maintain radical alterity, particular in thought and language, a relation to the other that suspends the internalization of radical alterity.

Part III: Europe and the Infinite Task of Moving beyond Identity

§3.12 Immanence and the Problem of Culture

This part is a further attempt to follow Levinas' thinking through questions of culture, the relation to the cultural other, language and violence so that its consequences for comparative philosophy can be considered. We have seen in §3.10 and §3.11 that transcendence as articulated in *Totalité et Infini* is problematic, particularly because it suggests that the cultural other can only discover the ethical primordial event by translating its own cultural heritage into the Jewish-Greek tradition. In this section, I will outline why Levinas thinks that the cultural other needs to translate its own cultural heritage into the Jewish-Greek tradition. I will highlight how the ethical relation as the irreducible alterity

of the other that precedes any cultural-symbolic construction, changes the particular way in which we have to understand "being privileged".

Cultures tend to become totalizing entities that reduce that what is other to the same; they rely on a common identity or idolize cultural expressions. Levinas sees culture as the break with the horror of anonymous being (*il y a*), a (partly) overcoming of the weight of Being by means of transforming the alterity of nature into the Same. The immanence of culture is characterized by dwelling as the *being-at-home* that enables the continuation of enjoyment through possession and labour. This formation of culture as the break with elemental being is a culture that affirms human freedom and is characterized by self-preservation and self-justification.

Culture as expression of art is the second way that culture tries to overcome the alterity of nature. Art is able to reveal the 'shadow' of the world and shows us that the elemental world is essentially not "there-for-us." Nevertheless, Levinas' evaluation of cultural art is predominantly negative as he sees it as idolatry. Idolatry is in Levinas' work the worst kind of paganism, an irresponsibility in which sociality is avoided and ignored. Levinas compares the enjoyment of cultural art as self-indulgence in which the *I* takes delight in the esthetical beauty of the world and turns away from the suffering of the Other. For Levinas, enjoyment is not gratuitous but is the essential precondition for infinite responsibility. The need of the Other, expressed in the epiphany of the Face, consists in his or her deprivation of the enjoyment and possession that the *I* does have, in which we have to take notice that even the economical encounter with the other in which the other has more material goods, is at the same time the encounter with the nakedness of the Other as stranger, orphan or widow.

Levinas' Messianism as the paternal relation of election and infinite responsibility introduces for Levinas the possibility of rejuvenation and hope. Transcendence as the higher culture that gives cultures their universal ethical orientation offers novel possibilities as an openness towards that what is yet unknown, or unknowable. Transcendence as the ethical relation is a break from totalitarianism: transcendence can overcome the pagan immanent world of cultural de-spiritualized diversity. Sonia Sikka (1998) who argues that Levinas does not leave any room for the holiness of existence: only transcendence as the ethical relation that moves towards the relation to fraternal infinity can give the immanent world of being its necessary orientation and ethical goodness. In the previous sections, we have seen that this is indeed true; Levinas sees the

ontological world as a pagan, de-spiritualized world that can only offer violence disguised as peace. Culture is the break with anonymous being, a break with the elemental and the continuation of self-preservation and self-enjoyment. It can however also result in a perverse self-indulgence in which the relation to the Other is neglected and ignored. Culture, is for Levinas in the first place, is always an invitation to bear witness to a higher culture of goodness: a bearing witness to the ethical culture of personal responsibility. Only this ethical higher culture is able to genuinely overcome paganism, as it interrupts and suspends the culture of knowledge and as expression of art, while at the same time giving culture the surplus of the language of peace.

The ethical relation does not negate or deny the formation of culture but serves as the condition of possibility for their formation. The face of the Other forces individuals into discourse and is the "locus of truth in society."[171] Ethics as infinite responsibility and first discourse is the concretization or move towards transcendence. In his more mature work *Autrement qu'Etre* (1974) Levinas reformulates transcendence in terms of proximity and language, which opens new ways to use Levinas' thinking for our present purpose. Transcendence is now conceived as transcendence-in-immanence in which Levinas relates corporeal vulnerability with the preconditions of spoken meaning. Language as first discourse is here conceived as an exposure to the sensuous ethical relation to the Other that precedes all concepts and gives language its specific meaning as the gift to the Other.

§3.13 Truth, Language and Dialogue

The theme that remains unthematizable throughout Levinas' work is the Other whose radical alterity cannot be reduced to the Same. The Face of the Other "speaks to me" in an immediate way; it simply "expresses itself"[172] The self is bound to respond to the Face as a result of asymmetry in which the Other speaks to me from a Height; indicating that the self is vulnerable to the otherness of the other prior to any cultural construction of the world.

We have seen in the earlier sections that Levinas associates immanence with the persistent possibility of violence. The world is *being-at-home* as enjoyment as well as the totalitarian tendency to make radical alterity accessible to the human

[171] TI:59; TeI;63.
[172] TI:51; TeI:54

cogito. In Levinas' thinking, the idea of fraternity as the intersection between the ethical and the political allows for the non-allergic resistance of totality that offers a language that does not originate in a shared system of signifiers, but is vocative before it is nominative. The speaking of the Other teaches the self the very presence of the Other and summons the self to unconditional responsibility to its brothers. Fraternity as conceived by Levinas enables the cultural dialogue; it enables judging cultures, and it enables to approach the cultural other from a position of responsibility. Fraternity affirms both the uniqueness of the self and the equality between brothers; it is a relation based on the irreconcilable separation between self and other that refuse power play and is as such a "non-allergic relation". The discussion now revolves around the question how we can orientate ourselves towards the other when the Other is revealed as the unknowable. The relation between "knowable" and "unknowable" unfolds in language as the tension between the "saying" (*le dire*) and "the said" (*le dit*).

For Levinas, the birth of discourse as truth originates in the encounter with the Other, a discourse of being answerable to the Other. The first word offered is inscribed in the Face of the Other, which is the religious command not to kill. This entails that our common language is always a belated response to this first word offered. The relation to transcendence that finds its expression in the ethical command is a relation of radical separation and non-adequation, or, better said, a relation beyond the distinction between adequation and non-adequation. Speaking about transcendence is as such never transcendence as transcendence, indicating that Levinas finds himself constantly entangled in expressing the inexpressible; an attempt to think that which is Other, which raises the question of whether such writing on the Other in Greek or in a non-Greek language is even possible. To quote Jacques Derrida, who has raised this problem in *Violence et Metáphysique*:

> *But will a non-Greek ever succeed in doing what a Greek in this case could not do, except by disguising himself as a Greek, by speaking Greek, by feigning to speak Greek in order to get near the king?*[173]

For Levinas, the Greek as universalism and the Jewish command of the Bible implicate all humanity since "any man truly human is no doubt of the line of Abraham"[174] Being of the line of Abraham implies being the "chosen particular

[173] Derrida, J. (2005). "Violence and Metaphysics" In: C.E. Katz & L. Trout, *Emmanuel Levinas*, Routledge, 66

[174] NTR:99; DSS:19

one," an election that is bestowed upon me beyond and outside my socio-religious and political context. Language bears a trace of this Abrahamic responsibility, despite the impossibility to bring it to light. Abrahamic responsibility, or Messianism, is a "trauma" that resists thematization which constitutes subjectivity. Subjectivity is thus always inspired by the mystery of proximity that gives subjectivity the surplus of a vocative "difficult" freedom as the passive, obsessive responsiveness to the Other. Language attests to this response of responsibility, this openness of me of the "Here I am" before my brothers. Election by the Good is for Levinas a "passivity more passive than passivity," a non-action or non-violence," a non-violence that is broken to pieces the moment when I utter words, as words are always objectifying the other. Yet, because the self is structured as infinite responsiveness, it seems that the self cannot stop speaking, but always has to start saying something.

It is precisely in the tension between infinite responsiveness to the Other as responsibility and the violence of speaking itself that Levinas is able to distinguish the saying (*le dire*) from the said (*le dit*). The said refers to ontological rational discourse, *interested* language, language directed at manifestations or phenomena conveyed before the *I.* The said is the language of "being" (*einai, on*), language that is a thinking of totality, that of *doxa* in which the "given is held in its theme."[175] The said objectifies and universalizes phenomena by thematizing them; by robbing them from their strangeness and bringing them under a common denominator. The said is driven by the "instinct for integration," an imperialism of the "search for security."[176]

Levinas argues that through the command of the Face as the first signifier, the self "comes into being" and becomes oriented towards the relation to infinite goodness. This orientation is a move towards that what cannot be known or understood and constantly interrupts the self's egocentric spontaneity. This other is the Other who can never be fully represented because my language cannot thematize the radical alterity of the Other. The Other is outside of totality, his Face is irreducible to a theme, yet the Face speaks to me and is welcomed as interlocutor.[177]Levinas calls the relation to the Other the very origin of signification, in which the archetype of signification is dialogue. Dialogue is a personal relation between me and the Other, a dialogue among brothers characterized by non-indifference to the Face of the Other, an infinite

[175] OTB:36; AE:78
[176] EV:50; DEE:68
[177] TI:69; TeI:66

responsiveness that is interpolation, vocation, and an infinite apology of my egocentric usurpation of the world.

"To approach the Other," writes Levinas "is to welcome his expression," an expression that can never be captured nor thought but to which I nevertheless am obliged to listen.[178] Even in my choice not to speak to the other, I have already responded to the Holiness of the Face, which reveals a dis-correlation between signified and signification.[179] Saying reveals the intentionality of language toward the Other as interlocutor, an intentionality that cannot be reduced to a theme, but is dialogue as a moral imperative that originates from religion. Saying is "discourse before discourse," a communication constituted by the metaphysical transcendental relation between the I, the Other and the Infinite. The said as impersonal discourse, discourse that is spoken in the name of *logos*, is preceded by the personal face-to-face situation in which the Other signifies himself and the I is exposed to his otherness.

Levinas shows that we always violate the otherness of the other by bringing the other under our own concepts. The saying as ethical discourse will always be betrayed by the said; every word that I utter will reduce or violate the very otherness of the Other and will capture him in universal, general terms, revealing the necessity of interpretation and translation of that which cannot be said. In *At this very moment in this work here I am,* Derrida asks what becomes of this fault, and wonders whether this betrayal of radical alterity is inevitable.[180] Can we attest to the Face by minimizing the totalizing gaze of the economic self? And can we be hospitable to the wholly Other by writing about the Other, a medium that departs from the voice of the Other and reduces the diachrony of the saying to something that always is a said? Based on Levinas' thinking, Derrida interprets the task of philosophy to go beyond language, to attest to grammatical opening in language, to become open to recognize language as chaotic, ambiguous, and never fixed. In the introduction to the English version of Derrida's work *Writing and Difference* (1978), Alan Bass describes the need to go beyond language as a:

> *[..] moment of irreducible difference conceived not only as the danger to the doctrines of truth and meaning which are governed*

[178] TI:51; TeI:44

[179] OS:40; HS:52

[180] Derrida, J. (1991). "At this very moment in this work here I am" In: R. Bernasconi & S. Critchley, *Re-reading Levinas,* Indiana University Press, 16

> *by presence, but also as an inevitable danger in the form of writing which allows truth and meaning to present themselves [..].* [181]

Going beyond language is for Derrida the exposure of language to interruption and disarticulation. In the process of writing and speaking each theme is "disarticulated, made inadequate and anterior to itself, absolutely anachronic to whatever it said about it."[182] Speaking is first a personal vocation, responsiveness to the accusation of the Other. The Saying refers to the generosity of the subject who infinitely gives his words to the Other, a giving of words that can each time be interrupted and questioned by the Other. Beginning to speak is always a gratuitous response to the Other, an infinite giving that does not ask for reciprocity.[183]

Levinas' entire phenomenological analysis is focused on showing how transcendence is needed in order to overcome the violence of the same, a violence inherent in language and its relation to knowledge. For Levinas, a wholly immanent world can never be sincere, because the sincerity of desire can only refer to the self as second, to the self who passively receives the surplus of pure goodness. Sincerity as desire that is dis-interested is a pure goodness that does not ask for anything in return; giving to the other does not satisfy any of the self's own needs. Levinas' distinction between the saying and the said reveals that intercultural or comparative philosophy can never become a panopticon, but should be seen as a dialogical "movement of the same toward the Other than can never return to the same."[184] Comparative philosophy is a philosophy that is driven by the desire to gain knowledge of another cultural philosophical tradition, but Levinas shows that the cultural other can never be fully captured.

For Levinas, the Face of the Other opens the relation to infinite as the move towards God. For Levinas, the ethical relation originates in Jewish Monotheism, because "I can only go towards God by being ethically concerned by and for the other person."[185] Levinas' thinking reveals that the central concern for any philosophical inquiry is not to bring the cultural other into the sphere of sameness or familiarity, but to recognize the irreducible distance between self and other. Comparative

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[181] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, xiii.
[182] Ibid.,21
[183] OTB:7; AE:19
[184] HO:29; HA:37
[185] Levinas, E. (1984). "Dialogue with Emmanuel Lévinas." In Kearney, R. (Ed.), *Dialogues with contemporary continental thinkers: The phenomenological heritage* (pp. 47–70). Manchester University Press.

philosophy is first the recognition of this ethical relation between self and other, which can be translated as the ethical competence to welcome the cultural other without any common horizon and without any hope to understand or grasp that other. Comparative philosophy will always be disturbed, traumatized, and haunted by the proximity of the Other, an interruption that demands rephrasing, re-saying (*dédire*) and re-interpretation. Philosophy is, Levinas writes, never a wisdom, but is always marked by non-adequation:

> *Philosophy is never a wisdom, for the interlocutor whom it has just encompassed has already escaped it. Philosophy, in an essentially liturgical sense, invokes the Other to whom the "whole" is told, the master or student. It is precisely for this that the face-to-face proper to discourse does not connect a subject with an object and differs from the essentially adequate thematization. For no concept lays hold of exteriority.*[186]

The human world that is structured by language and cultural practices (a totality) is grounded upon the relation to the Other that precedes experience. Totality can as such never be entirely subjective, as it always originates from the relation to the transcendent Other, nor can it be objective, as it is the activity of the subject that constitutes totality. The doubling of discourse, is traced back to the origin of the otherness of being as illeity: "Illeity is the origin of the otherness of being, in which the *in itself* of objectivity participates by betraying it."[187]

Levinas tries to justify the interruption of the ethical by seeing the diachrony between the saying and the said as the origin of philosophical scepticism. While Levinas is not a sceptic, he does emphasize the significance of philosophical scepticism as proof that language has an ambiguous and dual nature and can signify something else than its content.

"Scepticism," writes Levinas at the end of *Autrement qu'être*, "traverses the rationality or logic of knowledge, [it] is a refusal to synchronize the implicit affirmation contained in saying and the negation which this affirmation states in the said."[188] Scepticism shows how language as identity is derived from a non-identity. For Levinas, scepticism is not an attitude, but arises out of the tension between the offering of the Face of first discourse (the Saying) and

[186] TI:295; TeI:328
[187] HO:44; HA:52
[188] OTB:171; AE:265

the system of structure and grammar as possible ontological discourse (the Said). Scepticism draws happily from the diachrony that precedes synchrony, which is why scepticism can never be refuted. Levinas speaks therefore of scepticism's "paradoxical presence within our very possession of language."[189] The sceptical discourse attests to the fissure in language and comes up from the dis-correlation and dis-synchronization between the Saying and the Said. Levinas remarks that it seems "as though scepticism were sensitive to the difference between my exposure without reserve to the other, which is saying, and the exposition or statement of the said in its equilibrium and justice."[190]

We have to attune here to the "as though," which serves as a warning that, although Levinas uses philosophical scepticism to reveal that which is otherwise than being, Levinas does not want us to become radical sceptics who unsay A in favour of its negation. For Levinas, the task of the comparative philosopher is to infinitely unsay the entire ontological domain, as that which is said so that the pre-original relation to the Other can be revealed. This is in the end what Levinas has in mind when he argues, "philosophy is thinking more boldly than the others."[191] Thus task is bold because philosophy that keeps unsaying that which is said inevitably betrays the fact that the condition for philosophy lies beyond the order of philosophy.

Comparative philosophy must be unsaid, must be interrupted and traumatized, in order to break with identity and open up to the Saying that nevertheless always remains the "not-yet." The "not-yet" is not the "not-yet" that sinks into nothingness but is the hope of a rejuvenated future of the *other than self*. Comparative philosophy as such is not the love of wisdom but is the "wisdom of love in the service of love,"[192] a *disinterestedness* love for the Other that bears witness to the Other while betraying it. Comparative philosophy is first and foremost an ethical dialogue with the cultural other in which we are open to being infinitely interrupted by the otherness of the other. Truth is, in dialogue, the persecuted I who does not suppress the voice of the Other but fully attests to it. This also means that Levinas suggests that there are ways of speaking that deny the voice of the Other, which is, unjust or violent language. The Face that appeals to me and commands me to respond always remains outside of what is said. The voice of the Other is beyond ontological formulations, but nevertheless

[189] CPP:168
[190] OTB:178; AE:272
[191] CC:346
[192] OTB:157; AE:251

leaves a trace, - an ethical residue-, in that what is said. The tension between the Saying and the Said creates an opening in language to attest both to the radical alterity of the Other and to speak about that other in common conceptions.

§3.14 Infinite Responsibility and Comparing the Incomparable

The aim of this chapter is to revise the approach to the cultural other in light of Levinas' formulation of transcendence. Levinas challenges current conceptions of cultural dialogue that are driven by affirming commonality between distinct cultural philosophical tradition and deny the heterogeneity in the relation between the self and the cultural other who is also Other (*l'Autre*). Levinas shows that in order to answer the question of how to approach another cultural tradition, the personal relation between self and other is an essential point of departure. Infinite responsibility to the Other as an exclusive relationship between two persons, is for Levinas a necessary relation, but this relation of love is not "Other enough." The infinite relation to the Other is broken down when the third party enters and also demands justice. The closed culture that consists of personal relations needs to be opened and this happens when the third party, - described by Levinas as the widow, the orphan or the poor, enters. The entrance of the third party necessitates us to compare the incomparable.

In the previous section I have outlined how we always necessarily have to betray the saying by the said. Ethics as pure exteriority always needs to be translated to ontology or politics. Levinas argues that the demand for social justice in the ontological domain comes upon the scene when the third party enters. It is the ever-presence of the third that, as Simon Critchley argues, constitutes the political aspect of Levinas' ethical relation.[193] Critchley argues that the Face is always already a relation to humanity as a whole and as such ethics is always already political. Critchley thus sees a necessary relation between fraternity and the sacred history of chosen ones and the political domain of human respect and dignity. For Levinas, human rights receive their significance from the infinite responsibility of the self to the Other. Human rights have thus no significance without the primordial ethical orientation; these rights are not founded upon the mutual recognition between human beings but are dependent upon the asymmetrical relation to the Other.

[193] Critchley, S. (1992). *Ethics of Deconstruction.*,224.

At this point it is important to notice the independency between exteriority and totality. Levinas articulates a totality ànd an infinity, not an either/or relation even though totality and exteriority do not share a common foundation. Nevertheless, the ethical relation as demand for social justice is "felt" in the ontological domain when the third party breaks the one-to-one relation. The face-to-face encounter as the one-to-one relation in which the I bears infinite responsibility to the particular unique individual, to his brother, is disturbed by the third person who presents himself also as a neighbour to whom I bear infinite responsibility. The proximity of human plurality starts from this third person; it is the third person who makes my freedom a *difficult freedom,* and forces me to compare the incomparable. The third party interrupts the intimacy of the "society of two," and is, as interruption, the birth of the question "What do I have to do with justice?" This is, writes Levinas, a question of consciousness that demands ontological justice:

> *Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, and in intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of a system, and thence also a co-presence on an equal footing as before a court of justice.*[194]

The obsession with the Other who cries out for justice, breaks infinite responsibility down to the question of who needs the most and transforms social justice in a demand for measuring and comparing. The third party that also demands infinite responsibility requires the troublesome, or violent use of universality, generalization, and judgment. While justice derives from the infinite responsibility to each and every human person, the recognition of the Face, the seeing of the Face, speaking about and to the other as well as comparing unique individuals are necessary practices for a religious-ethical inspired justice.

Levinas shows that commonality does not derive from anonymous Being, but from the unique third person who signals the endless responsibilities I have and breaks the face-to-face encounter as relation between the I and the Other. In the third party, the neighbour that obsesses me is already a face, and already comparable and incomparable, yet each individual is a unique face "visible in

[194] OTB:158; AE:245

the concern for justice."[195] The third party is the incessant correction of the asymmetry of the Face, which is, as Levinas writes, a betrayal of "my anarchic relationship with Illeity," it is the betrayal of accounting for each and every person, the betrayal of giving each one his proper name as the necessary translation of the *illeity* to the *il*. The third party however is the necessary correction for pure exteriority to touch ontological totality.

The third party triggers me to visualize how I can make society more inclusive and peaceful, a question that moves me to action, which gets me out of bed and inspires me to re-commence and devote myself to the time of the Other. For Levinas, the personal call for social justice is the inspiration for politics, although Levinas does suggest that politics as a "science" which concentrates on "what is" necessarily fails to do justice to the infinite responsibility to the Other. Levinas clearly prioritizes the self's *being-for-the-other*, a prior religious-ethical command that inspires and makes autonomy and freedom possible. Politics is no longer the realm in which the rights and freedom of the individual are the main focus, but the infinite responsibility to the Other which, in the political domain, is broken down to the question of justice for the other.

Levinas argues that politics needs to respond to the ethical relation and needs to mitigate infinite responsibility. Levinas' critique on politics, as a practice of nations and thus related to cultural identity, relates to politics' tendency of totalization. Enrique Dussel highlights the relation between political violence and ethics in his contribution *'The Politics' by Levinas: Towards a 'Critical' Political Philosophy* (2006) and shows that Levinas' negative interpretation of politics originates in his belief that politics is driven by the desire to bring unique individuals under the common identity as "members of a certain state or nation."[196] This conclusion aligns with my central argument that Levinas argues that culture, and politics as such, originates in bringing unique individuals under a common identity and making them knowable or recognizable. A political culture that neglects its ethical orientation as the move towards the unknown, is a violent, primitive culture that can never bear witness to the otherness of the other. When we do not notice Levinas' critique on primitivism and the need of transcendence, we might agree with Jason Caro who argues that Levinas endorses a "sociability in which no epistemological clarity is permitted that

[195] OTB:158; AE:245

[196] Dussel, E. (2006). "'The Politics' by Levinas: Towards a 'Critical' Political Philosophy" Transl. by J. Rodriguez, In: A. Horowitz & G. Horowitz, *Difficult Justice. Commentaries on Levinas and the Political*, University of Toronto Press, 79.

could determine *in situ* personal duties," which jeopardizes political stability and social order.[197] This is however not the case; as we have seen Levinas claims that politics cannot do justice to the otherness of the other when it does not recognize it is preconditioned and interrupted by the ethical relation. Levinas wants to show how the dominant view on politics in the West is shaped as a consequence of the prevailing view of persons primarily for themselves (Spinoza's *conatus essendi*), as persons who only will cooperate with others out of self-interest. Levinas wants to show that politics originates from infinite responsibility, as the infinite demand to offer our words and possessions to the stranger, the widow and the orphan. This involves a recognition of the way national politics is based on the exclusion of the stranger, a necessary exclusion, but which does not acquit politics to take these others into account.

Levinas' conception of the political is a difficult and often misunderstood theme, mostly because Levinas' rejects all common assumptions of traditional political philosophy. Levinas' thinking betrays a deep suspicion of politics, a suspicion that is the direct result of the political horror of the Nazi regime. In *Signature* (1978), Levinas describes his life as "dominated by the presentiment and memory of the Nazi horror,"[198] a presentiment that prevails in his thinking on justice, philosophy and the political. Levinasian politics is inspired by irreducible plurality and endorses a politics of non-identity. It is a fundamental critique on Western political thinking that claims peace as the basis of tranquillity and the "man who is at home with himself behind closed doors, rejecting the outside that negates him."[199] Levinas argues that politics based on identity is a violence disguised as peace; it is a politics that leaves itself undisturbed by that which is other. In other words: it is an immanent politics devoid of transcendence and that solely is based on self-preservation and self-justification of its citizens. This is for Levinas a primitivist politics that does not take into account the Other and the way we are indebted to and responsible to each human being.

Levinas' notion of transcendence that gives the ontological realm of the same its ethical orientation, rejects the core of most political theories that centre around individual freedom and the right to property. The law does not arise from the clash of wills between beings that try to secure their egocentric spontaneity but arises as a function of pre-original responsibility persons have for their

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[197] Caro, J. "Against Levinas' Messianic Politics: A Polemic" *Continental Philosophy Review* 51, (2018):1-21.

[198] DF:291; DL:405

[199] AT':136 AT:140

brothers. For Levinas, politics does not originate from a clash of wills in the state of nature, but from the personal relation to the Other. Politics is produced by the infinite responsibility of each *I* for each of his brothers. A just society is for Levinas based on the shared notion of fraternity in which each person is infinitely responsible to his or her brothers. A just society is inspired by the unmediated encounter with the Face that reveals the nakedness of the Other.

Levinas reverses common political themes such as autonomy and freedom and makes them dependent upon the transcendence of the Other. Levinas claims that freedom and autonomy are dependent upon the ethical relation, which entails more specifically that autonomy and freedom do not originate from the self's desire to fulfil its own needs but is grounded in the self's metaphysical desire to give to the Other. The ethical-religious command is an invitation to take the Other into account, to give to the Other, an invitation that nevertheless can be resisted or denied by the self. This is precisely the surplus that does not negate or destroy human freedom and autonomy, but gives it an ethical orientation, the transcendental weight of the Face's accusation that can be "redeemed" through ethical practice.

Ethical responsibility as the way to transcendence interrupts the linear history of humanity and makes historical or cultural totalities impossible. Levinas' concern is however that we can tend to forget or ignore transcendence; we can become obsessed with cultural identity and idolize cultural expressions, we can become obsessed with knowledge and mistakenly belief that we can make another cultural philosophical tradition or the cultural other entirely transparent. These Pagan tendencies, these anti-Platonic inclinations, place the self before the Other and promote a violence disguised as peace. In the end, Levinas' entire work revolves around the question how we can bring peace to the world, which, for Levinas revolves around the question how we can conceive, a non-allergic relation to the Other. This non-allergic relation to the Other is conceived in terms of "hospitality of radical alterity," a "surplus of meaning that comes from the Other," that originates in an "ethics beyond ethics."

§3.15 Transcendence as Interruption

The aim of this study is to describe ethical competence as a form of intercultural communication. In the previous section the distinction was introduced between the content of speech (*the said*) and the saying, which indicates the event of

becoming responsive to the Face of the Other. This distinction can be used for comparative philosophy to reconceptualise responsibility and the relation between self and other in the intercultural encounter. Levinas defines the ethical relation as the encounter with the other whose radical alterity I can never bring to light, highlighting the open-ended and indeterminable character of intercultural dialogue. Transcendence is for Levinas the interruption of the realm of egolocial culture that bring unique individuals together under a common identity and excludes that what is other.

Levinas' conception of transcendence hinges on the Cartesian relation to infinity that concretizes in the Jewish command to be one's brother's keeper. Levinas' strong claim is that only the Western Greek-Judea tradition is the privileged tradition that can provide humanity with a sacred history that brings the language of peace. In this section I will investigate how Levinas conceives transcendence in *Autrement qu'être* and how we need to understand the privileged place of the Western tradition in Levinas' thinking. In other words: what does it mean to be the chosen one from a Levinasian point of view?

We have seen that the ethical relation as the relation to infinite and the move towards transcendence is the higher culture, the culture that produces and orients the variety of cultural formations and expressions. Levinas' important insight is that the presence of the Other does not clash with freedom and autonomy, but precedes and invests our understanding of freedom and autonomy. It is thus transcendence ànd immanence that Levinas is after. Transcendence is for Levinas needed as surplus to ontology because ontology is the violent realm of the same that neglects that what is radical different and cannot bring genuine peace. Particularly in his essay *La Signification et le Sens*, Levinas calls for the need of a "universal language" in which I am able to evaluate the cultural other without relying on a common ground.

In his later work Levinas reformulates the subject as "transcendence-in-immanence" and emphasizes the primary dispossession and vulnerability of the subject as both self and Other. Transcendence in *Autrement qu'être* is a combination of the corporeal vulnerability, - which Levinas relates to trauma-, and the disruption of identity that leaves a trace in spoken language. I will show how this later conception of transcendence can help us to reformulate the privileged place of Western philosophy as the infinite task to move beyond identity.

In Levinas' later work, the subject itself is "an identity in disruption," a self that is constantly interrupted and questions by the proximity of the Other. The alterity of the Other gives the self the very surplus of ethical non-indifference: the Other as the neighbour or "le prochain," always haunts the self and summons him or her to responsibility. Proximity is in Levinas work similar to the gentle caress in the erotic relation, a gentle sensibility that does not aim at being grasped or understood, - it is non-conceptual and non-intentional and non-reciprocal. Proximity marks the indebtedness of the self to the Other; it is the Other who teaches the self that his egocentric spontaneity is violent, and it is this non-allergic interruption that brings the possibility of peace. For Levinas, the relation to the proximity of our neighbour is the relation to my brother, in which I, and only I, am my brother's keeper.

The ethical relation constitutes the self, it gives the self a reason to get out of bed; the relation to the Other singles the self out and makes its existence indispensable for human history. Proximity denotes the infinite responsibility that persons have for each and every human being and is the self-reflective moment in which persons find themselves as usurpers of the world. It is here that language becomes essentially an apology: the exposure to the Other initiates a dialogical relation in which the Other has the authority to interrupt and question the self's considerations. Throughout Levinas' work transcendence remains linked to *excendance;* the *I*'s move beyond itself is a transcending towards the other person, a movement towards radical alterity defined as the relation to infinite goodness. *Excendance* is for Levinas an evanescence of Being that can only be accomplished by the infinite relation to the Other. In his later work *Autrement qu'être,* Levinas argues that being is conditioned by being's Other.[200] Instead of referring to the alterity of the other human being, Levinas now refers to the Other that is already within the self.

Levinas' mature notion of transcendence that synthesizes sensibility and the possibility of language does not overcome the problems of §3.11; cultural others still need to translate their philosophical tradition into the European tradition to understand how transcendence gives immanence its necessary and indispensable surplus. Levinas' notion of transcendence can be found as a trace in the immanent world of vision and in language as such, but this ethical residue, the ultimate 'sense' that orients cultures, is still dependent upon the call of the infinite and the Jewish notion of ethical responsibility that is revealed in the European philosophical tradition.

[200] OB:16; AE 21

Levinas' fundamental belief is that an immanent world of self-justification and self-preservation embraces a violent imperialism in which truth and knowledge are accessible to the egocentric masterful self. In the earlier sections of this chapter, we have seen that the ethical can never be justified, because of the radical otherness of the Other. Truth as justice comes from the Other, it is the Other who interrupts the solipsistic, masterful self and brings the self into a dialogical relation. The dialogical relation is however not a reciprocal relation, nor a relation in which the self and other share a common *logos*; it is a fundamental asymmetrical relation. However, we have also seen that the entrance of the third person does make this "un-dialogical relation", reciprocal and symmetrical.

The entrance of the third party mitigates infinite responsibility, but never takes it away. It is a necessary break with the infinite demands of responsibility, but it will always be marked by the trauma of having to compare the incomparable and as such violating the otherness of the other. Levinas here dismisses the idea that we can unproblematically relate to the other through a common foundation. A common identity or relatedness between self and other is brought by my infinite responsibility to the other and is always a trauma that breaks off every justification and reliance on *logos*.

Transcendence is needed as the unthematized that infinitely disrupts thematization. In *La Philosophie et l'Idée de l'Infini* (1957) Levinas writes that "an existence which takes itself to be natural, for whom its place in the sun, its ground, its site, orient all signification – a pagan existing."[201] It is a world devoid of hope and salvation, a world in which the self remains riveted to its own materiality and is at the mercy of crude, anonymous Being. Salvation rests upon the orientation towards goodness that is concretized in the intersubjective ethical relation. A relation as unthematized interruption of the self's own concerns that a Pagan view cannot articulate.

We have seen that Levinas' believes that Europe is the privileged tradition that can provide human history with the relation to infinite goodness to which the ethical relation attests. Instead of concluding that Levinas is "Eurocentric" and can therefore not be used for postcolonial purposes, I would like to ask the question of what it means for Europe to be the privileged tradition. What does it mean for Europe to "the privileged tradition"? The answer to this question will

[201] CPP:52; DEHH:236

become also important to reformulate the task of comparative philosophy and intercultural ethical competence.

§3.16 Europe and the Duty of Moving Beyond Identity

This chapter has shown that the distinctiveness of Levinas lies in his critique of an immanent understanding of culture and language in which truth and knowledge is accessible to the masterful, egological self and in which the other is approached from a shared, common ground. The logic of the Same tends to ignore our primarily responsibility to the neighbour, a responsibility that is gratuitous and does not originate from any egocentric activity. The difference between self and other created by relying on cultural identity are prone to producing effects of colonizing and excluding the other, while Levinas' insistence on transcendence as the "higher culture", or better said, "the culture of Height," originates in a difference between self and other that affirms particularity and endorses human plurality.

Levinas shows us that comparative philosophy is always already a conversation with the cultural other. The Other, as Ma Lin writes, is not only a "necessary participant in cultural expression, but is also the interlocutor with whom expressions converse."[202] In other words, the cultural other is both the other who we can understand by bringing the other under familiar concepts and by relying on family resemblance concepts, but at the same time it is also the Other who interrupts our totalizing tendencies and creates the surplus of meaning expressed in discourse. Ethical discourse disrupts the logic of the same, disrupts identity, but is also the very foundation of the subject as a particular *I*. Hospitality to Others as the welcoming of Others in their otherness always breaks through any cultural expression.

In comparative philosophy we try to create a meaningful relation with another cultural philosophical tradition. Through comparing culturally distinct concepts, we try to identify differences and familiarities. We approach the other from an intimate familiarity and try to make the other transparent so that we can learn from that other tradition. This comparative practice is however not only an epistemological endeavour, but also a form of intercultural dialogue. Important for the intercultural dialogue is to approach the Other, an approach that requires an ethical competence of the person doing the comparative project.

[202] Ma Lin, *All the Rest must be Translated*, 603.

In this chapter I have tried to show how Levinas can provide us with a different conceptualisation of the relation between self and other, a relation in which the other is not an object of understanding, but our interlocutor to whom we bear responsibility.

When comparative philosophy as a discipline of European, Western philosophy wants to avoid theoretical colonization of the other, we need to critically assess the way we approach the cultural other. From a Levinasian point of view, we can only become genuinely open to the otherness of the other when we have a sense of justice. Ethical justice is for Levinas related to the vulnerability of being questioned by the Other. We need therefore to reflect on the Levinasian notion of hospitality. For Levinas, the question is how the natural subject that does not let otherness reveal itself can become open to the Other. Such a conversion cannot come from egological economical culture but needs to come from the Other who calls this culture of self-justification and self-gratification into question. Justice as critical knowledge that acknowledges the way the self violates the otherness of the other in its egocentric tendencies, can only arise in a subject that has an origin prior to its own origin; it can only arise in a subject that already is hospitable to the Other.

Hospitality is understood in Levinas' work in its Biblical sense, in a non-economical sense, implying that hospitality is here not associated with any (monetary) rewards or returns, but is wholly gracious. Hospitality is to be the self's, or European philosophy in our case, vulnerability to the encounter with the Other, a relation of responsibility that concretely translates as the infinite task to go beyond identity. Hospitality as the absolute welcoming of the Other is the very condition for self-identity, indicating that identity arises from non-identity. At the same time this self-identity is constantly interrupted by the presence of the Other: hospitality is thus the tension between the constitution of identity and the demand to attest to the non-identity of the Other. This demand keeps on interrupting any consolidation of identity.

Derrida sees this Levinasian notion of hospitality as first having something in possession and then, prior to my own decision, inviting unconditionally a stranger into my home, as to the central duty of Europe. In his essay on Europe entitled *The Other Heading* (1992), but also in other works, Derrida associates the name "Europe" with the possibility of a better world. In line with Levinas, Derrida argues that culture and identity require difference to itself and argues that the central task of Europe is to affirm identity as non-identical. This would

entail that comparative philosophy, as a discipline of European thinking is the exemplary discipline where identity is rethought and exposed in the presence of the radical otherness of the cultural other. In *The Other Heading* Derrida urges for a re-identification of the duty of Europe:

> *Hence the duty to respond to the call of European memory, to recall what has been promised under the name Europe, to re-identify Europe – this duty is without common measure with all that is generally understood by the name duty, though it could be shown that all other duties perhaps presuppose it in silence.*[203]

In what follows, I shall try to explain what it means to have a duty without a common measure and why for Levinas as for Derrida this privileging of Europe is not a form of Eurocentrism but is a demand to move beyond any form of identity, a move beyond any form of –ism). In Derrida's reading, hospitality bears the tension of being hospitality to non-identity and the formation of cultural identity and the celebration of cultural expressions of art.

For Derrida, Europe is the symbol for cultural identity without stability because it is constantly challenging and questioning its own cultural identity. The privilege of Europe consists in serving as an example of displacing and questioning any consolidation of identity and is as such a bearing witness to the fact that its own identity originates in the ethical relation of non-identity. Bearing witness this "other heading," writes Derrida, can help us to relate differently to the other:

> *Indeed it can mean to recall that there is another heading, the heading being not only ours [le nôtre] but the other [l'autre], not only that which we identify, calculate and decide upon, but the heading of the other, before which we must respond, and which we must remember, of which we must remind ourselves, the heading of the other being perhaps the first condition of an identity or identification that is not an egocentrism destructive of oneself and the other.*[204]

Derrida points to the fact that no matter how xenophobic we are toward the stranger, Europe nevertheless has an intimate kinship with the other. For

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[203] Derrida, J. (1992). *The Other Heading. Reflections on today's Europe*, Transl. P.A. Brault & M.B. Naas, Indiana University Press, 76.

[204] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 15.

Derrida, but as we have seen for Levinas as well, the paradox of Western philosophy is that it tries to articulate the transcendental. Transcendentalism culminated in the work of Hegel who tried to reconstruct European identity. Hegel articulated human freedom as a self-shaping identity and in his belief this freedom was most adequately configured in modern Europe.

Hegel privileged Europe because it was founded upon the human free subject instead of defining the subject in terms of certain qualities (nationality, sex, religion etc.). Hegel believed that every content embodied three moments: the abstract-intellectual, the dialectical-negative and the speculative-positive moment.[205] In Hegel, the initial terms of oppositions are in the third and constitutive moment grasped as the totality of determinations and as such as a unity. Hegel's conviction is that every truth holds in itself its own negation; the process of identification and determination of any content form his idealism. When applied to the European identity, Hegel insisted that we should not take any particular content as the ultimate source of European identity, but instead we should question all given forms through a process of thorough philosophical inquiry.

In Hegel, we already see the task of Europe as the renunciation of any fixed identity. For Hegel, particular forms of world experiences, such as national states, are "non-real" and need to be overcome by realisation of the universal spirit. Derrida and Levinas identify the violence inherent in Hegel's view, a view that tries to erase particularities to make room for a unifying universalism. As we have seen, the subject for Levinas is heteronomous; its egocentric identity is produced by the non-identical relation to the Other. Derrida takes up on this idea and applies it to the task of Europe that is the task of attesting to this non-identity, attesting to never being one with itself. The duty of Europe is:

> *[..] opening it onto that which is not, never was, and never will be Europe. The same duty also dictates welcoming foreigners in order not only to integrate them but to recognize and accept their alterity: two concepts of hospitality that today divide our European and national consciousness. The same duty dictates criticizing ("in-both-theory-and-in-practice," and relentlessly) a totalitarian dogmatism that, under the pretense of putting an end to capital, destroyed democracy and the European heritage. But it also dictates criticizing a religion of capital that institutes its*

[205] Hegel, G.W.F. (2019). *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Nikol, §79.

> *dogmatism under new guises, which we must also learn to identify – for this is the future itself, and there will be none otherwise. The same duty dictates cultivating the virtue of such critique, of the critical idea, the critical tradition, but also submitting it, beyond critique and questioning, to a deconstructive genealogy that thinks and exceeds it without yet compromising it. The same duty dictates assuming the European, and uniquely European, heritage of an idea of democracy, while also recognizing that this idea, like that of international law, is never simply given, that its status is not even that of a regulative idea in the Kantian sense, but rather something that remains to be thought and to come [à venir].*[206]

Derrida here points to the infinite task of Europe to be responsible for opening to the other as the principle of non-exclusion that originates in the very constitution of the history of Europe. In other words, Derrida suggests that the project of constructing a European identity is marked by the infinite responsibility as hospitality to the other, a task that is never completed, but always needs to be performed anew.

Derrida highlights this discourse of responsibility by pointing to the exemplarity of Europe. Europe as the unique example posits itself as universal example; revealing that while attesting to universality each time the exemplarity of the example affirms at the same time its uniqueness. In other words, by positing itself as an example for the rest of the world, Europe attunes to being the host of the universal in the singular; a tension between same and other that cannot be resolved. Derrida concludes that this tension is marked by the "play of the same", a play that is only possible when otherness is already inscribed in the same. The infinite task of Europe is to take responsibility for this heading that heads toward to other, a heading that can no longer even relate to itself as its other, the other with itself "[207] The infinite task of Europe, and of comparative philosophy as such, is thus an infinite task of moving beyond identity, a move toward the unknown other that cannot be anticipated or conceptualized.

The infinite move beyond identity motivates and forces us to decide on what cannot be decided. This drives us to attune to the Levinasian notion of justice in which we have to weigh alternatives, calculate probabilities, take chances and risk committing violence to the other. If Europe has a privileged place in the work

[206] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 76-78.
[207] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 77

of Levinas, it cannot give rise to Eurocentrism, as Levinas' notion of privilege does not give rise to stability, certainty, and knowledge. Being privileged means having the infinite responsibility to move beyond identity, to attest to the interruption and prosecution of the other who questions my egocentric tendency to construct an identity that leaves the other out.

The task of Europe as the infinite move beyond identity originates in the relationship between the infinite and the finite; responsibility is derived from the non-correlation or non-unifying experience of the transcendental within the finite. The Levinasian framework provides comparative philosophy with a reconfiguration of the self-other relation in which static conceptions of self and other are challenged and an appeal is made to an ethical attitude of vulnerability to the other as embodied being who deserves justice.

While one can still claim that Levinas privileges the European tradition because it has attuned to transcendence, in contrast to the Asian tradition which is from the start immanent, this privilege can never become a fixed form of Eurocentrism as scholars such as McGettigan and Sikka suggest. These scholars concentrate on Levinas' statements on the cultural other that are, when not considered in their appropriate context, Eurocentric, but that can be understood from the broader relation between immanence, transcendence, and primitivism.

I have shown that Levinas' later work in which the self is marked by both *being-at-home-with-oneself* as infinitely being affected and haunted by the proximity of the Other, leads Derrida to reconfigure the duty of Europe as the infinite task to move beyond identity. The tension between same and other, between identity and non-identity allows for a discontinuity in which philosophy cannot draw upon or build upon an essential identity but is open to the infinite play of the constant becoming and deconstruction of identities. The Derridean/Levinasian conception of hospitable justice opens a space where self and other both can affirm themselves in their uniqueness and can be heard. Because the receives a critical-transformational position in relation to the Other, the self is both capable of accessing knowledge and practicing self-doubt. The relation to infinity gives birth to ethical discourse that voices different perspectives and possibilities. An immanent world in which the relation to the infinite is absent is a world in which this openness to infinite alternatives and perspectives is cut off and neglected. In other words, Levinas argues that the relation to infinite as the move towards what is yet unknown mitigates the imperialistic tendencies of cultures to exclude and muffle alternative voices.

This brings us to the problem that Levinas states that Asian tradition need to be translated into the Western tradition. What does "translating" here mean? Translating can only means becoming open to the Other and becoming susceptible to the Face that interrupts our egological quest for knowledge. Levinas provides historical, contingent cultures with the surplus of a signification "before cultures," a higher culture of absolute separation, non-adequation and non-identity that interrupts and at the same time makes culture possible.

Central to Levinas' thinking is the liturgical work as the move of the same to that what is other that never returns to the same. For comparative philosophy this suggests ethical responsiveness that will be concretized as adopting the transformative attitude that is tolerant and responsible toward an infinite of alternative perspectives. Chapter 5 will draw out the implications and characteristics of ethical responsiveness, which will be especially enriched, as we shall discover, when accompanied by the insights of the *Zhuangzi*.

§3.17 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the relevance of Levinas' relevance to comparative philosophy and particularly the problem of how to approach cutlural others in their uniqueness. Levinas shows that ethics precedes knowledge and that we can only gain knowledge because our prior hospitality to the Other. The Other can never be known; his or her otherness originates in the Cartesian infinite relation that keeps interrupting the self's egocentric activities. Bringing the other under our own categories and employing cultural categories to approach the other are in Levinas' thinking seen as an, although inevitable, betrayal of the other. When we want to engender responsibility and openness toward the other, it is important to recognize that we are indebted to the self as interlocutor; it is through the intercultural conversation and the otherness of the other that we can explore new forms of knowledge.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I have concentrated on the relation between immanence, transcendence, language, and culture. Although Levinas is not a philosopher of culture, he has written two important essays that help us to understand why cultural formation and multiculturalism pose a problem for him. I have argued that despite Levinas' Eurocentric disposition, his thinking is well suited to see comparative philosophy as intercultural dialogue. Levinas criticizes an immanent worldview and its central dimension of reducing that what is other

to the same and focuses on an ethical orientation that is not grounded in any assertion of commonality.

The self in Levinas' work is reconfigured as both a free and autonomous self that through inhabitation, possession and labour is able to secure its enjoyment of the world, as a self that is vulnerable to, or hospitable to welcoming the Other. The otherness of the Other originates in the Face of the Other whose Height is dependent upon the *illeity* as the trace of God. The Face of the Other is the only non-phenomena that is able to interrupt the self's egocentric usurpation of the world without destroying or limiting the self's freedom. The Face interrupts the self's egocentric spontaneity by calling this spontaneous activity question and transforming the self into a *being-for-the-Other*. Through the Cartesian relation to the Infinite, Levinas shows that the ethical relation as the move toward the Infinite, constitutes the self's activities. The self is thus first a *being-for-the-Other* and only after a *being-for-itself.*

Levinas argues that transcendence concretizes in the infinite giving to the Other, a giving of possessions and opening of my home to the Other and gives the immanent world the necessary surplus of the language of peace. This concretizes in language as the tension between the saying and the said which opens the self to the critical-transformational discourse of self-doubt. It is only in receiving this critical-transformational discourse of self-doubt that we receive in the transcendence of the Other that we can become open to the cultural other and learn form that other. While cultural diversity and multiculturalism are ontologically given, they will never be able to provide a genuine language of peace and can only articulate a "peace disguised as violence,"[208] as cultures are intimately tied to the logic of the same. Only with the notion of transcendence as ethical discourse, - as sense-, are we able to attune to the otherness of the Other in our intercultural interactions and can we judge the cultural other and other cultural traditions. The cultural other whose worldview is wholly immanent needs therefore to be translated to the Western Judeo-Greek tradition in order to gain access to this higher culture.

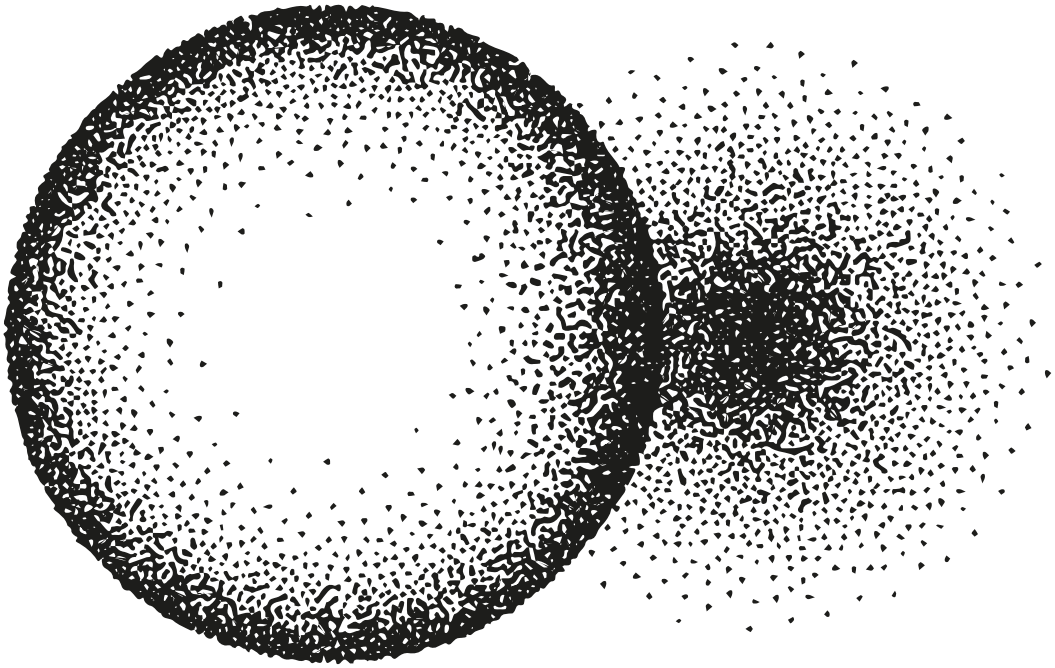
Levinas' affirmation of sacred history as the relation to infinity, God and the Holy, is seen as "the higher culture" and his statements that the "cultural other is "exotic" and "needs to be translated," are justifiably criticized as Eurocentric. In this chapter, I have related Levinas' Eurocentrism to his critique on immanence and his insistence on transcendence as the necessary surplus that can interrupt

[208] Levinas, E. (1995). *Alterité et Transcendance*, Fata Morgana,136-138.

the egocentric domain of self-justification and self-affirmation. Levinas' fundamental belief is that Greek philosophy and Jewish religion can save humanity from primitivism as the ethical relation is based on the inversion of the self's *conatus essendi*. For Levinas, the Greek as universalism and the Jewish notion of responsibility implicate all humanity.

Instead of dismissing Levinas' thinking as Eurocentric, I have posed the question of what it means for the Western tradition to be the privileged tradition. After all, comparative philosophy is a discipline of Western philosophy. I have turned to Levinas' mature notion of transcendence in which he relates the self's vulnerability to the Other to language. The encounter of the Other who summons me to responsibility is the birth of discourse as being answerable to the Other. The distinction between the *saying* and the *said* reveals that the otherness of the Other is constitutive for language. The comparative encounter is a personal responsiveness to the otherness of the Other; an infinite responsibility characterized by interruption, vocation, and hospitality.

In the end, I have taken up the question of what it means for Europe to be the privileged tradition. By relying on the work of Derrida and his thoughts on the duty of Europe, I have focused on hospitality as the infinite task to move beyond identity and to avoid essentialist generalizations. Derrida argues that philosophy needs to go beyond the language of identity and bear witness to the fact that philosophy is always already open to the wholly Other. The relation to the wholly Other gives us a fundamental reappraisal of the encounter with the Other in which the other is not an object of understanding, but the one who interrupts and challenges essentialist generalizations and identities. Europe as the site or place that has no common identity or a common language, poses itself as a universal exemplar of democracy and freedom. Derrida derives from the tension between particularity and universalism of the exemplar and as such has the duty to attempt to go beyond identity. Europe as exemplar, as the privileged tradition, has the infinite task to move beyond identity and is open to the infinite play of the constant becoming and destruction of perspectives, ideas, and identities.



Chapter 4

The *Zhuāngzǐ* on the Self-Other Relation: Finding the Pivot of *Dào*

In this chapter I argue that the Zhuāngzǐ tries to articulate a position that helps us to become open to alternative perspectives and which offers a way to relate to these different perspectives in a harmonious, non-violent way. In this chapter, I will particularly focus on the critical passage of finding "the pivot of *dào*," (*dàoshū*, 道樞) which is a position that will help us to move beyond identity and which will contribute to a methodological shift in comparative philosophy. The discussion of the *Zhuāngzǐ* will particularly be helpful in providing us with a practical method of how to attune to the otherness of the other while simultaneously relying on conventional language and logic that affirm the equality between self and other. The pivot of *dào* (*dàoshū*, 道樞) is a position that consists of certain commitments, behaviors, emotions and beliefs that helps us to embrace the relativity of our judgments which will facilitate the comparative dialogue, and which enables us to embody the task to move beyond identity.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that reality consists of constantly transforming phenomena that cannot be captured in conventional modes of language and knowledge. For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, self and other harmoniously connect when self and other are able to follow their unique preferences and are not impeded by others in the unfolding of their self-so-ness (*zìrán*, 自然). The text offers us strategies that enable us to align with reality and to harmonize different perspectives which the text calls "being at rest at the centre of the pivot of *dào*" (*bǐshìmòdéqí ǒu, wèizhīdàoshū*, 彼是莫得其偶,謂之道樞). The aim of this chapter is primarily to illuminate what it means to "find the pivot of *dào*" and to show what might be gained by making no rigid distinctions between what "is-so" (*shì,*是*)* and what is "not-so" (*fēi,*非). In the first part of this chapter, I will clarify the historical and social-political background of the text in which will show how the Warring States era Masters (*zǐ*) were concerned with the relationship between justice, personal freedom, and humaneness and how philosophy was seen as disputation (*biàn,* 辯). The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s critique on *biàn* serves as the main motivation of the text in which its rhetorical style can inform us about what it means to be at rest in the middle of the pivot.

In the second part of the chapter, I will focus on the relation between making *shìfēi* distinctions, the desire to hold on the objective standards and following the situation. I will show how the *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects any commitment to universally valid concepts or theories and how the consequential destruction of knowledge, language and logic restores human being's natural Virtuosity (*dé*,德). Virtuosity enables human beings to respond to situations from an attitude of carefree

wandering (*xiāoyáoyóu*, 逍遥遊), which indirectly leads them to complete activities with effortless action (*wúwéi,* 無為). The *Zhuāngzǐ* shows how clinging to knowledge, language and logic alienates humans from their natural alignment with the universe and how the deconstruction of artificial human values and conventions will liberate humans from their limited perspective.

In the last section I will focus on the merits of "being at rest in the middle of the pivot of dào," a position in which we are able to transcend polarization by having become truly free of preferences, but in which we still are actively involved in ordinary practices and can as such "walk on two roads" (*liǎngxíng,*兩行). I will argue that the pivot can be seen as the perspective in which comparative philosophers are open to a variety of alternatives and perspectives and can see them equal in their difference. The person at the pivot does not refrain from making every day *shìfēi*-judgments, but only uses them in a non-rigid, convenient way. In the end, as we will see in the case of Levinas, once all this material has been rehearsed and elucidated, these principles of the *Zhuāngzǐ* are not merely interesting contents of the text when placed into the specifics of its cultural environment but offer us a fundamental reorientation for comparative philosophy in our own times.

Part I: The Masters Of The Pre-Qin Period

§4.1 Contextualizing the *Zhuāngzǐ*

The *Zhuāngzǐ* as a text is shaped by the intellectual climate of the "Master texts" of the Warring States Period (480-221 BCE) in ancient China, such as those associated with Confucius (孔子), Xúnzǐ (荀子), Mòzǐ (墨子) and Mencius (孟子). The text responds to the moral-political discourse of its time and particularly to the Mohist commitment to correlating names with the correct classifications, which result from judgments made in terms of what is "so" (*shì,* 是) and "not so" (*fēi,* 非). These "so" (*shì,* 是) and "not so" (*fēi,* 非) judgments applied both to descriptive as prescriptive statements and referred to what is "right," "appropriate" or "fitting". Early Chinese philosophy can be seen as the debate over which *shìfēi*-judgments are right or most fitting. The *Zhuāngzǐ* responds as a text to these *shìfēi*-debates and particularly questions the reliance on a universal, neutral standard that can be used to discern what is right or appropriate and what is not.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* (莊子) and the *Dàodéjīng* (道德經) of *Lǎozǐ* (老子) have been traditionally classified as 'Ancient Daoist texts', even though "Daoism" is a term that neither the *Zhuāngzǐ* nor the *Dàodéjīng* uses; that classification emerged in the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 AD). What we do know is that the *Zhuāngzǐ* refers several times to *Lǎozǐ*, indicating that the *Dàodéjīng* was at least known of earlier than the *Zhuāngzǐ*. The heterogeneous collection of writings entitled the *Zhuāngzǐ* dates from the Warring States Period (c. 480-221 BCE) to the early Han (202 BCE-9 CE). The collection of writings is divided, at least after its reception by the commentator Guo Xiang in the third century CE, into 33 chapters, of which the first seven chapters are referred to as the *Inner Chapters* (*nèipiān*,內篇); sections of the text that are commonly seen as a coherent whole written by one author. The attributed author of these seven chapters in traditional Chinese doxography was Zhuang Zhou (ca. 369-286 BCE), although scholars today are of the opinion that the collection of writings was written by different authors and were also written in different time periods. Most early Chinese texts are composite in nature and can be better seen as 'anthologies' than single-authored works.

We do not know a lot of the life of Master Zhou, the only information we have is a short biography given by the historian Sima Qian (145-86 BCE) who wrote that Zhuāngzǐ was born in the state of Song and worked in a lacquer-tree garden of Meng. Zhuāngzǐ was, in this representation, a contemporary of Mencius (孟子) as well as Aristotle (384-322 BC). At the time of Zhuāngzǐ, incessant wars were fought among competing territorial states. The period that came to be known as the "Warring States Period" was not only an era of intense turmoil, but also gave rise to an increase in social mobility and the emergence of a cultural elite. Tao Jiang calls the pre-Qin period (traditionally 551-479 BCE) "the foundational period in Chinese philosophy," that "has been considered the single most creative and vibrant chapter in Chinese intellectual history."[209]

The cultural elite of the Warring States era was a group of educated persons who formulated social ideals of proper conduct and tried to sell their ideas on how to govern to the rulers of territorial states. These scholars who travelled from state to state trying to find an official position, formed "lineages of thought" (*jiā,* 家) that were later on classified as 'Confucian' (*rújiā,* 儒家), Mohist' (*mòjiā,* 墨家) or 'Daoist' (*dàojiā,* 道家) lineages. These lineages of thought were deeply dissatisfied with the political and social situation and began to think about how to restore political and social stability to a rapidly, and quite violently fracturing world. As a result,

[209] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*,1

Chinese lineages of thought concentrated on moral cultivation, social praxis, and the systematic education of government officials.[210]

Philosophical thought in the Warring States texts was centred on the question of proper conduct and how rulers should behave and approach their citizens to create political stability and bring about prosperity. The implicit "teaching model" of these texts was that proper conduct ought to be modelled after the persons who showed morally perfected behaviour. These exemplary persons (*worthies, xián*, 賢) modelled their behaviour after the sage kings, the cultural heroes who created prosperous civilizations and were able to harmonize society and improve the lives of the populace. These ancient sage kings, whose narratives place them as early as the third millennium BCE, were the ones who followed the heavenly patterns and had 'the mandate of heaven' (*tiānmìng,*天命), the divine right of ruling.

The main concern for scholars of the Pre-Qin era was to harmonize human conduct with heavenly patterns and established cultural norms. Identifying these patterns and norms was considered finding the Way (*dào,* 道), which can, in addition to its nominal denotation of a path, road, course or way, also be translated in a verbal sense as "to lead" or "to guide," but can also mean, "to speak," and so has the sense of giving someone direction, telling them where to go or how to get there, or what to do and how to do it.[211] Searching for *dào* was not the sole concern for the thinkers later classified as the *dàojiā* (道家); nearly all pre-Qin lineages of thought discuss following *dào,* although they tend to interpret the "course" ("the way") in different fashions.

Finding the course was deemed important for harmonizing human behaviour with the heavenly patterns. Chinese cosmology is based on the premise that the universe is constantly generating and regenerating itself, implying that all states are in flux. The universe is not created but comprises the vital force *qì* (氣), which pervades the entire universe and "animates" inanimate matter as different beings. *Qì* operates according to a pattern of interdependent yet opposing forces of *yīnqì* (陰氣) and *yángqì* (陽氣). *Yīn* (陰) is associated with the malleable, female, and tranquil side of *qì* whereas *yáng* is considered aggressive, male, and energetic.

[210] Puett, M. & Gross-Loh, C. (2017) *The Path: What Chinese philosophers can teach us about the good life,* Simon and Schuster

[211] Ziporyn remarks that each *jiā* has its own course and that these dào's have a prescriptive force. See: Ziporyn, B. (2009). *Zhuangzi. The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, Hackett Publishing Company, xiii

The written form of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is essential to its philosophical content, but the content is also a direct response to the political and philosophical climate of its time. In his book *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China* (2021) Tao Jiang offers a useful interpretative framework for understanding the political and philosophical climate of the pre-Qin period. Jiang argues that the intellectual debate centred around the three values of humaneness, justice and personal freedom that were re-thought and re-negotiated by the Masters in an effort to resolve the tensions between the distinct domains of the personal, the familial and the political.[212] The philosophical dialectics between the value of partial humaneness, our natural inclination to be partial toward those who are close to us, and impartial justice, defined as the exercise of impartial judgment on the merits of persons and state of affairs irrespective of their relations to us, were the two fundamentally juxtaposed ideals of governance for Warring States Master texts.[213]

Jiang argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* needs to be read as a text that wants to illuminate the futility of the philosophical-political debate of these Masters. In the next section, I outline how these texts of the so-called "Masters" (*Zǐ,* 子) all saw their own position as the absolute truth, an assertion that the *Zhuāngzǐ* sees as the failure to comprehend that what is "so" and "not so" expresses only situated views.

§4.2 The Teachings of the Masters

In ancient Chinese thought, the true teacher was the supreme intellectual – a noble man (*jūnzǐ,* 君子, or a *worthy,* (*xián,* 賢) who was no longer simply a matter of consanguineous privilege. Being a teacher was no longer an inherited status but resulted from the moral perfection of one's character and one's gestures. These *shìs* (*shì*, 士) became "Masters" of moral excellence who instructed disciples and rulers and whose ideas became lineages of thought (*jiā,* 家). It is against this background that we need to understand the "teachings of the Masters" and their rhetorical style. Collections of sayings like *The Analects* are not presented as a philosophical program but are – as Wiebke Denecke calls them – "scenes of instruction" between a Master and his disciples or apprentices.[214]

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[212] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 1

[213] Ibid., 36

[214] Denecke, W. (2010). *The dynamics of masters literature, early Chinese thought from Confucius to Han Feizi.* Columbia University Press, 21

The rhetorical style of *The Analects* greatly influenced the later Warring States texts and defined the intellectual context of this period. Nevertheless, these Masters all were re-negotiating the Confucian relation between the personal, familial and the political, which led to competing perspectives on the central notions of their time: humaneness and justice. In his analysis of the moral-political climate of the pre-Qin period, Jiang classifies the *Zhuāngzǐ* as the sole text that rejects the mainstream discourse, and instead endorsed personal freedom as the "appreciation and cultivation of personal space wherein one can be left alone and enjoy the company of like-minded friends without being entangled in the socio-political world."[215]

Although I do agree that the *Zhuāngzǐ* can be seen as endorsing personal freedom, I will argue that this is not the text's primary focus. Throughout this chapter I will show that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s is aimed at teaching persons to become at rest in the middle of the pivot, so that they can respond to the other's perspectives with the most clarity, which will, as a result, give them more personal freedom. Nevertheless, the person in the pivot still follows human conventions, but in a non-rigid and spontaneous way. Persons who are at rest in the pivot harmonizes with both Heaven and the human realm primarily because of their trained position of emotional equanimity and the acceptance of indeterminacy of life.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* urges us to embrace doubt as a way of being so that we are aligned with how reality is and can assess a situation with the most clarity. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s rhetorical style is aimed at exposing the blindness of the other Masters by showing how their points of view are the result of clinging to preferences and do not articulate the ultimate truth, but merely express a particularly situated view. The text does not criticize making *shìfēi*-judgments but does reject the belief that there is an ultimate principle or standard that justifies these judgments and because of its rejection of meta-standards, the *Zhuāngzǐ* also sees *shìfēi*-debates as a vain, futile, and even potentially violent practice.

There is indeed a tendency in the other Master texts to elevate their own thinking not only as the right and only way (*dào*), but also to portray those who have cultivated themselves in this tradition as "better persons" who deserve to rule the state. People less capable of perfectly displaying the virtues and conduct of a certain *jiā* are considered those who need specific guidance from

[215] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 36.

these morally elevated people. The texts of these Masters are characterized by consciously constructed "scenes of instruction" between the Master and his disciples or apprentices, but also frequently add a subtle form of a "rhetoric of therapy" that firmly establishes the natural authority and moral excellence of the Master. The texts of these Masters can all be considered rhetorical texts that try to teach the proper Way (*dào*) by dismissing or refuting other alternatives. The frequent use of repetition of arguments and the strong reliance on sage-king (*shèngwáng*, 聖王) narratives were used as strategies to prove that their theory was the right one.

The collection of texts we know as the *Zhuāngzǐ*, needs to be understood from this context, in which philosophy consisted of dispute and rhetorical strategies aimed at defaming advocates of rival positions. Masters such as Xúnzǐ, Mencius and Mòzǐ were highly confident that their particular approaches could help us definitively determine what constituted "right" and "wrong" conduct and tended to distinguish between "worthy persons" or "gentlemen" and "petty persons," referring to those who did not follow the standards of the particular *jiā*.[216] The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s aim is to show that these other Masters have "petty knowledge" and fail to see that their perspective is mere opinion. The central point of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that there are not principles or criteria that can uncontestably prove what is "right," or "appropriate" because there is always the possibility in that neither or both of the contesters are right. Debates about what is "so" and "not so" provoke unnecessary anger and lead mankind away from "the current of the central median as its normal course."[217]

The *Zhuāngzǐ* classifies the distinctions of what is "so" and "not-so" (*shìfēi*, 是非) as mere opinions, opinions that alienate persons from their natural spontaneity if they cling to these opinions and beliefs as if their perspective conveys the absolute truth. Instead of seeing us as the ones who can know what is ultimately right or appropriate, we should embrace indeterminacy and doubt as the fundamental characteristics of reality. The *Zhuāngzǐ* wants to overcome the split between heaven and the humane realm by rejecting all traditional human values and transcending all *shìfēi*-judgements of right and wrong or benefit and harm. It is particularly the belief in the existence of rigid distinctions that creates problems and prevents us from harmonizing with the myriad of things (*wànwù*,萬物).The *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to restore the natural relation between self and other by liberating men from their

[216] See for example *Xunzi* 1:145 (Hutton, 2014, 5), *Mencius* Chapter 11:33 and *Mozi* Chapter 9, 40-41 (Mei, 1929[2016]).
[217] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 22.

belief in rigid distinctions and their conflating of their identity. In the passage just before the pivot of *dào* is discussed, the *Zhuāngzǐ* asks the question:

> 果有言邪？其未嘗有言邪？其以為異於鷇音，亦有辯乎，其無辯乎？道惡乎隱而有真偽？言惡乎隱而有是非？道惡乎往而不存？言惡乎存而不可？
>
> *How could courses be so obscured that there could be any question of genuine and fake among them? How could words be so obscured that there could be any question of right and wrong among them? Where can you go without it being a course? What can you say without it being affirmable? Courses are obscured by the small accomplishments already formed and completed by them. Words are obscured by the ostentatious blossoms of reputation that come with them.*[218]

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s articulation of a positive approach to life aims at deconstructing traditional beliefs in truth, language and knowledge and the endorsement of a natural spontaneity in which we are at rest in the pivot and encompass the broadest perspective possible in which we see the natural interconnectedness of the different things.

"The pivot of *dào*" or the "middle of the Heavenly Potter's Wheel," is one of the central metaphors in the second chapter of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. This critical passage allows us to synthetize a variety of topics in one common concern. I will show that topics featured in the *Zhuāngzǐ* such as skepticism and deconstruction, which are often discussed by scholars as the text's driving topics, actually need to be seen from a broader perspective. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s narrative structures and its use of images, parables and metaphors also play an important role in its overall aim and purpose.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s own rhetorical style pushes us towards becoming free of all dependency, such as relying on knowledge, logic and language, as the text asserts that we cannot know what is ultimately "so" and "not so." The *Zhuāngzǐ* here does not claim authority, nor claims that it possesses the ultimate truth, yet in its sophisticated use of questioning the beliefs held by the various intellectual lineages, or *jiās,* it invites its readers to adopt an open and flexible attitude towards the different perspectives that are presented to us. Recognizing the

[218] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 11.

equality of the different perspectives and not preferring one to the other is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* the emulation of the natural *dào*. Important strategies that help us to find the pivot are practicing emotional equanimity, equalizing the seemingly opposed perspectives, embracing indeterminacy, not relying on any fixed meaning and being able to walk two roads (*liǎngxíng,* 兩行).

Equalizing the self-other relation means approaching the myriad things without preferences and seeing them all as expressions of *dào*'s intent. The *Zhuāngzǐ* remarks that we can endlessly add new or other *shìfēi*-distinctions, but that "nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious" (*yǐmíng*, 以明). The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not argue against making *shìfēi*-distinctions but wants to show how clinging to them and seeing them as ultimately "so" or "not so" limits our creative responsiveness. The ultimate preferred perspective is holding on to the pivot of *dào,* a position that is no longer concerned with evaluative judgments and having the right standards but responds to and can use a variety of standards.

It is important to recognize that the *Zhuāngzǐ* uses styles and aspects of the other Masters but frequently reverses or deconstructs their conventional meaning. Irony and humour in the *Zhuāngzǐ* are important tools aimed at destabilizing traditional values and exposing unacknowledged assumptions and beliefs, which is why the text is difficult to read and to interpret. The *Zhuāngzǐ* also occasionally mimics Confucian "teaching scenes," introducing the Master Confucius who educates a person. However, instead of being presented as the charismatic master who has authority because he possesses superior wisdom, Confucius in the *Zhuāngzǐ* mocks his own scholarship.

In Chapter 4 of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, Yan Hui tells Confucius that he wants to go to King Wei to "implement" what he has learned from Confucius and "derive standards and principles from it" to save the king's state from chaos and disorder. However, instead of affirming the wisdom of Yan Hui's attempt, Confucius replies that Yan Hui will be executed. In the unfolding dialogue, Confucius relates the main critique regarding the other lineages by letting Yan Hui ask whether a particular practice "would work." Confucius negates these practices and indicates why they are undesirable. The practice of "being a follower of the ancients" (i.e. a mere transmitter of superior wisdom) is, for example, dismissed as a mere diversion to avoid taking responsibility for one's own ideas.[219]

[219] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*,26.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is very critical towards the Masters and exposes their teachings as a mere strategy to win a dispute or as a means to win approval from rulers. These Masters are abusing language to affirm their own truth, suggesting that they were more concerned with proving themselves right than being genuinely concerned about creating political stability and diminishing violence. But, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s Confucius sees through these subterfuges, and ironically but powerfully predicts that this violent approach to dominating others will be seen through by malevolent rulers, and rewarded with violence, in the form of the execution of the "Masters."

§4.3 Genuineness and Living Out One's Full Lifespan

It is my contention to show that the *Zhuāngzǐ* provides comparative philosophy with strategies that can help comparative philosophers to employ a critical-transformational discourse that enables them to respond to the other and the other's perspectives in the most open and respectful way possible. The text embodies a rhetorical style of raising issues and then quickly dismissing them, a style often identified as a "sceptical" or "relativist" position, but which I will approach as a position that helps us to become less dogmatic and more open minded. The *Zhuāngzǐ* sees the position of the pivot as the perspective in which a person experiences the most freedom and has the most clarity. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on living out one's natural lifespan, its endorsement of an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind and its endorsement of flexible responsiveness towards resistance are all aspects that are important to realizing genuineness. The pivot as the preferred position entails certain beliefs, comportments and attitudes and stimulates us to rely on our natural ability to decide what is appropriate or fitting in a certain situation.

The novelty of the *Zhuāngzǐ* lies in the fact that the text does not propose an alternative political theory for the ruler, but instead urges each of us of to restore our innate power to approach the myriad things naturally. The *Zhuāngzǐ* particularly shows how man's tendency to see his own perspective as ultimate can lead to bickering, debate, execution, and oppression. In contrast to its intellectual contemporaries, the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes the individual and the cultivation of their inner spontaneity or genuineness. An inauthentic life can best be restored by taking responsibility of one's own life and restoring one's natural spontaneity through self-transformation, or better said, the destruction of

conflating of one's self-identity which prevents one from responding creatively to any situation.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not advocate an individualist philosophy, but firmly believes in the natural correlation and connection between things and persons. Restoring our natural responsiveness and nourishing the world means recognizing that we are all part of a larger whole and entails embracing a radical impartiality towards the human realm, towards the self and towards other perspectives. Man should model himself upon the natural *dào,* which makes no distinctions between "this," "that," "so" and "not so." *Dào* is impartial to human concerns for being "this" or "that", because for *dào* all perspectives are ultimately One. Throughout the text, the *Zhuāngzǐ* shows how each perspective is unique and has its own preferences, but that human beings tend to group perspectives together, creating all sorts of artificial distinctions that are consequently but mistakenly seen as the need to internalize and cling to pre-established, or societal, preferences. For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, violence does not emerge from the fact that each perspective has certain preferences, but emerges from clinging to these preferences and preferring "this" perspective to "that" perspective. Clinging to preferences creates a fixated, artificially completed (*chéng;* 成) heart-mind, that is biased and partial.

Before we illuminate the different topics of the text, it is important to look at the passage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* were the "pivot of *dào*" (§2.16-2.18) is discussed so that we can understand how this part of the text needs to be seen as the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s overall philosophical project:

> 物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也。雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；因是因非，因非因是。是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。故曰「莫若以明」。

> *There is no being that is not "that." There is no being that is not "this." But one cannot be seeing these from the perspective of "that": one knows them only from "this," [i.e., from one's own perspective]. Thus, we can say: "That" emerges from "this," and "this" follows from "that." This is the theory of the simultaneous generation*

> *of "this" and "that." But by the same token, their simultaneous generation is their simultaneous destruction, and vice versa. Simultaneous affirmability is simultaneous negatability, and vice versa. What is circumstantially right is also circumstantially wrong, and vice versa. Thus, the Sage does not proceed from any one of them alone but instead lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven. And that too is only a case of going by the rightness of the present "this."*
>
> *"This" is also a "that." "That" is also a "this." "THAT" posits a "this" and a "that" – a right and wrong – of its own. But "THIS" also posits a "this" and a "that" – a right and a wrong – of its own. So is there really any "that" versus "this," any right versus wrong? Or is there really no "that" versus "this"? When "this" and "that" – right and wrong – are no longer coupled as opposites – that is called the Course as Axis, the axis of all courses. When this axis [pivot] finds its place in the centre, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted by none. For it has an endless supply of "rights," and an endless supply of "wrongs." Thus, I say, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious.*[220]

Ziporyn has translated 是 and非 as "this" and "that," in which是 and非 are actions: to posit something as "this" or "that." The passage wants us to see that affirming something as "this" or "that," is a human activity dependent upon a particular perspective. Furthermore, it shows how "this" and "that" are generated simultaneously: positing something as "this" is automatically denying that it is a "that." In §4.2, I have discussed the philosophical context of the Master scholars and their rhetorical style. The *Zhuāngzǐ* mocks their complacency in being the knowers of what is ultimately and universally "this," or "that," or "right" or "wrong." The fundamental problem is not positing something as "this" or "that,' but originates in a person's inability to see the interconnectedness of "this," and "that." I will illuminate the passage in the next section in which I will particularly show in which way the *Zhuāngzǐ* wants us to embrace a position in which we are open to different alternatives.

First of all, the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that we cannot rely on meta-standards that can guide our *shìfēi*-distinctions and judgments. This means that we also cannot assume that humans have a privileged position in the world; from the perspective

[220] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12.

of humans, human beings are the most important creatures, but another living thing will see it differently. In the *Lǎozǐ* and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, humans have no special role or position, but are just as other things, generated by and returning to *dào*. *Dào* does not only generate human beings (*rén,*人) but rears alike the ten-thousand things (*wànwù*, 萬物).[221] This realignment between *dào*, nature and humans led to a different understanding of the attitude and characteristic of the ideal man (the Sage). The *Zhuāngzǐ* concentrates on the personal realm instead of the political realm and tries to restore the genuineness of human beings so that they can "wander far and unfettered," and do not add any violence to the universe.[222]

Jiang argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s central intellectual project is that of personal freedom, a freedom that Jiang defines as "creating and discovering new possibilities to navigate various constrains of the world, instead of simply making choices as an "escape" of necessity."[223] Although I do agree with Jiang that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s notion of carefree wandering (*xiāoyáoyóu,* 逍遙遊) revolves around altering our relations or attitude to external phenomena, I don't think that the main concern is personal freedom, as this position does not take into account that the Sage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* has lost himself, and technically speaking has no-self. Furthermore, Jiang's position does not consider the crucial passage of the pivot that is "located in the centre of the circle of things."[224] Occupying the centre of the circle of things is associated with Illumination; with supreme wisdom. The supreme wisdom does not only refer, I would argue, to "creating and discovering new possibilities to navigate various constraints of the world," but in living out one's full lifespan and nourishing the self-so-ness of the other perspectives as well.

The overall project of the *Zhuāngzǐ*is the integration of all the myriad things and restoring their natural connection and interrelatedness. This entails that we should harmonize or equalize differences, deconstruct or conflated sense of self-identity and embracing the indeterminacy of reality. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s aim is as such to liberate each human being from various constraints so that the ultimate Course can be realized which means that each thing can follow its own preferences and inclinations. Nevertheless, the text is realistic in the sense that it recognizes that, in times of great social upheaval and times when persons are

[221] Perkins, F. (2014). *Heaven and Earth are not Humane*, Indiana University Press, 195.
[222] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 3.
[223] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 292.
[224] Mair, V.H. (1994). *Wandering on the Way. Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, Bantan Books, 15.

abusing their power; it is not tenable to nurture the natural self-so-ness of both self and other. When the Course is absent in human society, all that the wise Sages can do is to preserve their own life.

At this point, it is interesting to compare the *Zhuāngzǐ* to Levinas. In Chapter Three we have seen that Levinas' main belief is that the immanent worldview, or the natural view, needs the surplus of transcendence in order to do justice to the otherness of the Other. Where Levinas thus interprets natural spontaneity as the egocentric concern with one's self-perseverance in being, the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that one's natural spontaneity is not egocentric but is a potentiality in which both self and other naturally interrelate and connect. The *Zhuāngzǐ* localizes the problem of violence against the otherness of the Other in the self's rigid ways of thinking and particularly the tendency to hold on to one particular *dào* (*chéng,* 成). The main problem is, once more, not making distinctions, but rigidly clinging to these distinctions and mistakenly believing that there is a meta-standard that governs what is right or wrong in any given situation. The deconstruction of these patterns of rigid thinking will help us to restore our natural spontaneity to follow along any *dào* and to see how reality naturally interconnects.

Equalizing assessments of things originates in the recognition that one's natural spontaneity is nurtured by Heaven, the force that nurtures all the myriad things and affirms the equality of these different things. The *Zhuāngzǐ* offers several strategies to overcome the egological culture of the same and to respond to the givenness and otherness of each perspective. The overarching project of the *Zhuāngzǐ* in a minimal sense is self-preservation and in the fullest sense harmonizing the myriad things, which is realized when human beings have deconstructed their calculative heart-mind. Being in the center of the pivot and following along different *shìfēi*-patterns in a minimal sense thus prevents us from being attacked by others, but when others also are persuaded to embrace a less rigid way of thinking, harmony between self and other will be more easily be realized.

The calculative heart-mind, from which human beings assess the world based on calculative gain, is the culprit of violence and the loss of harmony. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s desire to restore the natural interrelatedness between the myriad things leads to a reconfiguration of the human self-other relation in which self and other are seen as unique beings that form an integral part of the Whole. In the *Zhuāngzǐ,* differences are not fixed or static but are constantly changing and transforming, both within the self and the other as within the way they relate to

each other. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s primary focus is on living out one's natural lifespan and integrating the human realm in the natural flux of transformation, which entails that we should recognize that our relation to the other and the other's perspectives is constantly changing and that we have to honour and attune to these differences to be able to affirm them as equally different.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s overarching project is for us all to realize the Way through inhabiting the pivot of *dào* so that we can "respond to their infinite transformations."[225] Fundamental to obtaining this flexible responsiveness is accepting that reality is constantly changing and cannot be divided into rigid opposed terms of "this" and "that." An important aspect of being at rest in the pivot is accepting that indecision and insecurity and especially contingency mark our assertions; when we unconditionally have accepted this, we have freed ourselves of intense emotions and limiting behaviours and beliefs.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s "golden rule" for self-preservation seems to be not to let others disturb or upset one's peaceful heart-mind (a wandering, mirroring and empty heart-mind) while doing no harm to others.[226] Furthermore, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on "the usefulness of the useless" and its psychological strategy of genuine pretending in which we mirror persons who are corrupted by "playing the baby with him if he's playing the baby," are all effective strategies to preserve one's own life while at the same time letting others follow their own preferences and desires.[227]

Self-preservation and harmonizing perspectives are the main motivations to prefer being at rest in the middle of the pivot, as this position enables a person to see things without being emotionally invested in them and nourish all the perspectives from an impartial, non-attached position of clarity (*míng*, 明). In the pivot, the Sage is at rest and acts from a state of emotional equanimity and non-preference, the Sage can understand the nature of each perspective and is as such able to attune to their needs and preferences instead of corrupting their inborn nature by trying to impose standards on them. Persons who train their heart-mind not to be disturbed by inner or outer events have the power to access the situation in an open, non-biased way and will respond in a more creative and harmonious way.

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[225] Mair, V.H..*Wandering the Way,* 15.
[226] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 27
[227] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 30

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s aim is to show a different way of being in the world, in which we can experience the self-other relation differently. Jiang argues that the *Lǎozǐ* "appropriates the Mohist idea of the impartiality of Heaven but did so under a naturalist cosmos, making justice and impartiality a natural feature of the cosmos."[228] This applies to the *Zhuāngzǐ* as well, with the slight adjustment that the *Zhuāngzǐ* makes impartiality a natural strategy for self-preservation and, subsequently for the affirmation of other perspectives. Nevertheless, the *Zhuāngzǐ* is very realistic regarding the sage's ability to restore the naturalness of the human realm by integrating it into the Whole. The *Zhuāngzǐ* claims that when the "Course is present in the world," the Sage perfects himself with it, which implies that when there are many persons who have adopted to some degree a wandering, empty and mirroring attitude, the Sage is able to harmonize the different perspectives fairly easily. Yet in a world in which most persons see their perspective as the ultimate truth and fight the other, all we can do is avoid being hurt and harmed.[229] When persons abuse their power and try to master and control the other perspectives, the Sage is not able to nourish the different perspective, but can only concentrate on his self-preservation, which entails that the Sage concentrates on remaining at rest in the middle of the pivot.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to question the validity of the political-philosophical discourse of its time. The text responds especially to the Mohist commitment to disputation (*biàn*, 辯) and offers a more open way to approach the other and the other's perspectives. The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not claim that the position of the pivot resolves all conflict between self and other, because that would presuppose the reliance on a meta-standard that makes the Zhuangzian approach true. The subtle difference between the *Zhuāngzǐ* and the other Master scholars is that the Sage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* aligns itself with the current situation and responds to that what is most fitting or adequate in the experienced situation, because the Sage is then in line with how nature unfolds. I agree with Graham (1978) who indicates that the *Zhuāngzǐ* sees disputation as a practice that alienates us from Heaven. Disputation for the *Zhuāngzǐ* is according to Graham:

> *[..] the technique for judging between alternatives, the right and the wrong, the beneficial and the harmful, self and other, that we cut ourselves off from the world we objectify, and lose the capacity of the angler, the carpenter and the swimmer to heed his total*

[228] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 185.
[229] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 32.

> *situation with undivided attention and respond with the immediacy of a shadow to a shape and an echo to a sound.*[230]

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'rejects for the need for standards to evaluate *shìfēi*-judgments and responds to the Mohist commitment to disputation and its rhetorical style. In the *Zhuāngzǐ*' we also frequently find references to artisan tools and artisans such as carpenters. The pivot of *dào,* - also translated as the "Potter's Wheel," uses tools as a metaphor for pairing counterparts. For the Mohist, artisan tools are metaphorically used to show how making evaluative judgement is dependent on having the adequate tool, having adequate and reliable standards.

Realizing justice is for the Mohist similar to a craft. The will of Heaven has a unified standard (*míngfǎ*, 明法) that measures (*dú*, 度) whether opinions are successful (*zhōng*, 中) and are therefore "so/right" (*shì*,是) or are not successful and therefore "not-so/wrong" (*fēi*,非).[231] Jiang (2021) argues that the Mohists were the first ones who fully embraced justice and who laid the foundation for adjudicating whether an argument is right (*shì,* 是) and wrong (*fēi*, 非).[232] The *Zhuāngzǐ*'wants to show that these *shìfēi*-distinctions are merely opinions or limited perspectives; appropriate from the points of view of those who assert them, but which are not generalizable to different people and to different situations because there is no fixed vantage point from which we can evaluate these *shìfēi*-distinctions.

The problematic nature of making *shìfēi*-distinctions is a concentrated focus of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, inspired by the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on recognizing how these distinctions emerge from a particular perspective. While the Mohist method of inclusive care (*jiānài,*兼愛), aimed at individuals benefiting each other by caring for others inclusively if needed or desired is important, being free of preferences and not being committed to a particular *shìfēi*-distinction, is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* the real solution to eschewing anger. It might be that the term "inclusive" or "to combine, to unite" *jiān* (兼) is replaced in the *Zhuāngzǐ* by the term "even" "level with" *qí* (齊), as nourishing is aimed at the self and its relation to the oneness of *qí* (齊). For the *Zhuāngzǐ* "equalizing all things," is a way of affirming each perspective (whether human or non-human) in their self-so-ness (*zìrán*, 自然). The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that the best position, the most realistic

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[230] Graham, A.C. *Later Mohist Logic*, 21.

[231] De Reu, W. " How to Throw a Pot: The Centrality of the Potter's Wheel in the Zhuangzi" *Asian Philosophy*, 20 No. 1, (2010):44.

[232] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 116.

perspective, is being in the centre of the pivot, in which we can see how the Mohist and Confucian attempt to define one another reveals that there is no such thing as an ultimate "so" or "not so".

Part II: *Dào*, Self-Transformation And Perspectivism

§4.4 What is Debatable is not *Dào*

I have indicated that the overall intent of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is to overcome disputation by "finding the pivot of *dào*", which entails that we should never cling to dualistic oppositions but align ourselves with the nature of *dào*. In this part I will show that the first step for finding the pivot of *dào* is the deconstruction of language, logic, and knowledge. The deconstruction will trigger the loss of the calculative heart-mind, which is the precondition for taking rest in the pivot. I will first clarify the nature of *dào* and which specific role *dào* fulfils in both the *Zhuāngzǐ* as in the other Master texts.

The relation between *dào* (Way, path) Heaven (*tiān*), morality and social order as well as their nature was heavily debated and (re)-negotiated by the pre-Qin Masters. A common consensus among the Masters is that, in the presently chaotic scene of social and political fragmentation and increasing bloodshed, the Way has been lost, and that losing the Way was the main cause for the decline of the Zhou dynasty and the violence of the Warring States Period.

The character *dào* is a compound of the words for head (*shǒu*, 首) and the radical *chuò* (辶), which means "walking," or "passing through." In Chinese, many words, with no morphological changes, can serve as both nouns and verbs in different sentences or even the same sentence; *dào* can therefore both verbally refer to an event (action, process) as well as nominally to a path.[233] The "head walking," can be metaphorically interpreted as the ruler or master that leads one in a certain destination. As a noun, *dào* refers to "principle," or "pattern," indicating that the way represents the logic of things or events. Walking the way is etymologically thus synonymous with knowing the way. *Dào* as a verb can also mean "the act of saying," or "discourse," which indicates that *dào* has multiple meanings and is also used in different ways by the Masters of the pre-Qin

[233] Sun, Z. (2015). *Language, Discourse, and Practice in Ancient China*. Springer, 117

period. While some Masters interpret *dào* as the Way, it can also be interpreted as principle (*lǐ,* 理) and as discourse.

The pre-Qin Masters tended to interpret *dào* as the pattern of Heaven and/or as the patterns of human life and assumed that an ultimate principle or Way must exist. *Dào* was interpreted as the ultimate reality or ultimate principle of the universe, the principle that, when followed, brought prosperity and social harmony. The human realm was seen a manifestation of *dào* and needed to be modelled and perfected in the light of the ultimate principle that provided the socio-political and moral horizon. Jiang (2021) classifies the pre-Qin thinkers as either embracing the *dào* of human morality or humaneness (*rén*, 仁) , which is partial in nature, or justice which is impartial.[234] In the *Mòzǐ dào* is interpreted as Heaven's will (*tiānzhì*, 天志) that serves as a method (*fǎ*, 法) to establish impartial standards of justice (*yì*, 義). The *Mòzǐ* argues that Heaven is all-inclusive and impartial in its activities (*jiānàixià*,兼愛下), which is why humans should not only care for their next of kin but should extend their care to others when needed. For the *Lǎozǐ*, *dào* gives rise to continuity, continuity gives rise to difference, difference gives rise to plurality, and plurality gives rise to the manifold of everything that is happening (*wànwù*, 萬物)." [235]

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is frequently read as a Daoist text that interprets *dào* like the *Lǎozǐ* as giving birth to the One and then to the myriad things. But when we look closely at some passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, it seems that the *Zhuāngzǐ* has an incompatible understanding of *dào. Dào* is described as the dynamic, creative force in all its potentialities, the event or process of transformation itself, a potency (*dé*, 德) that has no beginning or ending and is without any principle of constancy. *Dào* is spontaneous, unlimited, timeless, and indivisible. The *dào* is the natural course of the universe:

> 夫道，有情有信，無為無形；可傳而不可受，可得而不可見；自本自根，未有天地，
>
> *[..] has its own tendency and consistency, but without any deliberate activity or definite form. It can be transmitted but not received,*

[234] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 51.

[235] Ames, R. T. & Hall, D.L. (2003). *Daodejing. "Making this Life Significant." A Philosophical Translation*, Ballentine Books.

> *attained but not shown. Being its own root and its own foundation, it exists firmly even when heaven and earth are not yet there.*[236]

Where the dào in the Lǎozǐ is "alone and constant, ever present and in motion," (*jìxīliáoxī, dúlì bù gǎi, zhōuxìng èr bù dài*, 寂兮寥兮, 獨立不改, 周行而不殆) as "the root of all things" (*tiānxiàmǔ*,天下木) the *dào* in the *Zhuāngzǐ* has no ultimate presence or reality. *Dào* has in the *Zhuāngzǐ* no metaphysical connotation referring to an ultimate reality or objective law; it is the event of becoming-into-being as the process of differentiation and un-differentiation. This event of coming-into-being is a temporal break between the being of a thing (*wù,* 物) and the absence of a thing. The coming-into-being is a split in the thing itself, - a being engendered by *dào*-, a moment in which things come forth into existence with their complements or opposites.

Dào thus engenders complementary things and complementary perspectives. Transformation (*biàn,* 變) and change (*huà*, 化) are essentially inherent of the coming-into-being (*shēng*, 生) in which a thing can even transform into its opposite or counterpart. Similar to the balance between *yīn* (陰) and *yáng* (陽), the *Zhuāngzǐ* refers to this process as the tipping of the vessel, which will automatically empty itself when full. Every-thing comes-into-being, transforms and changes according to the natural rhythm of *dào*. The natural rhythm of each thing (including living beings) is in each moment utterly unique and unpredictable, which the *Zhuāngzǐ* calls "self-so-ness" (*zìrán*, 自然).

When we look at the passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ*'on the myriad things and Heaven, we can gain insight into the relation between *dào*, the myriad things and Heaven, as well as understanding how the self is essentially connected and interdependent upon the other. This is an important step in our study, as the aim of this dissertation is to affirm the togetherness of disparate cultural philosophical traditions, while at the same time accounting for their uniqueness. The *Zhuāngzǐ*, like the *Lǎozǐ*, argues that humans are part of nature; they are part of "the myriad things" (*wànwù*, 萬物). The novelty of the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s conception of the myriad things is that it argues that Heaven generates every "this" as singular, which suggests that the ultimate "Oneness" of the universe is a mere collection of a multitude of different and unique perspectives. It suggests also that each "this" is generated in a particular way and has particular preferences. Each perspective generated as a particular "this" will follow its own unique course as the innate divisions (*tiānní,* 天倪) of heaven.

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[236] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,* 43.

"Oneness" (*yī*, 一) in the *Zhuāngzǐ* has a fundamentally different meaning than in the *Lǎozǐ*; in the *Lǎozǐ* divisions emerge from the Oneness of *dào*, while for the *Zhuāngzǐ*, Heaven as the infinite process of generation, transformation and change, brings each thing in the world in its *self-so-ness*. This implies, as Graham and Hansen have already suggested, that all things are actually in the *Zhuāngzǐ* not one but are treated by Heaven and the Sage as One.[237] The different perspectives do not emerge from Oneness because *dào* is not the ultimate reality of root of all things. Each perspective is without an origin, without a root and is merely a temporal unity that consists of a finite process of transformation and change.

The recognition that perspectives do not share an ultimate origin is important to understand the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s conception of knowledge and truth but is also the distinguishing quality that justifies the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s articulation of the Sage who takes a place at the pivot of *dào* and harmonizes all perspectives. The Sage who harmonizes the different perspectives is not merely adding a new perspective but works with Heaven. Nelson (2014) suggests that this entails embracing the perspective of nature as a whole instead of the perspective of humanity, allowing the *Zhuāngzǐ* to articulate a unicentric holism.[238] The term "unicentric holism," describing the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s "perspective of all perspectives,' is also introduced and elucidated by Brook Ziporyn:

> *Unicentric holism will refer to any doctrine holding that there is indeed a perspective from which all things can be viewed aright, from which their connections may be comprehended in their true aspect; this would be the holistic view that the quiddities of all things are determined solely by their relations to other things, and thus the whole is more than the sum of its parts, but that a whole has only one centre and hence one and only one true perspective that can validly determine the value and nature of the parts."*[239]

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[237] Graham, A.C. (2001). *Chuang-Tzu. The Inner Chapters*, Hackett Publishing Company, 56. Hansen, C. (1992). *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation*. Oxford University Press, 410-412.

[238] Nelson, E.S. "The Human and the Inhuman: Ethics and Religion in the *Zhuangzi*" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy,* 41 S.1, (2014):724/725.

[239] Ziporyn, B. (2003). "How Many Are the Ten Thousand Things of I? Relativism, Mysticism, and the Privileging of Oneness in the "Inner Chapters."" In: S. Cook (eds.). *Hiding the World in the World*, State University of New York Press, 35.

I will call this "unicentric holism" or the position of the pivot, an "realist perspectivism." I prefer this term because it emphasizes that it is still a human perspective, - we cannot transcend our human form, but it is the perspective in which we have the most clarity because we are no longer emotionally committed to a more limited standard or perspective. The pivot is also the position in which we affirm the correlation or togetherness of the self and the other and have dissolved the dichotomy between self and other, because we see that we are at the same time "self" and "other". I will clarify the self-other relation in the pivot later on in this chapter.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to suggest that because Heaven nourishes each thing, we should therefore also affirm each thing it its unique spontaneous nature.240 Proper nurturing thus must start with the right consideration for the arrangement of perspectives of the other, which means that we respond to the needs of the other. Responding adequately as the emulation of *dào* entails incorporating what the other takes to be his or her needs, rather than assuming that there are general needs that we have in common or assuming that his or her needs are the same as mine. Recognizing and attuning to differences is thus central to finding the "pivot of *dào,*" it originates from a deep trust in the natural operations of *dào*.

Central to the *Zhuāngzǐ* is show how we naturally can care for the myriad things, for different perspectives, without the need to rely on an evaluative standard. The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that we can see all perspectives as a whole when we no longer attach to our preferred perspective. As Heaven is impartial to the different things and nourishes them all, the Sage wants to abide to "no-thing" and embraces the impartial perspective of Heaven. Heaven as the all-encompassing perspective of all perspectives is *wúwù* (無物), a no-thing, or open space and the encompassing of things and no-things. Heaven is the "reservoir," (*tiānfǔ*, 天府) or "numinous reservoir," of no-thing that encompassing the thing and its opposite by "Transforming Openness." (*huàtōng*化通; *dàtōng*, 大通). The Sage who is the same as the Transforming Openness of Heaven is "free of all preference," (*wúqíng*, 無情) and as such impartial and "free of all constancy," (*fāngqiě yǔ* wùhuà èr wèishǐ yǒu héng, 方且與物化而未始有恒) implying that the Sage does not rely on an ultimate origin or root.

240 We should assume the "Primacy of Nourishing Life," or "Nourishing the Host [or Master] of Life," or "What is primary in nourishing life." (Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi* 21)

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s specific challenge now becomes clear. Most (if not all) perspectives do have preferences and also do tend to believe that there is an ultimate origin (*héng*, 恒) of things. The difficulties that the *Zhuāngzǐ* deals with is how we can emulate *dào* and can adopt, as particular beings, an all-encompassing perspective of "Transforming Openness," that harmonizes and nourishes all. The challenge is not only to become as particular perspectives free of preferences and free of all constancy but it also concerns the problem how we can nourish and harmonize perspectives that have lost their way.

More specifically, if Heaven nourishes and equalizes all things, how can we as particular perspectives nourish and equalize perspectives that do not take themselves as perspectives but as comprehensive views of truth with constancy? How can the Genuine Human Being "take joy in clearing the way for things," [and human beings] if that human being tries to impose their preferences on others? I think these are the most important questions that the *Zhuāngzǐ* tries to address, as why the text on several occasions warns that, when we haven't yet mastered the Course ourselves, we should not try to impose it on others.[241] This problem furthermore helps us to understand the difference between the Master scholars who affirm a particular position and the *Zhuāngzǐ*. Both positions are composed of a set of beliefs, behaviours, comportments and emotional cognition, but the difference between the Zhuangzian Sage and the other Sages is that the the Zhuangzian Sage keeps on deconstructing his or her position in order to be able to respond to each situation in a fresh and non-biased way.

§4.5 Knowledge and Truth

In this study I try to show the relevance of the *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas for comparative philosophy. I have proposed that comparative philosophers need to cultivate a form of ethical competence in which they become open to different perspectives and methodologies and critically reflect on their emotional commitments and assumptions. The *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes a critical-transformational position of the pivot in which persons have become free of preferences and can respond to the other and the other's perspectives in their uniqueness by seeing them ultimately as the same. In this section, I will outline how the *Zhuāngzǐ* 's endorsement of "non-knowledge" is related to the recognition of bias and preferences and the acceptance that reality never can be fully known.

[241] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 24.

Knowledge (*zhī*, 知) plays a pivotal role in the *Zhuāngzǐ* and has become a major topic of debate among contemporary interpreters of the text. Hansen (1998, 2003) interprets the *Zhuāngzǐ* as defending both a relativist as well as a sceptical position, while Ivanhoe (1993,1996) suggests that we should not interpret the *Zhuāngzǐ* as a sceptical philosopher nor as endorsing relativism.[242] Fraser proposes a more nuanced reading and argues that, while the *Zhuāngzǐ* is sceptical about our ability to know which class of distinctions should be privileged, the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not question our ability to know how to distinguish between things in an ordinary, everyday manner.[243] I will interpret the texts' use of scepticism as an integral part of its overall project, which is aimed at enabling the Sage to find the pivot of *dào,* a reading in which scepticism is a necessary tool to deconstruct knowledge and become free of preferences. I will argue that the *Zhuāngzǐ* cannot be a relativist or sceptic because that would entail that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is committed to a particular doctrine or theory. Furthermore, the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not criticize all knowledge, but just a particular kind of knowledge.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is very critical of the ruling elite, who abuse knowledge to control its citizens; a vulgar use of knowledge that is also embraced by the Masters who restrain the natural spontaneity of others in the name of moral cultivation. Instead of wasting our time on "petty knowledge", we should gain knowledge of how the world consists of different things and how we should interact with these different perspectives. This kind of knowledge is "psychological knowledge," knowledge that helps us to understand how the positions of others are eventually the result of (arbitrarily) chosen starting points. The *Zhuāngzǐ* prefers this kind of knowledge not because it is "better" knowledge, but because it serves the practical goal of realizing the Course and restoring harmony between humans.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s scepticism needs to be seen in the light of its aim of "finding the pivot of *dào*," as only the person who is not committed to a particular pattern of *shìfēi*-distinctions can be perfectly at rest in the middle. Central to

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[242] Hansen, C. (1983). "A Tao of 'Tao' in Chuang Tzu." In; V. Mair (eds). *Experimental Essays on Chuang-Tzu,* University of Hawai'i, 24-55; Hansen, C. (2003). "Guru or Skeptic? Relativistic Skepticism in the Zhuangzi." In: S. Cook (eds.) *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*. SUN,128-162.; Ivanhoe, P. J. "Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill, and the Ineffable Dao" *American Academy of Religion* 61 No 4, (1993):639-654; Ivanhoe, P.J. (1996). "Was Zhuangzi a Relativist?" In: P. Kjellberg & P.J. Ivanhoe (eds.). *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangz*i, State University of New York Press,196-214.

[243] Fraser, C. "Knowledge and Error in Early Chinese Thought" Dao, 10, (2011):127–148.

the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s philosophy of life is that the universe is in endless flux without constancy (*héng,* 恒), which means that the universe does not have an ultimate origin or reality. The process of infinite transformation and the shifting from one thing to another are responsible for the effacement of things and life, but also for changes of meaning and knowledge. Central to the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s cosmology is the observation that the myriad things are mutually engendering and have no origin or essence. When things have no essence, are unique, and are mutually engendered and have no origin, objective knowledge that can evaluate particular *shìfēi*-judgments is compromised and replaced by subjective, or practical knowledge.

Before discussing knowledge and truth in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, it is useful to offer some context on the meaning of knowledge in the pre-Qin period. First of all, the character 知 in pre-Qin texts denotes both knowledge (*zhī*,知) and wisdom (*zhì*,智).[244] Secondly, knowledge can refer not only to practical know-how knowledge, but may also include moral knowledge (to know how to act, how to feel), to be acquainted with (to know what a cat is) or it can refer to a general proposition (to know that a bachelor is an unmarried man). Knowledge was also used within the political-moral framework that revolved around the contestation between partial humaneness and impartial justice.[245] Knowledge was, in any case, for the pre-Qin Masters, always connected to action, or behaviour. The Confucian virtues of benevolence (*rén*, 仁) and righteousness or justice (*yì*, 義) were conceived as morally perfected knowledge in which purpose matches conduct.[246]

The *Zhuāngzǐ* emerged from a historical and socio-political background in which philosophy was considered *biàn* (辯, disputation)[247]; the different Masters argued over who promoted the best Way of life, who had the best understanding of the special qualities of human life and who best understood which values and virtues needed to be cultivated. It is from this context that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s scepticism and critique on knowledge need to be understood: the *Zhuāngzǐ* attempts to express the idleness of knowledge and the way knowledge is used

[244] Graham, A.C. *Disputers of the Tao*, 137.

[245] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy*, 39.

[246] Ibid., 137

[247] 辯 is closely related to 辨 (distinction, distinguishing). 辨 refers to the cognitive capacity to draw distinctions between different (kinds of) things and/or recognizing things in the right way. 辯 is the activity of disputing how to make distinctions by drawing upon analogies and giving justifications. Knowledge is sometimes seen as the wisdom to draw adequate distinctions.

to affirm one's own merit and is used as an instrument to gain political power. Even though the *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects intense cultivation of knowledge and instead proposes to rely on our inborn "uncarved" nature, it does agree with the Masters that the Course is lost and needs to be restored.

In this respect the *Zhuāngzǐ* isn't an outlier. Although the text argues against the mainstream discourse that human beings are mandated by Heaven to follow their unique course (*zìrán*, 自然) and need to embrace their inborn "unsocialized nature" to become virtuous persons, the text does aim to formulate different strategies to restore the Course. However, the *Zhuāngzǐ* attacks "idle" or "petty knowledge," knowledge that is not used to navigate everyday situations but is used to overpower the elite; knowledge that is shown off and affirms the merits or power of a particular person or group of persons. The *Zhuāngzǐ* exposes this as "sham Virtuosity":

> 肩吾見狂接輿。狂接輿曰：「日中始何以語女？」肩吾曰：「告我：君人者，以己出經式義度，人孰敢不聽而化諸！」狂接輿曰：「是欺德也。其於治天下也，猶涉海鑿河，而使蚉負山也。夫聖人之治也，治外乎？正而後行，確乎能其事者而已矣。且鳥高飛以避矰弋之害，鼷鼠深穴乎神丘之下，以避熏鑿之患，而曾二蟲之無知！
>
> *Jian Wu said, "He told me that if a ruler can produce regulations, standards, judgments, and measures derived from the example of his own person, none will dare disobey him and all will be reformed by him." Jieyu said, "That is sham Virtuosity. To rule the world in this way is like trying to carve a river out of the ocean, or asking a mosquito to carry a mountain on its back. For when a sage rules, does he rule anything outside himself?*[248]

For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, standards derived from our own perspective but that are mistakenly taken as universal, will restrain the other perspectives. Perspectivism is a recurrent them in the *Zhuāngzǐ* that not only refers to being in somebody else's position, but also reveals how knowledge is derived from our own particular preferences. The problem is not that we have preferences and that we are tied to our perspectives, but the source of the problem resides in the tendency to judge others and approach others from our own perspective. The Sage who responds from the pivot does not criticize the other and the

[248] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 50/51

other's perspectives, but attunes to their needs from a position of tranquillity and emptiness and holds as such the broadest, most encompassing perspective.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is critical of maxims that are aimed to generate disapproval and approval, and which are used as standards for judging action. While I agree with scholars such as Hansen who argue that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is a "relativistic sceptic" claiming that one's linguistic and conceptual perspective determine one's knowledge,[249] I think that this is not the main concern of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. The specific problem that the *Zhuāngzǐ* wants to address is that we fail to see that knowledge is tied to our unique perspective, is constantly changing, and transforming and is, dramatically but palpably, nourished by that which we don't know. The futile attempt to question the origin of knowledge misses the fact that we have knowledge even if we don't know or acknowledge where that knowledge comes from.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that Heaven produces the myriad things in their unique self-so-ness; all these creatures do not know how they are born, but nevertheless "they get hold of it somehow, without knowing how they do so."[250] (故天下誘然皆生,而不知其所以生;同焉皆得,而不知其所以). As humans are part of nature, they naturally know how to live well, as the "piping of Heaven" "gusts through all the then thousand differences, allowing each to go its own way."[251] (夫吹萬不同，而使其自已也，咸其自取). The *Zhuāngzǐ* endorses spontaneous knowledge as the suspension of any judgment and the rejection of reflection on emotion and cognition, so that one can attune to one's natural responsiveness and "instead entrust it [each thing] to the everyday function [of each being] (唯達者知通為一,為是不用而寓諸庸).[252]

Spontaneous knowledge is responding to the needs and preferences of the other and the other's perspectives, a responsiveness that originates in the "greater knowledge" (*dàzhī*, 大知) which acknowledges that incorporating what others take to be their needs is key to harmonizing different perspectives. Their everyday function is "what works for them" and we should just let them live their lives instead of mingling with them and trying to pursue them to change their preferences. Pursuing knowledge of what is "so" (right, good) and "not

[249] Hansen, C. *Theory of Chinese Thought*, 268
[250] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 58
[251] Ibid. 9-10
[252] Ibid.13

so" (wrong, bad) that is used to guide action does not lead to a just, good, and beautiful life, but corrupts our inborn nature and leads to "idle knowledge."

Idle knowledge and seeking knowledge to affirm one's (moral) superiority is analogous to making weapons. Pursuing knowledge is in the *Zhuāngzǐ* seen as a "shooting forth like an arrow from a bowstring," creating violence and conflict. Those who pursue idle knowledge will create constant emotional upheaval both for him- or herself as for others. The problem is thus not knowledge *per se*, but using knowledge as an instrument for judging what is the right way to do and what is the correct way to use things (*zhèng,* 正) and using this knowledge to persuade or rule others.

Perspectival knowledge thus becomes idle knowledge when we fail to see that it is merely our own opinion; our own preference for acting and thinking. It cannot be objective knowledge, not only because the universe consists of the relations between the myriad things that are constantly changing, generated, and transforming, but also because the myriad things have no ultimate origin and no essence; each thing is without essence *(qíng*, 情*)*. The *Zhuāngzǐ* frequently mocks the attempt to gain knowledge of the ultimate origin of things; not only does the text show that it leads to an infinite regress, but it also shows that such an attempt only stirs up anxiety and confusion:

> 其發若機栝，其司是非之謂也；其留如詛盟，其守勝之謂也；其殺如秋冬，以言其日消也；其溺之所為之，不可使復之也；其厭也如緘，以言其老洫也；近死之心，莫使復陽也。
>
> *We give, we receive, we act, we construct: all day long we apply our minds to struggles against one thing or another – struggles unadorned or struggles concealed, but in either case tightly packed one after another without gap.*[253]

Similar to Levinas, the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes the violence of the human realm in which everything is made the same, in which human beings are trying to reduce that which is other to something similar and implicitly take their limited perspective as the ultimate truth. In contrast to Levinas, the *Zhuāngzǐ* shows that persons who reduce that which is other to the same experience resistance, which causes stress and anxiety. The experience of resistance needs to be seen as a warning that one is alienated from one's natural spontaneity and has lost

[253] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 10

the natural harmonious connection to the whole. The relationship between self and other is naturally correlated and integrated into the harmonious Whole. However, human beings have alienated themselves from Heaven which had led to the unnatural conflictual opposition between self and other.

The deconstruction of knowledge is an important step to overcome the blockage between self and other and to restore their natural interconnectedness. Idle knowledge refers to the rigid use of claims that leads to fierce discussion, intellectual bickering, and the suppression of alternative views. The *Zhuāngzǐ* points out that, when we are debating and think that we are right and the other is wrong, we are so entangled in our own perspective that we are no longer able to nourish the myriad things. Debates on what is right and wrong can only lead to the spiral of violence as the debaters in their position only align themselves with others who have the same starting point. Adding perspectives which also rely on what is "so" and "not so" leads us nowhere, something that is vividly descripted in the following passage:

> 既使我與若辯矣，若勝我，我不若勝，若果是也？我果非也邪？我勝若，若不吾勝，我果是也？而果非也邪？其或是也，其或非也邪？其俱是也，其俱非也邪？我與若不能相知也，則人固受其黮闇。吾誰使正之？使同乎若者正之，既與若同矣，惡能正之！使同乎我者正之，既同乎我矣，惡能正之！使異乎我與若者正之，既異乎我與若矣，惡能正之！使同乎我與若者正之，既同乎我與若矣，惡能正之！然則我與若與人俱不能相知也，而待彼也邪？何 化聲之相待，若其不相待。和之以天倪，因之以曼衍，所以窮年也。[1]謂和之以天倪？曰：是不是，然不然。是若果是也，則是之異乎不是也亦無辯；然若果然也，則然之異乎不然也亦無辯。忘年忘義，振於無竟，故寓諸無竟。

> *Suppose you and I get into a debate. If you win and I lose, does that really mean you are right and I am wrong? If I win and you lose, does that really mean I'm right and you're wrong? Must one of us be right and the other wrong? Or could both of us be right, or both of us wrong? If neither you nor I can know, a third person would be even more benighted. Whom should we have straightened out the matter? Someone who agrees with you? But since he already agrees with you, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with me? But since he already agrees with me, how can he straighten it out? Someone who disagrees with both of us? But if*

> *he already disagrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? Someone who agrees with both of us? But since he already agrees with both of us, how can he straighten it out? So neither you nor I nor any third party can ever know how it is – shall we wait for yet some "other"?*[254]

The problem with idle knowledge is that it brings violence into the world; it leads to bickering, dispute and anger and leaves humans stressed and depleted. The rigid attachment to knowledge leads to a clogged heart-mind, - a heart-mind already full that clings to what is "so" and "not so"-, preventing humans from being creative and considering the endless perspectives and possibilities of the world. The *Zhuāngzǐ* sees the culprit of our misery in having a "fixed heart-mind" (*chéngxīn*,成心) and suggests that we should liberate our heart-mind from the construction of knowledge and (moral) standards. Embodying Heaven implies that humans become free of preferences and free of all constancy, which means that humans have to accept that knowledge is nothing more than a provisional, temporal opinion.

The conclusion of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that what "man knows is far less than what he does not know.[255] Different perspectives are equally mere opinions or interpretations that emerge from a specific point of view. The main problem of human knowledge is that our knowledge is in the end derived from a subjective point of view, a point of view that is limited when compared to the infinite possibilities and ways of being of the different perspectives of the universe. To see clearly means embracing this as a way of life, indicating that the pivot is the position of the recognition of infinite possibility of indeterminacy as there are always other perspectives that equally fit or are equally appropriate. Deconstruction knowledge also leads to the deconstruction of language and logic. The language of humans is not similar to the chirping of the birds, not because human speech is more elevated or able to "know the Way," but because the human constitution is different to that of birds. The chirping of baby birds seems unsophisticated to man, but to baby birds it is a very sophisticated way of communicating their needs. Instead of judging the other and the other's perspectives, we should respect our innate capabilities. The first commentator of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, Guo Xiang (252–312), complements this point by drawing attention to each being relying on its own potential:

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[254] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*,20.
[255] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 70

> *Though some are larger and some are smaller, every being without exception is released into the range of its own spontaneous attainments, so that each being relies on its own innate character, each deed exactly matching its own capabilities. Since each fits perfectly into precisely the position it occupies, all are equally-far reaching and unfettered. How could anyone be superior to any other?*[256]

The problem that the *Zhuāngzǐ* sees is that when humans do not adequately deal with their limitations, it causes not only conflict and anxiety, but it also blocks them from experiencing life in a natural, harmonious, and carefree way. The pivot of *dào* is not only a position in which humans are freed from conventional knowledge and can shift between a variety of perspectives, but is also the position in which humans experience the least resistance and are therefore content. Being content means affirming "non-knowing," as the recognition that from our confined human perspective we can never gain true knowledge of what is "so" and "not-so". It is also the recognition that we can never transcend our human perspective and that our knowledge is always relative.

The Way is obscured by man's desire for the heart-mind to be "fully formed" (*chéngxīn,* 成心). The heart-mind naturally desires to turn what is perceived into objects of knowledge[257], a desire that is useful but can also cause problems. The acquisition of knowledge is constrained (*kùn*, 困) by what it desires to reach; we will always be obstructed in our desire for knowledge. Our perspectival knowledge is grounded in a process that we cannot understand, and which provides no fixed method or standard. Petty or idle knowledge originates from reasoning that imposes fixed patterns and division onto reality, but these linguistic patterns do not match with the endlessly transforming, changing, and dissolving world.

Forcing your Way into the world brings only more violence to the world, because it prevents the world from taking its own course (*zìrán,* 自然). Human cultivation should not serve some external standard, but should be an internal, self-critical transformation, which in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is called "bringing clarity" (*míng,* 明) by equalizing things. This means that we have to 'unclog our heart-mind' and disregard stored-up knowledge and preconceived ideas and ingrained habits.

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[256] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,* 129

[257] Geaney, J. (2002). *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought*, University of Hawai'i Press, 56.

This will enable us to adequately deal with our limitations instead of artificially trying to control them.

To summarize, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s scepticism is not an isolated philosophical position, but is the first step to restoring our natural integrity and restoring the natural relationship between self and other. Being *at rest* in the middle of the centre of the pivot refers to an unclogged and liberated heart-mind that does not experience intense emotions. Robert Allison argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* aims at a radical change on human consciousness in which the conscious self "does not depend upon the belief in any system of putative truths", but rather silences these attitudes of scholarly thinking, which leads to a transformation of one's personality and a widening of one's perspective.[258] To conclude: it is not that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is a radical sceptic of knowledge, but it offers an analysis of how we are blinded by our belief in knowledge, a blindness that prevents us from living in harmony with the world.

In a similar way, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s relativism should be seen as but a part of its primary project. As we have seen, the *Zhuāngzǐ* endorses a harmonious, non-contradictory oneness composed of unique, constantly changing and transforming things that can never be adequately conveyed in traditional modes of human language and logic. Being at rest in the pivot entails that the Sage approaches the other and the other's perspectives in a different way; his or her way of speaking has changed. Hans Peter Hoffman (2015) concludes that this way of speaking:

> *[..] must be a way of speaking that is no longer useful and can no longer be used as an argument in debates, as a weapon of discerning, as a means and – remembering that the text is from the horrific era of the Warring States – a legitimation of war; a way of speaking, however, that at the same time insists on the importance and the effectiveness of its ideas.*[259]

The *Zhuāngzǐ* offers us insight into how to communicate without using fixed distinctions or elaborate argumentative discourse. The *Zhuāngzǐ* tries to show that we can spontaneously follow a particular *shìfēi*-distinction without the

[258] Allinson, R.E. (1989). *Chuang-Tzu for spiritual transformation: An analysis of the Inner Chapters*, State University of New York Press, 24.

[259] Hoffman, H.P. (2015). "*Yuzhile*. The Joy of Fishes, or, The Play on Words" in R. T. Ames & T. Nakajima (eds.). *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, University of Hawai'i Press, 42.

need to rely on a universal standard. The pivot passage says that the Sage sees how denials and affirmations follow each other (*yīnshì yīnfēi*, 因是因非); the Sage sees how the disputers follow their own *shìfēi*-judgments and are stuck in a rigid way of using language. In the pivot of *dào* humans are no longer attached to any rigid belief, enabling them to others without colonizing them.

For comparative philosophy that generates a variety of different, often incompatible, perspectives, this is key to solving the problem of how we can approach another cultural philosophical tradition in its difference by means of comparison. Comparing A and B is a creative moment in which we affirm the connectedness of A and B and in which we approach A and B without relying on a fixed distinction or a specific pattern of what is "so" and what is "not-so". By using a fluid language of indeterminacy, a language of "spill over-goblet words" that maintains an equilibrium amid different opinions, expressions, and judgments, the *Zhuāngzǐ* is able to affirm the rightness of every perspective.

§4.6 Bringing Clarity

Instead of using knowledge to show off one's moral perfection or as a way to affirm one's moral superiority, the *Zhuāngzǐ* endorses the use of *yǐmíng* as a method to harmonize perspectives. The text argues that "when words demonstrate by debate, they fail to communicate," indicating that when we approach the other and the other's perspectives from a fixed heart-mind we are no longer communicating with them but fighting with them. Language is aimed at facilitating communication between different perspectives, not as an instrument that can proof what is right or wrong. Persons who rest in the pivot are able to communicate with and responds to the different perspective in a flexible open way because they have adopted a critical-transformational position. This entails first of all that persons in the pivot do not offer their views for disputation, which particularly implies that they do not agree nor disagree in a doctrinaire fashion with any of the debaters. Lai and Wai Wai (2014) suggest interpreting the character *yòng* (用), which is frequently used in the *Zhuāngzǐ* not as "listening to" or "trying to understand," but as an active attitude enabling one "to engage in such a way so as to further perpetuate this kind of discourse."[260] *Míng* in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is primarily concerned with avoiding disagreement and needs to be seen as a viable alternative to both relativism and dogmatism. The

[260] Lai, K. & Wai Wai, C. "Ming in the Zhuangzi Neipian: Enlightened Engagement" in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 40, No 3-4, (2013):531-532.

sage is not a relativist who claims that anything goes but treats preferences as situational and provisional. As Fraser aptly explains, the Sage does not hold on to his preference and quickly recognizes the need for an open, flexible approach:

> *Practically, the agent with ming still draws shi fei distinctions, but in an open-ended, adaptive way grounded in a loose, flexible set of ethical and prudential ends, not in a doctrinaire fashion that assumes there is only a single genuine' (zhen) way to proceed, all others being 'false' (wei).*[261]

In the pivot, persons recognize their innate biases and know that they should not hold on to them. Lai and Wai Wai argue that the Sage situates *shìfēi* discourse into the domain of ordinary life (*yōng*, 庸), indicating that the Sage is able to contextualize the perspectives and is able to see how the perspectives emerge from different points of view that are equally permissible. The Sage is therefore not anxious to win the argument but embraces an impartial attitude. The effort of *míng* (clarification) which harmonizes perspectives is more than a method that liberates humans from their anxiety and entanglement but shows a care for all perspectives through transcending all human values and adopting an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind.

While scholars such as Hans-Georg Moeller (2006) and Lee Yearley (1996) interpret the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s use of skilful knowledge as a kind of mysticism, I suggest reading the *Zhuāngzǐ* from a psychological point of view, as a way to cope with the world of intersubjective clashes. The pivot of *dào* needs to be seen as a coping strategy rather than a mystical state in which we have attained spiritual freedom. There is for example nothing mystical to the method of "genuine pretending" that the *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes as a way to interact with tyrants. Genuine pretending is here offered as a way to cope with a tyrant who in no respect adopts an enlightened, nourishing perspective. The method of genuine pretending provides us with psychological insights on how to interact with a perspective that is abusive and harmful:

> 顏闔將傅衛靈公大子，而問於蘧伯玉曰：「有人於此，其德天殺。與之為無方，則危吾國；與之為有方，則危吾身。其知適足以知人之過，而不知其所以過。若然者，吾奈之何？」蘧伯玉曰：「善哉問乎！戒之慎之，正汝身也哉！形莫若就，心莫若

[261] Fraser, C. "*Zhuangzi, Xunzi*, and the Paradoxical Nature of Education" in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33 No 4, (2006):538.

> 和。雖然，之二者有患。就不欲入，和不欲出。形就而入，且為顛為滅，為崩為蹶。心和而出，且為聲為名，為妖為孽。彼且為嬰兒，亦與之為嬰兒；彼且為無町畦，亦與之為無町畦；彼且為無崖，亦與之為無崖。達之，入於無疵。

> *Be compromising in appearance and harmonious in mind. But even these measures can present problems. Don't let the external compromise get inside you, and don't let your inner harmony show itself externally. If you let the external compromise get inside you, it will topple you, destroy you, collapse you, cripple you. If the harmony in your heart shows itself externally, it will lead to reputation and renown, until you are haunted and plagued by them. If he's playing the baby, play baby with him. If he's being lawless and unrestrained, be lawless and unrestrained with him. If his behavior is unbounded and shapeless, be unbounded and shapeless with him. You must master this skill to the point of flawlessness.*[262]

When we have given up all our preferences and are freed from constancy, we can harmonize perspectives by moving through them without obstruction. However, the *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes that we have to adapt our strategy of how to move through these perspectives based on the perspective(s) we encounter. The *Zhuāngzǐ* was written in a time when social responsibilities could not always be questioned or dismissed, which is why the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that we should accept that humans are constrained by social responsibilities.[263] Fleeing from the situation or using violence to overpower the tyrant is as such not an option for the *Zhuāngzǐ*; as Heaven has given us the human form we have to accept our social roles as fate.

Knowing how to cope with different perspectives is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* crucial for self-preservation in times when the Course is absent in the human world, but psychological knowledge of the inclinations of all these perspectives allows us and the other perspectives "to accomplish their own mandates" (聖也者,達於情而遂於命也).[264] Accomplishing their own mandates means being responsive to the situation and taking into account the emotions and needs of the other perspectives. Humans who embodies *dào* is able to cope with different perspectives by affirming their rightness, but at the same time restrain their

[262] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 29.
[263] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 28
[264] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 68

heart-mind from becoming fixed and keeps him from entering into a debate as he or she simultaneously recognize the limitation of each perspective:

> 六合之外，聖人存而不論；六合之內，聖人論而不議。春秋經世，先王之志，聖人議而不辯。故分也者，有不分也；辯也者，有不辯也。曰：何也？聖人懷之，眾人辯之以相示也。故曰：辯也者，有不見也。

> *As for the sage, he may admit that something exists beyond the six limits of the known world, but he does not further discuss it. As for what is within the known world, he will discuss it but not express an opinion on it. As for historical events, he will give an opinion but not debate it. For wherever a division is made, something is left undivided. Wherever debate shows one of two alternatives to be right, something remains undistinguished and unshown. What is it? The sage hides it in his embrace, while the masses of people debate it, trying to demonstrate it to one another. Thus, I say that demonstration by debate always leaves something unseen.*[265]

The Sage does draw *shìfēi*-distinctions, but knows that human knowledge is limited, and knows that constant disputation is a futile and even dangerous practice that alienates us from our spontaneous nature. We have to take the contextual situation here into account in which scholarly debate frequently was a risky endeavour that sometimes even led to the execution of a Master. The text sees no difference between dispute, debate and discussion and seems to see all of them as unwanted practices that emerge from a clogged and fixed heart-mind.

§4.7 The Deconstruction of the Calculative Heart-Mind

We have come to this study with the hope of making progress on the question how we can approach the cultural other in the most open way possible. The question that is at the heart of comparative philosophy is how we can approach the other as a unique tradition different from our own; while at the same time bringing this other closer to us through familiar philosophical concepts. In Chapter Three, we have seen that Levinas' ethical relation is concerned with attuning to the otherness of the other, which can be translated as the infinite

[265] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 16.

task to move beyond identity. We can see a similar concern in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, who embodies doubt and indeterminacy and rejects fixed identities and classifications. Where Levinas' thinking however emphasizes how the otherness of the Other interrupts the spontaneous activity of the self, the *Zhuāngzǐ* takes a different route and argues that the feelings of anxiety and stress that the self experiences in relation to what is other reveals that the self has lost its natural spontaneity. Reducing what is other to the same is not only something that violates the Other, it is also something that hurts the self. In this section, I will explain how the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that we have lost our natural spontaneity the moment we constructed our egocentric identity. The Sage at the pivot "has lost himself," (*shì sàng qí*ǒu, 似喪其耦) he or she has "no-self," which liberates him or her from artificial constraints.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that the culprit of anxiety and confusion lies in a clogged heart-mind; a heart-mind that has lost its natural self-so-ness. The text proposes several methods to free the heart-mind from sprouting weeds in order to restore man's inner spontaneity as a mirror responds to the myriad things. Particularly important is restoring the natural interactions between the body and its different organs. Before discussing the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on liberating the heart-mind, I will first provide a general background on how the body, senses and the heart-mind was conceived in ancient China.

In ancient Chinese philosophy, *xīn* (心), translated as "heart-mind," represents the physical organ of specifically human subjectivity and the source of man's deliberating and judging. The heart-mind is seen, however, as both an affective and cognitive source of rationality, reasoning and understanding. In contrast to much in Western philosophy, which from the beginning distinguished reason from emotions, the heart-mind also includes the expressions of the emotions such as imagination and desire. In ancient Chinese philosophy, emotions do not refer to a strong subjective state, but elicit inner states by describing human embodiment in situations.[266]

The heart-mind is also the organ that can make evaluative judgments (*shìfēi*-distinctions) and can tally (*fú*, 符).[267] Tallies were, in ancient China, tokens of official agreements that consisted of a left and a right part that matched.[268] If

[266] Hansen, C. (2015). "The Relatively Happy Fish" in R.T. Ames & T. Nakajima. *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, University of Hawai'i, 56.

[267] Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 50.

[268] Falkenhausen, L. von (2005). "The E Jun Qi metal tallies, inscribed texts and ritual context" In: M. Kern (eds.). *Text and Ritual in Early China,* University of Washington Press, 82-123.

agreements were broken, the matched notch kept by the party which broke the agreement would be evidence of the betrayal. The tallies then were measures of whether the promises, the words of an agreement, were fulfilled by the required deeds. In ancient Chinese, the heart-mind is seen as the ruler of the body and the central faculty of cognition. The heart-mind is the faculty that unifies the will, emotion, intuition, and sense experiences; it makes tallies among all of them.

Geaney (2002) distinguishes two types of knowledge associated with the ability to differentiate information through the senses. First, sensing knowledge refers to the knowledge of the senses themselves, which are acquired independently from the heart-mind. Second, sense discrimination refers to the verification of knowledge as the combined result of a certain sense and the heart-mind. Geaney further notes that hearing and seeing in the pre-Qin texts are considered special aspects of knowing because these senses are used by the heart-mind to tally things; specifically, the ears and eyes enable the heart to tally whether the words and deeds of other persons, as well as one's own, match.[269] Perceptual knowledge therefore does not only originate from the senses but is verified by the heart-mind.

In the pre-Qin texts, the relation between the body and the heart-mind is an important theme for ethical and epistemological reasoning. The different aspects of the human body are all composed of human *qì* (氣) and the flowing of *qì* pervades the entire human body. The human body, the senses, and the heart-mind (which in some texts might also be interpreted as a sense organ) form a network of mutual interactions and cannot be conceived as independent sources of knowledge. Knowledge of different kinds is overtly attributed in classical Chinese texts to the sense organs, the heart-mind and the body's vital energy.

Most Warring States texts emphasize the holistic unity of humans and argue that all parts of their embodied consciousness need to be correctly cultivated. Most ancient Chinese thinkers assumed that the proper cultivation of the body is needed in order for the correct teachings to penetrate the heart-mind. The heart-mind has to set itself to learning, and the cultivation of the heart-mind is regarded as superior to the cultivation of other senses. Persons who had set their heart-mind to learning were seen as the best potential rulers who had

[269] Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 50

earned the merit to govern petty people.[270] These commitments reveal thus that there is a universal evaluative standard that can distinguish the morally superior man from the petty man, which is the main point of critique on the *Zhuāngzǐ*. This is why the text often pictures dismembered or deformed persons as Masters, probably also because these persons are outside of being considered morally worthy and have thus more personal space to emulate *dào*.

Although the heart-mind and the body are an organic whole that need proper cultivation, there is a tendency in these early Chinese texts to view the heart-mind as the central organ that rules the other organs. The strong emphasis on human cultivation and the forming of the heart-mind by reciting the classics and modelling correct moral conduct resulted from a general tendency to view human nature as "not good enough," or in need of social re-shaping. The idea was that, when left unattended, humans would certainly fall into chaos by not being able to align their own individual standards of righteousness with others, or by not being able to recognize "right" from "wrong" and "benefit" from "harm." These thinkers agreed not only that humans needed a proper, uniform, cultivation framework to live harmoniously together, but also felt it was necessary to elevate them to become "human." Xúnzǐ, for example, argued that humans differ from animals because humans can "have distinctions" (以其有辨). Through ritual, man is the only living being that can clarify and apply social distinctions, which makes man particularly able to create harmonious and elevated social relations.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to reintegrate the human realm in the natural whole of the universe. The text argues that the construction of knowledge, morality and the belief in an ultimate origin has resulted in a constrained and alienated life in which humans respond to the world from a "clogged" or "calculative heart-mind." In other words, the construction of egocentric identity (social position, moral superiority) has led to negative intersubjective emotions such as greed, vanity, and jealousy. Humans have the tendency to push away the Course by becoming entangled in social relations and conventions and are particularly prone to using "the Human to try to help the Heavenly."[271]

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[270] See for example *Mencius* IIIa, IV, 6 (Legge, 249-250): "Hence, there is the saying, "Some labor with their minds, and some labor with their strength. Those who labor with their minds govern others; those who labor with their strength are governed by others. Those who are governed by others support them; those who govern others are supported by them." This is a principal universally recognized."

[271] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 40

Trying to adjust the natural inclinations of the myriad things to a socially approved framework creates a constant tension, particularly because these unique perspectives resist being unified by a universal standard. In the *Outer Chapters,* the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that the interaction between the natural inclinations of the ten thousand things and the traditional codes for human relationships alter them both: "joined, they separate. Completed, they are destroyed."[272] The particular inclinations of each perspective do not match the generalized social rules for human relationships, but when humans force them upon other perspectives, their natural self-so-ness will be destroyed, which will lead to the impoverishment of nature.

Several passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* draw attention to how the human tendency to judge things according to their usefulness leads to reducing or harming the natural lifespan of things. Trees that are seen as useful are chopped down and employed for human practices, which the *Zhuāngzǐ* uses as a metaphor to draw attention to the paradoxical fact that when a thing is deemed not useful, its uselessness enables that thing to complete its natural lifespan, which is very useful to that thing. These passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* on uselessness that can become useful when we change perspective should not be interpreted as an ecological concern but is an allegory for human relations. One of the most quoted passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* that shows the "use of the uselessness," is about the tree of the shrine at the Qu Yuan Bend:

> 匠石之齊，至乎曲轅，見櫟社樹。其大蔽數千牛，絜之百圍，其高臨山十仞而後有枝，其可以為舟者旁十數。觀者如市，匠伯不顧，遂行不輟。弟子厭觀之，走及匠石，曰：「自吾執斧斤以隨夫子，未嘗見材如此其美也。先生不肯視，行不輟，何邪？」曰：「已矣，勿言之矣！散木也，以為舟則沈，以為棺槨則速腐，以為器則速毀，以為門戶則液樠，以為柱則蠹。

> *Carpenter Shi was traveling in Qi when he came upon the tree of the shrine at the Qu Yuan bend. It was over a hundred arm spans around, so large that thousands of oxen could shade themselves beneath it. It overstretched the surrounding hills, its lowest branches hundreds of feet from the ground, at least a dozen of which could have been hollowed out to make into ships. It was surrounded by marvelling sightseers, but the carpenter walked past it without a second look.*

[272] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 84

> *When his apprentice finally got tired of admiring it, he caught up with Carpenter Shi and said, "Since taking up my axe to follow you, Master, I have never seen a tree of such fine material as this! And yet, you don't even deign to look twice at it or pause beneath it. Why?"*
>
> *Carpenter Shi said, "Stop! Say no more! This is worthless lumber! As a ship it would soon sink, as a coffin it would soon rot, as a tool it would soon break, as a door it would leak sap, as a pillar it would bring infestation. This is a talentless, worthless tree. It is precisely because it is so useless that it has lived so long."*[273]

Instead of the tree that has excellent lumber and is subsequently cut down and cultivated in something (a cup, a ship) that it is not, the useless tree is able to affirm his own self-so-ness, to follow his natural spontaneity as it has been intended by Heaven. The example intends to show that a rigid distinction of what is "useful" and what is "not useful" cannot be made, as it is relative to the unique perspective of and on each thing. Oppositions such as "right and wrong," "useless and useful" and "benefit and harm," are not *real* oppositions, but are interconnected: the carpenter, who deems the lumber of the tree useless, is for the tree very useful, because it leaves it unharmed. As a consequence, interpreting anything as "so" automatically creates what is "not-so," revealing the togetherness of opposed perspectives. The particular passage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is however of particular weight of this present study when we look at the next passage in which the Carpenter dreams about the useless lumber tree:

> 且予求無所可用久矣，幾死，乃今得之，為予大用。使予也而有用，且得有此大也邪？且也，若與予也皆物也，奈何哉其相物也？而幾死之散人，又惡知散木！」匠石覺而診其夢。弟子曰：「趣取無用，則為社何邪？」曰：「密！若無言！彼亦直寄焉，以為不知己者詬厲也。不為社者，且幾有翦乎！且也，彼其所保，與眾異，以義譽之，不亦遠乎！」
>
> *Back home, Carpenter Shi saw the tree in a dream. It said to him, "What do you want to compare me to, one of those cultivated trees? The hawthorn, the pear, the orange, the rest of those fructiferous trees and shrubs – when their fruit is ripe they get plucked, and that is an insult. Their large branches are bent; their small branches are pruned. Thus do their abilities embitter their lives. That is why*

[273] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 30

> *they die young, failing to fully live out their natural life spans. They batter themselves with the vulgar conventions of the world – and all other creatures do the same. As for me, I've been working on being useless for a long time. It almost killed me, but I've finally managed it – and it is of great use to me! If I were useful, do you think I could have grown to be so great?*
>
> *"Moreover, you and I are both [members of the same class, namely] beings – is either of us in a position to classify and evaluate the other? How could a worthless man with one foot in the grave know what is or isn't a worthless tree?" Carpenter Shi awoke and told his dream to his apprentice. The apprentice said, "If it's trying to be useless, what's it doing with a shrine around it?" Carpenter Shi said, "Hush! Don't talk like that! Those people came to it for refuge of their own accord. In fact, the tree considers it a great disgrace to be surrounded by this uncomprehending crowd. If they hadn't made it a shrine, they could easily have gone the other way and started carving away at it. What it values is not what they value. Is it not absurd to judge it by whether it does what is or is not called for by its position, by what role it happens to play?"*[274]

This passage shows that we can always find similarities between things and perspectives; the tree is just as a human a being, making it as such "comparable" or "relatable." This however does not make it right to evaluate them according to some general, universal standard. What the tree values is not what man values; their perspectives are as such always at the same time different.

The text aims to show the arbitrarily of social conventions on how to value a certain thing. These conventions are based on an artificial agreement of what is "so" and what is "not-so," which does not make these conventions right, but only shows that there are a lot of perspectives that share the same starting point. The *Zhuāngzǐ* draws attention to the hermeneutic circle that is here at stake: because we agreed that a tree is only useful when its lumber is of good quality for us to use, we, therefore, call this particular tree "useless." In other words: because we have committed ourselves to a particular pattern of *shìfēi*-distinctions, we can only evaluate a thing or perspective in one particular way. From an epistemological concern, this tendency restricts us from gaining a broader, all-encompassing perspective and producing new knowledge. From a

[274] Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi*, 30

psychological point of view, it brings stress and anxiety, particularly when the perspective of the thing that is presented to us does not fit within our categories. Michael Puett articulates that the main goal of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is to celebrate the natural process of Heaven:

> *The goal of the adept is not to control things – an act that would be portrayed within this cosmology as an attempt to overcome Heaven. One must rather take pleasure in the ceaseless transformations of the universe – including those of one's own life and death. Instead of attempting to overcome Heaven, one should seek to glory in the transformations of Heaven.*[275]

Instead of taking human conventions as their standard, humans should take Heaven as their model and recognize that the universe is in ever-changing flux that is, in every moment, exactly how it "should have been." Genuine humans recognize that every moment of this flux is part of nature, and as such part of him. The recognition that everything is constantly in a state of flux, calls for extensive self-adaptation (*zìshì,* 自適); the mandate to respond to the unfolding of the current situation and affirm, and nourish, the self-so-ness of the myriad things.[276] The human embodied self (*shēn*,身) is a transforming, complex wholeness that has several behavioural- and thinking patterns (*qíng*,情). Humans are for example naturally inclined to take several unique perspectives as a group by creating identities. These identities can fragment the human embodied self, causing anxiety and confusion and condemns humans to labouring themselves "over the aspects of life that deliberate activity can do nothing about."[277]

Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692), a seminal commentator on the text, interprets nourishing the self-so-ness of the myriad things as recognizing that, among "forms lodged here between heaven and earth, there is only this wandering, this play, and nothing besides. It makes no difference how large and small: each stops only where it finds itself."[278] Restoring our natural spontaneity means adapting spontaneously to circumstances rather than controlling the outside

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[275] Puett, M.J. (2003). "" Nothing Can Overcome Heaven": The Notion of Spirit in the *Zhuangzi*" In; S. Cook (eds.). *Hiding the World in the World,* State University of New York Press, 254

[276] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 40

[277] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 77

[278] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 129

world, which calls for a disengagement with social conventions. Only when we have untangled our heart-mind can we be at rest in the middle of the pivot.

Part III: Harmonzing Perspectives And (Self) Nourishment

§4.8 Fasting the Heart-Mind

In this part I will show how the loss of the calculative heart-mind, - the loss of our egocentric "me"-, is key to finding the pivot. Self-transformation begins with deconstructing language, logic, and knowledge; a step that I have discussed in the previous section. When we see that language, knowledge and logic are mere human conventions and do not express the absolute truth, as they cannot adequately capture the constant transforming and changing flux of reality, we can let go of our fixed or calculative heart-mind.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s primary focus is on how to cope with the myriad things in a nourishing, non-controlling way. Its focus bears some similarities with Levinas' project, which also sees the self's egocentrism and its tendency to approach the other from its own perspective as violence. But while Levinas opts for transcendence as a surplus that gives the human immanent world its ethical orientation, the *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to reveal how clinging to particular ways of seeing the world prevents us from affirming the oneness of the different perspectives. In other words: the *Zhuāngzǐ* shows how violence originates in rigid ways of thinking and a conflated sense of self-identity in which humans belief that they can know what is universally right or wrong.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that humans need to become genuine (*zhēn*, 真) by becoming free of preferences and by becoming free of constancy. Genuineness is acquired by fasting the heart-mind, by means of meditation or breathing techniques and by accepting fate. To become a genuine person, the *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes approaching the self-other encounter not as a constraint but as a connection, in which the Sage recognizes that "Heaven and earth are born with me, and the ten thousand things and I are one." (*Tiāndì yǔ wǒ bìng shēng, ér wànwù yǔ wǒ wéi yī*, 天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一).[279] The genuine man is a follower of Heaven (*yǔtiān wèitú*, 與天為徒) who allows for the joy of the

[279] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 15

harmonious state of the heart-mind "to open into all things without thereby losing its fullness (*shǐ zhī hé yú tōng ér bùshī wū duì,* 使之和豫通而不失於兌), which is the moment when we are at rest in the middle of the pivot.[280] The Zhuangzian Sage differs from other Sages, primarily because he or she uses |the radiance of drift and doubt" as his or her only map (*Shì gù huá yí zhī yào, shèngrén zhī suǒ tú yě*, 是故滑疑之耀，聖人之所圖也), indicating that the Sage in the pivot uses *shìfēi*-judgments to respond to situations, but at the same time is fully aware of the indeterminacy and contingency of these judgments.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that humans should begin by "unclogging [their] own heart-mind. The three methods the *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes to bring the heart-mind back to its natural rhythm are emptying (*xū*, 虛), wandering (*yóu*, 遊) and mirroring (*jìng*, 鏡). The emptying of the heart-mind is the clearing of all prior-knowledge, ingrained habits, and preconceived ideas, so that the self can retain the heart-mind's natural, unique potential. Emptying the heart-mind helps him to "[use] various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others" (*Shì yǐ shèngrén hé zhī yǐ shìfēi*, 是以聖人和之以是非)[281] which reveals that the Sage no longer sees that what manifests itself as some-thing but as no-thing; as a fleeting moment in which all things become what they are before dissolving again. Emptying enables self-return (*zìhuí,* 自回) in which the self realizes that the socialized self, -the identity that is shaped by social conventions-, is not the true self.

Emptying restores the natural epistemological limits of our senses. When we empty our heart-mind, the heart-mind will "stop at tallying," indicating that the heart-mind is limited to verifying what is perceived by tallying the senses of hearing and vision.[282] Emptying the heart-mind prevents it from judging experience rigidly, because, as Wang Fuzhi aptly describes it, the heart-mind is no longer obsessed with opposites.[283]

The second strategy of restoring our natural spontaneity is adopting a mirroring heart-mind. The Sage's heart-mind is like a mirror "rejecting nothing, welcoming nothing: responding but not storing," so he can "handle all things without harm." (*Yīng ér bù cáng, gù néng shēng wù ér bù shāng*, 應而不藏，故能勝物而不傷).[284] This comment regarding harm is crucial. The *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that we harm

[280] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 26, 37, 77
[281] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 14
[282] Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 95
[283] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 138
[284] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 54

other perspectives when we let our preferences guide our actions, something we have seen in Chapter Three, when we had to conclude that Levinas, who wanted to articulate the radical transcendence of the Other, failed to attune to the otherness of the cultural other. What humans prefer, is an affirmation of their own perspective; when they reject a certain characteristic of a thing or person, they will try to change that thing or person. Equally, welcoming something or welcoming a person involves a positive bias that excludes other perspectives. Mirroring offers us the best method to connect our perspective with the other myriad things; because we do not judge but passively receive, respond but do not become affected so that the heart-mind can hold its peaceful state. Mirroring as the pure reflection of the universe, without adding anything, is a technique that helps us with the 'balancing acts of what enters and what exits the heart-mind', as a means to keep a soft, silent, empty, and non-deliberate heart-mind.[285]

Yóu 遊 is also a crucial character for restoring the natural spontaneity of humans. Translated as "wandering," "roaming" or "play," it is usually interpreted as the endorsement of a less serious approach to life. The term is particularly used to depict the roaming sages have fasted their heart-minds and can move freely and independently. In the first chapter of the *Zhuāngzǐ,* entitled *xiāoyáoyóu* (逍遙遊), the *Zhuāngzǐ* uses the metaphor of *being* a "chariot upon what is true both to Heaven and to earth" to describe the wandering sage.[286] The image of a chariot was a well-known metaphor for describing the unity between Heaven and earth.[287]

The roaming heart-mind is characterized by its unboundedness; its ability to transcend the human perspective results in an attitude that the commentator Liu Xianxin describes as the position in which "everything is wanted; all is to be included."[288] *Yóu* allows the heart-mind to adopt an all-encompassing approach to the world that enables it to accept different perspectives without being obstructed by assessments of rights and wrongs. Wandering enables man to see the difference between the "piping of man," "the piping of earth" and the "piping of Heaven." When humans only hear the "piping of man," they hold on to *shifei*-distinctions and does not see how humans give voice to the differences

[285] Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses,* 34

[286] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,* 5

[287] In ancient Chinese cosmology, Heaven was considered to be round and earth to be square. Together, they formed a chariot, the body representing earth and the canopy representing Heaven. The wandering mind can unify Heaven and earth by correlating the different perspectives and "walking two roads."

[288] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,* 137

between the myriad things, differences that originate from the "piping of the Earth," that equalizes differences.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to liberate humans from artificial constraints caused by the construction of and belief in truth, knowledge, and morality. A fixed heart-mind is the main culprit for why we are unable to harmonize with the other and the other's perspectives and why we fail to see how self and other naturally connect. Instead of introducing new *shìfēi*-distinctions, the *Zhuāngzǐ* deconstructs all human artificiality and urges us to rely on our natural spontaneity. The techniques of wandering, emptying, and mirroring help us to see the equal nature of the different *shìfēi*-perspectives and recognize how a specific perspective confines us to a particular way of looking at the world. The empty, mirroring, wandering heart-mind is not a masochistic giving to the other, but is a strategy that aims to protect the self's natural lifespan by adequately responding to the variety of perspectives and not offending them. This is close to the Fabian strategy of letting the opponent defeat himself and is as such not an ethical strategy, but a realist strategy.

The sage in the pivot responds to the situation in a skilful, efficacious way. When we look closely, we see that fasting the heart-mind restores the connection between the heart-mind and the body. The body plays an important role throughout the *Inner Chapters* and is denoted primary as personhood (*shēn*, 身), form (*xíng*, 形) and the body as environed substance (*tí,* 體). In the *Zhuāngzǐ*, *shēn* seems to refer to the living body, the body that constitutes one's personhood, while *xíng* seems to refer to its form, a form that can be mutilated. The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to reconceive personhood and sees it not shaped by social conventions, but shaped and nourished by Heaven:

> 舜問乎丞曰：「道可得而有乎？」曰：「汝身非汝有也，汝何得有夫道？」舜曰：「吾身非吾有也，孰有之哉？」曰：「是天地之委形也；生非汝有，是天地之委和也；性命非汝有，是天地之委順也

> *Shun asked Cheng, "Can the Course be attained and possessed?" Cheng said, "Even your body is not your own possession; how could you attain the Course?" Shun said, "If my body is not my own possession, whose is it?" Cheng said, "It is just a form lent*

> *by heaven and earth. Life is not your own possession; it is just a harmony lent by heaven and earth."*[289]

The *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that we tend to confuse the temporal flux that each of us is in the present moment with what is "ours," that which defines us, what can be manipulated and controlled. Clinging to life is a preference that seems to be the root of confusion, as death is for human beings the most radical transformation of all. But life, human or not human, belongs to *dào,* belongs to the infinite flux of generation, transformation, and change; belongs to the infinite process of reversal (*diāndǎo*, 顛倒). The different parables and riddles in the *Zhuāngzǐ* teach us that cultivation is not about exercising our human abilities, but about restraining these abilities so that we can articulate a form of life that is boundless and spontaneous.

There is a deep trust in the *Zhuāngzǐ* in the natural unfolding of the self-so-ness or unique pattern of each being, an unfolding that, when left unharmed, naturally will interlock with the myriad things. The natural interlocking is connecting to a larger whole, a being lodged "in a common body" (*tóngtǐ*, 同體). Deborah Sommer defines this common body as "a complex, multi-layered corpus whose centre can be anywhere but whose boundaries are nowhere."[290] The fasting of the heart-mind does not only free our heart-mind, but also changes the way we relate to our physical body (*shēn*, 身) and its appearance (*xíng*, 形). The bodily form (*xíng,* 形) is said to protect spirit (*shén*, 神), as vital energy (*qì,* 氣).[291]

Becoming free of preferences and constancy involves a disengagement from both the heart-mind and the body in which we no longer see the body as our possession and no longer treat the heart-mind as the governor of all our organs. The *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that the heart-mind is ill-suited to be the ruler (*zhì,* 治) of the other organs. This view aligns with the commentary of the Song Dynasty philosopher Lü Huiqing (1031-1111) who comments: "the life process follows the body and thus ends where the body ends. But the mind bent on knowledge chases object after object without limit."[292] Instead of representing the world with our heart-mind, the heart-mind should harmonize with the natural impulses of the body. When the heart-mind aligns itself with the spontaneous impulses of the body, the Sage is able to adequately respond to the seamless flux of

[289] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,*87

[290] Sommer, D.A. (2010). "Concepts of the Body in the Zhuangzi" In: V. Mair (eds.). *Experimental Essays on Zhuangzi*, Three Pines Press, 212

[291] Mair, V.H. (1994). *Wandering on the Way*, Bantam Books, 108

[292] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 166

dào, because he himself has also become a seamless flux of transformation and change. Fasting the heart-mind does not only transform the heart-mind, but also restores the natural relation between the heart-mind and the other organs, creating a synergistic and responsive whole. The pivot of *dào* is thus not a doctrine nor a theory, but a way of life that embodies doubt and indeterminacy as a way of life and is rooted in the unconditional trust that we can respond spontaneously to each situation.

The relation between the heart-mind and the body is particularly restored by the loss of *me-ness*, also seen as the loss of the calculative heart-mind, in which the process of life is no longer seen as mine. The Sage who is no longer a "me" has overcome the differences between self and other and sees the many manifestations of the world no longer as things but as no-things; as a unique flux that goes its own unique way. Ziporyn argues that this is an important step in the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s ideal that we should equally assess all perspectives, and, as I would argue, understand what it means to be at rest in the middle of the pivot:

> *'Losing me' is paired with and indeed seems to be identical with 'losing his opposite'. Here the great question of the mutual definition of dyadic pairs makes its unmistakable appearance. It is here too that the decisive step toward omnicentrism is made. For here we begin to see concretely what a 'whole' is for Zhuangzi. It is not an undifferentiated mass of indifferent matter or qi, as we might think from an unreflecting reading of some of the passages quoted above, and others. Instead, the primary idea of a whole is of a correlative pair, which Zhuangzi pares down to its purest and most abstract form: this and that, or self and no-self.*[293]

The displacement of the ego as the locus of control is in the *Zhuāngzǐ* described in terms of *zuòwàng* (坐忘), - sitting and forgetting-, and *sàngwǒ* (喪我), forgetting oneself. Forgetting oneself does not mean that the Sage has withdrawn from the world to become One with the universe, but is a coping strategy that enables the Sage to wander freely in the world.

It is here important to draw attention to the specific difference between Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*. In her essay "Transcendence, Freedom and Ethics in Levinas' Subjectivity and Zhuangzi's non-being Self," (2015) Zhao draws attention to the similarity between Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, as they both appreciate pre-ego

[293] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 41

and pre-reflective experiences and reveal the violence of the ego that tries to master and control its outside environment. Although I do agree that Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* both see the non-self, - the self that is no longer an egocentric usurpation and colonizer of the world-, as the primordial vocation of the self, I think that it is important to see how Levinas' project of the ethical relation is challenged by the *Zhuāngzǐ.*

For Levinas, only the epiphany of the Face of the Other can liberate or suspend the self's egocentric spontaneity, it is only in the face-to-face-encounter and the Height of the Other that the self is transformed into a non-self or a *being-for-the-other.* The *Zhuāngzǐ* shows that the violence and resistance that the Levinasian egocentric spontaneity creates originates in a fixed heart-mind and the artificial construction of knowledge, morality as well as the unfounded belief in the power of language and logic. Levinasian egocentric spontaneity is not the ontological realm produced by the infinite relation to the Other as pure goodness, it is the result of a clogged heart-mind constructed by social conventions and the rigid belief in (moral) standards.

For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, the affirmation of difference does not reveal the radical transcendence of the Other as an ethical command, but is the recognition that the perspective of others and their preferences are different from mine and are relative to their specific *shìfēi*-patterns and circumstances. Adequately responding to the other and the other's perspectives and seeing the togetherness of the different myriad things entails taking reality as it is and responding from an unconditional trust in the natural unfolding of the self-so-ness of things. In the beautiful narrative of the fish Kun, who changes seamlessly into the bird Peng, we see what it means to wander freely and be at ease with the myriad things:

> 北冥有魚，其名為鯤。鯤之大，不知其幾千里也。化而為鳥，其名為鵬。鵬之背，不知其幾千里也；怒而飛，其翼若垂天之雲。是鳥也，海運則將徙於南冥。南冥者，天池也。
>
> *There is a fish in the Northern Oblivion named Kun, and this Kun is quite huge, spanning who knows how many thousands of miles. When he rouses himself and soars into the air, his wings are like clouds draped across the heavens. The oceans start to churn, and*

> *this bird begins his journey toward the Southern Oblivion. The Southern Oblivion – that is the Pool of Heaven.*[294]

Kun is able to follow its bodily transformations without judging and without clinging to its identity as a "fish named Kun." Kun has retained its spirit and can wander limitlessly through the sky. The parable indicates that Kun is beyond what can know or remember (*běimíng*, 北冥), suggesting that Kun's heart-mind holds to the pivot of *dào* which enables it to harmonize the different perspectives without any resistance. The wandering heart-mind of Peng is contrasted with the limited perspective of the cicada and the fledgling:

> 蜩與學鳩笑之曰：「我決起而飛，槍[1]榆、枋，時則不至而控於地而已矣，奚以之九萬里而南為？」

> *[..] The cicada and the fledgling dove laugh at him, saying: "We scurry up into the air, leaping from the elm to the sandalwood tree, and when we don't quite make it, we just plummet to the ground. What's all this about ascending ninety thousand miles and heading south?"*[295]

The difference in attachment between clinging to the truth of one's own perspective and judging that which is other from this 'small truth' is depicted here as the earth-dwelling animals who mock and ridicule Peng. In the moment, Peng knows that it is Peng, but it does not hold on to its identity, nor derive its sense of self-worth from its state of being Peng. Its decentred, nomadic heart-mind is able to respond to the unfolding of the world ceaselessly and can dwell in the flow of the moment with ease. This responsiveness follows the moment, but does not dwell on its achievement, it "lets [itself] be carried along by things and the mind wanders freely. Hand it all over to the unavoidable so as to nourish what is central to you" (*Qiě fū chéng wù yǐ yóuxīn, tuō bùdéyǐ yǐ yǎng zhōng, zhì yǐ*, 且夫乘物以遊心，託不得已以養中,至矣).[296]

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that our singularity and self-worth is not derived from human conventions, but is derived from being generated by Heaven in our unique self-so-ness.[297] Restraining the heart-mind enables the release of the

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[294] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,* 3
[295] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,*4
[296] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,*29
[297] Mølgaard, E.J. (2015). "Zhuangzi's Notion of Transcendental Life" In: R.T. Ames & T. Nakajima (eds), *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, University of Hawai'I, 100

body, which demonstrates, as Peng Yu notes "an extraordinary openness to external influence inasmuch as the boundary is a porous surface rather than an impermeable wall."[298] The wholesomeness that the Sages have attained enable them to become conscious and celebrate life as it is. Instead of Levinas, who articulates the guilty self that is responsible to each and every human being, the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes how human conventions and more precisely rigid thinking patterns and the reliance on universal standards are the main source of negative emotions and violence.

§4.9 Emotions, Debate and Social Relations

Methodologies in comparative philosophy are primarily aimed at bringing two disparate traditions together so that we can understand and grasp that other cultural philosophical tradition. In this present study I have pledged for a reconceptualization of comparative philosophy by considering the self-other relation and to adopt a critical-transformation position as a form of ethical competence. Ethical competence is required to approach the other in a respectful, non-colonizing way. Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* have both articulated a discursive practice in which we can communicate with the other and the other's perspectives in an open and responsive way. Being a competent comparative philosopher does not only call for reflecting on different methods on how to do comparative philosophy, but also entails that we need to see comparative philosophy as intercultural communication, which comprises the ability to communicate with interlocutors from other cultural traditions. Based on the readings of Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, this study tries to disclose the ethical underpinnings of intercultural communication that concentrates on the problematic assumptions and emotional commitments in the comparative praxis. In this study I try to discern a critical-transformational discourse that does not originate in the assertion of commonality.

For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, adopting a critical-transformational discourse helps us to become open to the other and the other's perspectives. This discourse is aimed at affirming the self-so-ness of each thing, which persons can do when they do no longer cling to traditional values and human conventions which block their natural spontaneity. A confined perspective is produced by a clogged heart-mind that strives for completion (*chéng*,成); it is the construction of identities

[298] Yu, P. "Indeterminate Self-Subjectivity, Body and Politics in Zhuangzi" *Philosophy and Social Criticism,* 46 No 3, (2020):351

and the clinging to what is "so" and "not-so." In contrast with the other thinkers, the *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to see human relationship as deeply troublesome. Man, who "groups every appearance with something else," (*Tiān zhī shēng shì shǐ dú yě, rén zhī mào yǒu yǔ yě*, 天之生是使獨也，人之貌有與也) tries to exchange perspectives for a systematic unity, which creates "constant anxiety (*Duō zé rǎo, rǎo zé yōu, yōu ér bù jiù*, 多則擾，擾則憂，憂而不救)."[299] Their confusion and anxiety lead them away from the Way, leaving them empty and depleted and bickering over "whiteness" and "blackness" instead of enjoying their natural lifespan. The human abilities, argues the *Zhuāngzǐ*, "embitter their lives," (*Cǐ yǐ qí néng kǔ qí shēng zhě yě*, 此以其能苦其生者也)[300] which raises the question of whether human beings should rejoice in human activities at all.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* nevertheless fiercely promotes a method of self-adaptation that enables each of us to nourish life and, as it seems, to nourish human relationships. Throughout the *Zhuāngzǐ*, friendship plays an important role, which indicates that the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not endorse a withdrawal from the world but opts for a different way of approaching the world. Self-adaptation means for the *Zhuāngzǐ* fasting the heart-mind and a calm acceptance of fate (*ānmìng*, 安命). Bringing clarity implies seeing the current situation from an impartial viewpoint in which we are able to attune to the different perspectives without causing harm and anxiety. The unconditional trust of the Sage in the transformation and change of the myriad things leads to the acceptance of that what we cannot change.

Accepting the inevitable fate of the death of our loved ones as well as accepting our own mortality is seen in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as an immense liberation that provides us with more openness to experiencing life to the fullest. Liberating the heart-mind from its desire for completion is seen as overcoming death and becoming infinite. No longer chained to our form, we can marvel in the thought that we can transform in future incarnations into a "mouse's liver? Or perhaps an insect's arm" (*Yǐ rǔ wèi shǔ gān hū? Yǐ rǔ wèi chóng bì hū?*, 以汝為鼠肝乎？以汝為蟲臂乎？).[301]

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s endorsement of harmonizing the different perspectives should however not be seen as a kind of fatalism in which we happily walk into the arms of a murderer. The aim is to safeguard and fulfil our natural given lifespan, to live out our years and to take joy in carefree wandering. Especially in violent

[299] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 23, 24
[300] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 30
[301] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 45

times, it is necessary to learn coping strategies and self-techniques to secure our survival, a desire that does not originate in an egocentric *conatus essendi*, but in the fact that Heaven has created us and nourishes us.

When we do not attune to how we naturally interlock with the myriad things, we tend to go astray. The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that anxiety, stress, and violence emerge from not accepting internal and external limitations. Man tends to move beyond his epistemological limit and tries to gain knowledge of that which cannot be known from his perspective. The belief in objective knowledge results in quarrelling, debate, and hatefulness, while acceptance of the limits of knowledge and seeing knowledge as provisional and dependent upon a perspective enable us to approach others in a less aggressive but more creative way. The *Zhuāngzǐ* also argues that our loyalty to our parents and family members are fated and as such does not need to be cultivated. The *Zhuāngzǐ* sees the personal-familial relation as natural, as mandated by Heaven and does not see it as a privileged domain for moral cultivation.[302]

Accepting fate also involves recognizing that social relationships, social roles, and responsibilities, are fated. The *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that self-adaptation is a more positive and valuable approach than controlling the outside world and endorses an attentive and receptive attitude toward the world; an attitude based on the trust that we can "freely pass wherever we may go".[303] The novelty of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that the text shows that colonizing what is other creates resistance that will make the subject anxious and angry. Zhao draws attention to the harmful effects of the calculative heart-mind in her essay:

> *For the Zhuangzi, ego and consciousness are the root of anxieties, fears, and worries from which human suffer. With a thinking, judging and evaluating mind, we differentiate things, we set up*

[302] Parents as such do not have the responsibility to cultivate their children, but should approach their children from an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind. The *Zhuāngzǐ* seems thus to endorse a permissive parenting style in which parents have unconditional trust in their children to find their own way. It seems however that both parents as children are fated to stay loyal to their family members, indicating that parents and children naturally share an intimate and close relationship, which might suggest that for these particular relations "leaving the other and other's perspectives alone" is not a natural option.

[303] I paraphrase here the commentary of Lü Huiqing: "The passage from "depend on Heaven's unwrought perforations" to "knotted nodes" describes what it is like to "never see the entire ox" – or to be entirely free of seeing the ox. Freely passing through wherever you may go, since each thing is the Course, I also like this." (Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 168)

> *boundaries and develop attachments and preferences, which eventually brings up constraints, inequalities, and unfreedom.*[304]

Colonizing what is other does not only harm what is other, but also harms the subject because the subject experiences negative emotions and no longer sees the situation with clarity. Being free from all preferences means that we respond to the world from emotional equanimity, a position of tranquillity and stillness. This does not mean that the Sages are free of emotions, but that they are more able to vacillate between having emotions and being free of them.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* acknowledges that humans have emotions, and that the Sage has a human form, even though this person is free of "human inclinations." The Sages are however able to keep their heart-mind at ease and let the emotions blow like the wind, adding nothing to the process of life.[305] This is what the *Zhuāngzǐ* has in mind when it emphasizes dwelling "in the moment and abiding in ease" (*ànshí ér chùshùn,* 安時而處順). The tranquil acceptance of fate does not allow feelings to enter in, not even happiness and joy. Fasting the heart-mind transforms the self from a limited, evaluative self to a unified self that rests in the flow with *dào*, which provides the self with a "transcendent kind of knowledge,"[306] as Sham Yat Shing calls it; which is described by Møllgaard as the spiritual awareness of "being nourished by self-emerging life itself, the life of Heaven, which generates each being in its own unique way."[306]

The Sage who is at rest in the middle of the pivot of *dào,* can nourish all perspectives equally because he or she responds to them from a situation of emotional equanimity and non-preference. The pivot is as such the most open and receptive position; a perspective in which, and I quote here Cheng Xuanying:

> *Action and quiescence form an undifferentiated unity [xiangji] in arcane response [mingjing] to the circumstances of the moment, so while such a one sits upright in the very center of the universe, his mind travels beyond the boundaries of the four seas.*[307]

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[304] Zhao, G., *Transcendence, Freedom, and Ethics*, 72

[305] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 38

[306] Sham, Y.S. (2015). "Knowledge and Happiness" In: R.T. Ames & T. Nakajima (eds.). *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*, University of Hawai'i Press,127; Mølgaard, E. *Zhuangzi's Notion of Transcendence*, 90.

[307] Ibid. 64

Chen Xuanying's commentary on the *Zhuāngzǐ* is sometimes criticized by scholars as his commentaries are overtly influenced by Xuanying's Buddhist ideas. However, I think Xuanying's attempt to integrate the different passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* on the Sage, the Sage as the *zhēnrén* (真人), the *dàrén* (大人) and the *shénrén* (神人), can be useful for understanding what it entails to be in the pivot of *dào*. Xuanying interprets the *Zhuāngzǐ* in a metaphorical way and interprets the extraordinary qualities of the Sage who roams freely in terms of simply being uninterested or unaffected with the troubles and issues of other human beings.

Nevertheless, Xuanying also recognizes that the sage returns to the human realm and responds to the needs of other beings, indicating that the Sage has transcended the human realm, but at the same time still is part of it. The Sage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* is not a reclusive hermit, but participates in the human world, but without "being human," as the Sage:

> *Concentrated in tranquil profundity, his sagely intelligence reflects things free of predilections [qing], toward which it neither advance nor with does it engage, neither giving rise to nor extinguishing them, so such a one certainly does not travel on the perfect path [zhidao] of emptiness [xu] and interchangeable expedience [tong] with a mind [xin] that clings to the objects of phenomenal reality [panyuan zhi xin].*[308]

This passage suggests that Xuanying sees the sage as someone who is part of the human world, but interacts with others in a detached, non-involved way. The Sage who has adopted an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind remains unaffected by the dogmatism, violence, and fixations of others although the Sage does interact with others and mingles with them.

Because the sages have no attachment or judgments towards others, -and act from an attitude of non-knowledge, they can emphatically respond in the best way to the needs to other beings. Xuanying specifically pays attention to the sage who has transcended the dualism between self and other and the body and heart-mind, which is the position in which we are able to affirm the equality of the different things. For Xuanying the main goal of the Sage is to nourish other beings and help them to unfold their natural self-so-ness; an interpretation that might be inspired by the Buddhist idea of the Bodhisattva, but which is in line

[308] Ibid, 64.

with the passages in the *Zhuāngzǐ* in which it is said that the Sage is not able to help others when the Course is not present. When the human realm is so corrupted, it is not possible for the Sage to help others to complete their self-so-ness, as they have lost themselves completely and are, in a way, "beyond help." The only thing that the Sages in this case can do is protect their own self-so-ness, which sometimes amounts to mirroring the corruptness of the other as in the example of "playing baby with the ruler when he is playing baby" (*Bǐ qiě wèi yīng'ér, yì yǔ zhī wèi yīng'ér*, 彼且為嬰兒，亦與之為嬰兒).

Nurturing life involves respecting the self-so-ness of each thing. The "principle of nurturing life" (*yǎngshēngzhǔ*, 養生主) is embraced by practicing forgetting (*wàng*, 忘), transformation (*huà*, 化) and using the unborrowed or surplus (*yú*, 餘) of the universe. *Yú* refers to the way we can change perspectives and change our way of seeing things as no-things, which means seeing things in their unique manifestation. We can conclude that the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not merely articulate a notion of personal freedom that values pluralism, a personal freedom that Jiang conceived as creating and discovering new possibilities to navigate constraints,[309] but articulates a multidimensional perspective from which all things can be viewed in their true uniqueness. The Sages' commitment to keep their heart-mind at ease originates from a deep trust in the infinite expressions of *dào*, an unconditional trust in the transcendental order which moves beyond a mere concern for personal freedom. The Sage resonates with the world while keeping his distance from unwanted influences and keeps his peaceful heart-mind from being disturbed. The Sage's heart-mind is like dead ashes and his body like dried wood (*Xíng gù kě shǐ rú gǎomù, ér xīn gù kě shǐ rú sīhuī hū?*, 形固可使如槁木，而心固可使如死灰乎?), a visualization of the Sage's inward transformation.[310]

Although the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes that the world comprises many perspectives, the text privileges the perspective of non-interference, a perspective that abides to Heaven and is attuned to how nature is. For the *Zhuāngzǐ* the myriad things all naturally interlock, which is why the Sage treats all things equally, since for him "each thing is just so, each thing is right, and so he enfolds them all within himself by affirming the rightness of each" (*Wànwù jìnrán, ér yǐ shì xiāng yùn*, 萬物盡然，而以是相蘊).[311] The Sage approaches the different things as expressions rather than attributes or qualities of that particular thing (or lived being) and treats them as a manifestation of the flow of *dào*.

[309] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, 292.
[310] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 9.
[311] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 19.

We can recognize that an open and receptive heart-mind that does not allow for intense emotions and fixations to enter, is able to interact with objects in a creative and novel way. When we no longer see objects from a particular fixed point of view, we can explore different ways of enjoying and relating to objects. Gourds can be used as boats as well as spoons, they can be used to make soup or can become potential forms of art. This playful, receptive approach becomes however more difficult when interacting with other human beings. Humans seem to be the only ones who can lose their self-so-ness and who can get confused about the true Way. First of all, humans make an artificial distinction between humans (*rén*, 人) and other beings and give the human realm a special, privileged status. The problem is not that humans make distinctions between forms; the Sage equally recognizes the different forms and even groups them in classes such as "trees" and "humans." Problems emerge when we approach things and persons as having an identifiable essence or a fixed inborn nature (*rénzhīqíng*, 人之情) that needs the right cultivation. The *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects that there are essences; the myriad things do not have a common, moral root (*běn*, 本), but emerge together from a vital energy that is devoid of any form and does not depend on anything. Dependence (*dài*, 待) on one's own perspective, on meaning or knowledge are therefore undesirable as it alienates man from his natural spontaneity and causes anger and conflict.

While some scholars see the *Zhuāngzǐ* as idealizing the anti-social hermit and recommending withdrawal from society, I suggest reading the *Zhuāngzǐ* as recommending that we resist from adding anything artificial to our relations with others.[312] The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not promote withdrawing from relationships but promotes a different way of relating to them. There is ample evidence that the *Zhuāngzǐ* acknowledges that human life unfolds within a human society. Most of the parables and stories in the text are friendly dialogues in which social outcasts are seen as instructors, usefulness is interpreted as uselessness and in which ritual propriety and benevolence as moral qualities are mocked.

These dialogues do not promote a withdrawal from the world but expose the problems of interacting with persons solely in a restrictively socially accepted, way. Fasting the heart-mind and concentrating on our "vital breath" and accepting fate are self-adaptive strategies that restore the natural connection between humans. The Sage's understanding of a current situation is "limited to his immediate surroundings," (*Zhī bù chū hū sì yù,* 知不出乎四域) and because the Sage does not have preferences and is free of constancy, he has the creative

[312] E.g. Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*

power to find "something fitting in their encounter with each thing (*Yǔ wù yǒu yí*, 與物有宜).[313] The genuine man accepts change and transformation, exists spontaneously, lacks a self, has no preferences, acts from emotional equanimity and does not cling to social norms. When Huizi asks Zhuangzi if a human being really can be without "characteristic human inclinations" (*wúqíng*, 無情), the *Zhuāngzǐ* clarifies the Sage's attitude as being liberated of "affirming some things as right and negating others as wrong." Here, the Sages do not let *shìfēi*-distinctions hurt themselves or others. Rather than being troubled by what is or should be "so" and "not so," by pondering over and re-assessing relationships, the Sage can just go along with the present "rightness". What entails this "rightness" appears spontaneously when we are in a situation. The entails that we should leave others complete their own course, because when we respond from our natural spontaneity, we are utterly self-sufficient and will transform naturally and without any help from others:

> 泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相呴以溼，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。
> 與其譽堯而非桀，不如兩忘而化其道。

> *When the springs dry up, the fish have to cluster together on the shore, gasping on each other to keep damp and spitting on each other to stay wet. But that is no match for forgetting all about one another in the rivers and lakes. Rather than praising Yao and condemning Jie, we'd better off forgetting them both and transforming along our own courses*[314]

Jiang (2021) takes this passage as evidence that the *Zhuāngzǐ* advocates a personal freedom and problematizes the entanglement in relations, "even when he acknowledged at times the nurturing aspect of human relationship."[315] I would however suggest that for the *Zhuāngzǐ* the problem is not generally our entanglement in relationships, as the world is comprised of different perspectives and we are part of the myriad of things that are ultimately One. The problem is more specifically that we do not relate to these relationships in the natural way but evaluate other things from our own perspective, causing us to become entangled and blocking our natural interconnectedness.

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[313] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 36, 40
[314] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 43, 293
[315] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*

The *Zhuāngzǐ* accepts human conventions but sees them as mere means to communicate with others. When we need others for self-survival or others need us for their self-survival, the *Zhuāngzǐ* deems it necessary to care for each other. But the *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes that in most cases others do not need care, especially not the care in which the talented and knowledgeable provide guidance for those less fortunate.[316] The *Zhuāngzǐ* opts for a philosophy of life that is subtle enough to overcome the various problems attached to social interaction. Forgetting others like the fish that forget each other when they are swimming in the rivers and lakes has a different meaning than withdrawing from relations. The perspective of fish is frequently introduced in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as an allegory for carefree wandering. Fishes in the text can also frequently be read as an allegory for ideas or meanings.[317] Forgetting each other means not seeing the other as having an identity; "forgetting" here means not holding on to any meaning, not clinging to how the person is or how my relation to the other should be. Transcending all artificial values through the cultivation of inner stillness enables the self to respond from a position in which the self as no-self can connect to the other as no-other in each instant in novel, creative ways.

§4.10 The Problem of Politics

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s perspectivism and its emphasis on self-transformation, in which self and other are relativized but in which their difference is not resolved, can show us how to become open to cultural others. In terms of the self-other relation, which is the main focus of this study, this entails that we should be aware of the risks involved both in attuning to and to ignoring differences. The risk involved in attuning to difference is that we "other the other," in which the tradition classified as "different" is approached either as having no common nature to our own cultural tradition or being assimilated to our tradition for the purpose of comparison. Ignoring difference between self and other amounts not only to a missed opportunity to learn from what is other, but also tends to dismiss the need to reflect upon one's own biases, prejudices, and perspectives. For comparative philosophy, it is important to reflect upon one's own self-understanding and undermine cultural hegemony.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on desocialization and liberating ourselves of all artificial values and unnatural constraints is an active method in which we adopt

[316] Robins, D. "Mohist Care" *Philosophy East & West*, 62 No 1, 64
[317] Hoffman, H.P. *Yuzhile*, 42

a broader, open perspective that mirrors the other perspectives rather than evaluating them. For comparative philosophy, the decision to adopt a wandering, empty and mirroring heart-mind is a political choice that reflects our ethical responsibility not to colonize what is other as a need to gain epistemological clarity. Politics is however always the realm of the violation of the other and the other's perspectives, something that is not only illuminated in Levinas' analysis, but is also a sentiment present in the *Zhuāngzǐ*.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is often interpreted as advocating a philosophy that privileges the tranquil life and eschews politics. Graham describes the *Zhuāngzǐ* for example as "in effect an anthology of writings with philosophies justifying withdrawal to private life."[318] The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s relativism and perspectivism are also seen as a problem for the articulation of a political theory, as the lack of epistemological clarity regarding the determination of personal duties provides no ground for formulating laws and regulations. The *yǐnshì* (隱士, hermitic) interpretation of the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasize the text's disapproval of politics and sees the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s spiritual ideal as a withdrawal from social life. Dull for example argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* celebrates socially marginalized persons who are freed from being assimilated into schemes, designs, and agendas. For Dull, the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s distrust of politics is not a mere anti-authoritarian resistance but is grounded in a "deep criticism about the way in which designs, ideologies and intentional frameworks forcefully impose themselves on nature itself."[319] Jiang argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* primarily opts for political abstention and living in the margins of the political world due to "what they considered the hopelessness of the mainstream moral-political project."[320]

The readings of both Dull and Jiang suggest that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is not anti-political but sees the political realm as the site of exploitation, oppression, imperialism, and violence. I agree with these readings, especially when we consider that the *Zhuāngzǐ* overall aim is to liberate all humans from artificial constraints so that they can find the pivot of *dào* and naturally interlock with the myriad things. Politics is however the realm of power in which humans try to control others; a realm of violent power relations in which humans risk their own lives.

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[318] Graham, A.C. *Disputers*, 172

[319] Dull, C.J. "Zhuangzi and Thoreau: Wandering, Nature, and Freedom" *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (2012): 222-239

[320] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, 231

On multiple occasions, the *Zhuāngzǐ* indicates that in its time there was no space for "being careless," that its time was a time of "great confusion," in which "he who steals a belt buckle is executed, but he who steals a state is made a feudal lord" (*Bǐ qiè gōu zhě zhū, qièguó zhě wéi zhūhóu*, 彼竊鉤者誅，竊國者為諸侯).[321] The *Zhuāngzǐ* provides us with great insight into how our emotions and our desire for reputation can create tensions in social relationships. Showing off how good and wise we are is an instrument to expose how bad the other person is, and this is seen as "plaguing others," a behaviour that for sure leads to being "plagued in return" (*Zāi rén zhě, rén bì fǎn zāi zhī*, 菑人者，人必反菑之).[322] Fasting the heart-mind is seen as a method that mutually benefits persons; by responding in a non-evaluative way, others do not feel controlled and are affirmed in their own self-so-ness, which, as a consequence will not provoke them to afflict us.

Persons who respond from an empty, mirroring and wandering heart-mind and who is at rest in the middle of the pivot are excellent mediators in social relationships, because they do not add any emotional disruption to the situation and their presence is a source of tranquillity and stillness. Their mere presence is as such enough to teach persons about the genuine life; teaching is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* unintentional, in the sense that having the intention to teach others is already assuming too much and will be easily confused with controlling others.

It seems that being in the pivot will also be a position that will be of use in politics, as we are in the pivot able to emphasize with the other and the other's perspectives. The *Zhuāngzǐ* does seem to share this point of view, but also sees how the political realm will make it hard for us to remain in the pivot. For understanding the problem with politics, we have to understand the relation between *zhēn* (真) and natural spontaneity. *Zhēn* denotes the true nature of things and is as a concept closely related to virtue (*dé*,德), another term frequently used in the text which in an original sense means "efficacious power," which for the *Zhuāngzǐ* refers to one's natural inborn unique capacities. True autonomy is for the *Zhuāngzǐ* realized when we act spontaneously, drawing upon the resources of or natural inborn unique capacities which entails responding with efficacious power as we are affirming our own self-so-ness.

We have to consider that the *Zhuāngzǐ* frequently attacks and mocks the Mohist and Confucian Masters, who particularly disagreed on the nature of political obligation. While Confucians emphasize politics as a moral obligation that

[321] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 26, 64
[322] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 25

originates from one's specific role, the Mohists saw it as a natural obligation derived from impartial moral principles. For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, these "*Rúmò*" Masters all were making the same mistake: they all made the heart-mind dependent on specific patterns of *shìfēi*-distinctions and failed to see that these artificial distinctions construct a confined, anxious, and limited self.

Petty rulers are depicted in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as persons who use wisdom to maintain their power of position, and the text tries to show that these persons are locked in their own perspective and dwell in their own self-righteousness. In a sense, the *Zhuāngzǐ* suggests that political power corrupts persons and changes their inborn nature, suggesting that persons do not tend to give up their position of power. This is why the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that it is easier to change ourselves than others and that we should invest in mastering different anti-rebellious methods that are best suited for self-preservation. Dodging the bullet by transforming oneself into uselessness, - into a person who aligns themselves with others and does not enter into debates, is a fairly reliable strategy to secure one's natural lifespan. The only viable possibility we have is securing our own self-preservation and not adding any more confusion to the world. Bo Wang (2004) emphasizes this point:

> *It is not that the Zhuangzi was not concerned with [social] order, but rather that he thinks this problem is not something he can consider, or that only after one's life is [relatively] safe and peaceful that [political and social] order can be considered. So he chooses to give up [the discussion of order], or we could say temporarily give it up. This attitude of "giving up" allows him to take a relaxed approach in the world, which means that he can keep an appropriate distance from it.*[323]

Wang observes that the *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes the need for genuine pretending and hiding our Virtuosity (*dé*, 德) in order to remain aligned with others. I think this passage also particularly shows that the Zhuangzian project is not ethical but realistic. Where Levinas interprets the resistance of the Face as pure goodness and infinite responsibility to the Other, the *Zhuāngzǐ* proposes being in the middle of the pivot to preserve one's own life and opening oneself to the entire universe so that we can respond to life without being deluded.

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[323] Wang. Bo. 庄子哲学 (2004), 23 quoted in: D'Ambrosio, P. & Moeller H.G. "Authority without Authenticity: The *Zhuangzi*'s Genuine Pretending as Socio-Political Strategy" *Religions* 9, (2018): 1-11

The technique of genuine pretending is a practical strategy to preserve one's own life and not be affected by the politics of competition and desire for power. The technique is particularly suitable when dealing with tyrants and oppressors or those who are unlikely to criticize their own attitude. However, the *Zhuāngzǐ* also leaves room for the "clear-sighted sovereign" whose achievements are effective and invisible, indicating that the *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes that withdrawing from political life is not a lone ideal. The sage ruler can:

> 功蓋天下而似不自己，化貸萬物而民弗恃，有莫舉名，使物自喜，立乎不測，而遊於無有者也.
>
> *cover all the world, but they seem not to come from himself. He transforms all things, and yet the people do not rely upon him. There is something unnameable about him that allows all creatures to delight in themselves. He establishes his footing in the unfathomable and roams where nothing at all exists.*[324]

The rulers who roam freely can, thus, empower each individual in their rightness, indicating that they refrain from criticizing them and judging them wrong. Rulers can regulate the community without relying on their singular perspective, which can only mean they issue regulations, standards and laws that align the different perspectives. Yet, even when the rulers have adopted the strategy of fasting the heart-mind and have mastered keeping their heart-mind at ease, they will remain a potential target for violence and aggression as long as there are still persons who have not yet mastered the Course. The *Zhuāngzǐ*, therefore, concludes that rulers cannot be truly free, but can, when they have transformed their heart-mind, "roam freely in [their] cage." Politics is, thus, always the sacrifice of one's own freedom, a risking of one's self-preservation for the sake of society.

Politics as such does not align with the overall project of the *Zhuāngzǐ* in which we can freely and creatively respond to the endless range of *shìfēi* perspectives without becoming entangled and affected by them. Navigating the world in a relaxed way is what the *Zhuāngzǐ* calls "carefree wandering," (*xiāoyáoyóu*, 逍遙遊). Carefree wandering is a state that results from being in the pivot of *dào*: it refers to a detached heart-mind that can look at the different perspectives from a distance and can play with a variety of perspectives to align them. This meandering and playful approach to life that D'Ambrosio and Moeller call

[324] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*,51

"genuine pretending."[325] A genuine pretender is able to playfully and skilfully engage with the different perspectives from a neutral, non-committed position.

§4.11 Adepts Who Do Not Rely on the Eyes or Heart-Mind

In this section, I will show how the person whose heart-mind is at rest in the middle of the pivot occupies an "objective perspectivism" and lets the different perspectives "illuminates the obvious," (*Yǐmíng*, 以明)[326] this means that, from the pivot, one sees that debates over what is right/beneficial/comparable are mere expressions of opinions issued from a situated context. In the pivot, the person lets the different perspectives debate about what is right and wrong. What perspective A affirms, is denied by perspective B, which, simultaneously means that A denies what B affirms, revealing that A and B both are wrong and right at the same time. The affirmation and denial of a perspective is only an opinion produced in relation to (an) other perspective(s).

Persons in the pivot do not show any preference for a particular perspective, but instead "[go] by the rightness of the present "this," (*Yì yīnshì yě*, 亦因是也)[327] which means that they in each situation assesses the best way in which things fit together. D'Ambrosio and Moeller call the specific attitude of the Sage who is in the middle of the pivot "genuine pretending," an attitude in which the pretender "pursues no selfish goal – he has no hidden agenda, no mission to complete, no ideology to impose," and is as such not attached to his position or role. D'Ambrosio and Moeller further specify this position as follows:

> *Pretending here can be understood in the way that children play, that is, without attachment to whatever is temporarily adopted, recognizing both the contingency and transience of transformations. The "genuineness" of genuine pretending is reflected in a child's play as well. Children take on their roles and actually "become" them, but again only while affirming the contingency and transience of their roles.*[328]

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[325] D'Ambrosio, P. & Moeller, H.G. *Authority without Authenticity*, 1-11
[326] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12
[327] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12
[328] D'Ambrosio & Moeller, *Authority without Authenticity*, 7

I would however add to this explanation that genuine pretending is responding to the world from an attitude of emotional equanimity, it is a mature spontaneity which the child lacks. Children often do not have control over their emotions and are as such not good examples of persons who are *at rest* in the middle. Fasting the heart-mind as a method of genuine pretending is a trained spontaneity that does not come easily, even when it is the most natural method to approach external constraints.

Genuine pretending is an attitude that requires a detachment from socially approved aspirations such as success and requires the ability to train the heart-mind, a practice that not all persons will readily adopt. The different parables and stories of the attitude of the Sage therefore emphasize the benefits of this approach, even though we have to recognize that expecting or clinging to beneficial results from fasting our heart-mind is still a sign of having a fixed heart-mind.

The Sage is depicted as a person fully immersed in the world but who acts from an attitude of *wúwéi* (無為). Commonly translated as "without action" or "effortless action," this term depicts the person who responds to the unfolding of a situation without clinging to a particular identity and as such creates a perspective in which the Sage is open to any identity. The prototype of the person in a state of *wúwéi* is Cook Ding:

> 庖丁為文惠君解牛，手之所觸，肩之所倚，足之所履，膝之所踦，砉然嚮然，奏刀騞然，莫不中音。合於《桑林》之舞，乃中《經首》之會。文惠君曰：「譆！善哉！技蓋至此乎？」庖丁釋刀對曰：「臣之所好者道也，進乎技矣。始臣之解牛之時，所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。技經肯綮之未嘗，而況大軱乎！良庖歲更刀，割也；族庖月更刀，折也。今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。彼節者有間，而刀刃者无厚，以无厚入有間，恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣，是以十九年而刀刃若新發於硎。雖然，每至於族，吾見其難為，忧然為戒，視為止，行為遲。動刀甚微，謋然已解，如土委地。提刀而立，為之四顧，為之躊躇滿志，善刀而藏之。」文惠君曰：「善哉！吾聞庖丁之言，得養生焉。」

The cook was carving up an ox for King Hui of Liang. Wherever his hand smacked it, wherever his shoulder leaned into it, wherever his foot braced it, wherever his knee pressed it, the thwacking tones of flesh falling from bone would echo, the knife would whiz through with its resonant thwing, each stroke ringing out the perfect note, attuned to the "Dance of the Mulberry Grove" or the "Jingshou Chorus" of the ancient sage-kings. The king said, "Ah! It is wonderful that skill can reach such heights!" The cook put down his knife and said, "What I love is the Course, something that advances beyond mere skill. When I first started cutting up oxen, all I looked at for three years was oxen, and yet still I was unable to see all there was to see in an ox. But now I encounter it with the spirit rather than scrutinizing it with the eyes. My understanding consciousness, beholden to its specific purpose, comes to a halt, and thus the promptings of the spirit begin to flow. I depend on Heaven's unwrought perforations and strike the larger gaps, following along with the broader hollows. I go by how they already are, playing them as they lay. So my knife has never had to cut though the knotted nodes where the warp hits the weave, much less the gnarled joints of bone. A good cook changes his blade once a year: he slices. An ordinary cook changes his blade once a month: he hacks. I have been using this same blade for nineteen years, cutting up thousands of oxen, and yet it is still as the day it came off the whetstone. For the joints have spaces within them, and the very edge of the blade has no thickness at all. When what has no thickness enters into an empty space, it is vast and open, with more than enough room for the play of the blade. That is why my knife is still as sharp as it if had just come off the whetstone, even after nineteen years. Nonetheless, whenever I come to a clustered tangle, realizing that it is difficult to do anything about it, I instead restrain myself as if terrified, until my seeing comes to a complete halt. My activity slows, and the blade moves ever so slightly. Then all at once, I find the ox already dismembered at my feet like clumps of soil scattered on the ground. I retract the blade and stand there gazing at my work arrayed all around me, dawdling over it with satisfaction. Then I wipe off the blade and put it away.[329]

[329] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*,22-23

This lengthy report of Cook Ding's extraordinary capacity to cut up oxen without effort gives us insight into how we can engage with the outside world in a spontaneous dispossessed way. Furthermore, Cook Ding can be seen as an example of a Sage who "uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter's Wheel." (*Yī yīng wúqióng. Shì yì yī wúqióng, fēi yì yī wúqióng yě*, 以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也).[330] Just like the potter who uses his wheel to make pots, the Butcher uses his knife to slice up an ox. Their crafts need to be interpreted here as a metaphor for the genuine person (*zhēnrén*, 真人), or a person of Virtuosity (*dé,* 德), who responds to the situation from an attitude of emotional equanimity and has a specific knack for navigating smoothly through the world. The Way, says Cook Ding, "advances beyond mere skill," indicating that the Cook takes the oxen as there are at this present moment and not as language or conventional concepts takes them to be.

When Cook Ding explains that when he first started to cut oxen, all he looked at "for three years was oxen," which in the context of traditional Chinese probably indicates that Cook Ding connected the right name to the right image. Deconstruction language and more specifically the belief that the right name correlates with the right image, is a very important moment in finding the pivot of *dào*, as the *Zhuāngzǐ* wants to show us what kind of creative freedom we will get when we let go of clinging to *shìfēi*-distinctions and no longer rely on universal evaluative standards. Instead of clinging to distinctions, we should respond from an attitude of *wúwéi* (無為), in which we let things run their own course. In the pivot of *dào*, our thinking is no longer limited as the Sage recognizes that there is no essential or "right" meaning for words, which, as a consequence, allows the Sage to think in endless possibilities.

Wúwéi in the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not mean 'no action' but refers to a specific kind of non-interference with the unfolding of the world. The philologist Pang Pu notes that the term *wu* (無) might mean "without a definite plan" or "losing something that was initially possessed" but in its most ancient forms is probably related to "dance" (舞).[331] In the narrative of Cook Ding, the *Zhuāngzǐ* refers to ritual dances to emphasize the way Cook Ding is able to align his bodily gestures with the outside world. I think this might also refer to how genuine persons (*zhēnrén,*真人) draw

[330] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 14

[331] Pang P. (2005). "Yifenweisan" in *Zhijiao liushi zhounian ji bashiwu shouchen jinian wenji*, Shandong Education Press, 418-422

upon their own nature, their embodied efficacy, instead of acting out of moral or political obligation.

In the pivot, persons respect their sensory and rational limitations. The Sage firmly restraints the desire of the heart-mind and "stops at tallying." Geaney argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* regards tallying as the common ability of the heart-mind, and that the text describes tallying as "the closest thing to verification."[332] The Sages, thus, use their heart-mind to access a situation, but at the same time restrain their heart-mind from overemphasizing its desire to turn things into objects of knowledge. While the *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects the heart-mind's tendency to make fixed *shìfēi*-distinctions based on emotions, it does allow for grading the situation (*lùn*, 論), explained by Ziporyn[333] The *Zhuāngzǐ* does not reject knowledge, but wants us to change our relation to knowledge, a change that requires a wandering heart-mind that does not cling to knowledge, language, and logic.

Being at rest in the middle of the pivot of *dào* (*dàoshū*,道樞) is a position that changes the way the Sage relates to himself and the outside world. The illumination of the endless variety of perspectives of *shìfēi*-distinctions and the recognition that what is "so" and "not so" are interchangeable and interdependent, enables the Sage to transcend these values and to find the pivot. In the pivot, humans temporarily forget any particular pattern of *shìfēi*-distinctions, and respond to the perspectives from an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind.

Nevertheless, the Sages do act, but from an attitude of *wúwéi*, indicating that these Sages respond from their natural spontaneity, their natural capacity to harmonize the seemingly opposed perspectives by recognizing the disparate values that can be constructed. The Sages who "us[e] various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others," responds to what other's take their needs to be, a responsiveness that is the ultimate state of freedom because in the pivot, the Sages have lost "their selves."

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[332] Geaney, J. *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 93
[333] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 9

§4.12 Non-Obstruction and Connection

We have seen that the Sage in the pivot no longer clings to human values and traditional conventions on language, logic, and knowledge. In the pivot, persons respond from an attitude of emotional equanimity and embrace doubt and indeterminacy as life itself. Instead of relying on rigid evaluative standards, the Sages draw upon their natural Virtuosity (*dé*,德) and respond from an attitude of "effortless action" (*wúwéi*, 無為).

In this section I will specifically concentrate on how the different elements of Virtuosity, effortless action and carefree wandering relate to remaining at rest in the middle of the pivot. First of all, responding from the pivot entails that we no longer have a clogged heart-mind and have transcended all human values and conventional beliefs on language, knowledge, and logic. The deconstruction of language, moral values and knowledge liberates the heart-mind from its limitations and enables the heart-mind to move along within the social sphere in a detached and non-obstructive way.

The Way of wandering is a recognition that "understanding is merely a bastard son, obligations and agreements merely glue, Virtuosity is a mere continuation of something received, skill merely salesmanship" (*Gù shèngrén yǒu suǒ yóu, ér zhī wèi niè, yuē wèi jiāo, dé wèi jiē, gōng wèi shāng*, 故聖人有所遊,而知為孽，約為膠，德為接,工為商).[334] The Sage uses knowledge, social responsibilities and conventions in a provisional, non-committed way. Genuine pretending should however not be seen as being indifferent, the sages do draw *shìfēi*-distinctions, but only in a very lose, practical and provisional way.

Retaining the position in the pivot, provides humans with the ability to be stable amid instability without trying to eliminate or control the flux of the moment or adding anything artificial to the situation. The *Zhuāngzǐ* calls this strategy "walking two roads" (*liǎngxíng*, 兩行) or finding the "hinge of the way" (*dàoshū*, 道樞) to "illuminate things in the light of heaven (*zhàozhī yútiān,* 照之于天) and being identical to *dàtōng* (大通).[335] I will first analyse the philosophical meaning of "being identical to *dàtōng,*" as this provides us with insight in how we can harmonize seemingly opposed perspectives. In the following passage, "being identical to *dàtōng* is explained:

[334] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 38.
[335] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi,*12

> 顏回曰：「回益矣。」仲尼曰：「何謂也？」曰：「回忘仁義矣。」曰：「可矣，猶未也。」他日復見，曰：「回益矣。」曰：「何謂也？」曰：「回忘禮樂矣。」曰：「可矣，猶未也。」他日復見，曰：「回益矣。」曰：「何謂也？」曰：「回坐忘矣。」仲尼蹴然曰：「何謂坐忘？」顏回曰：「墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。」仲尼曰：「同則無好也，化則無常也。而果其賢乎！丘也請從而後也。」

> *Yan Hui said, "I am making progress." Confucius said, "What do you mean?" Yan Hui said, "I have forgotten Humanity and Responsibility." Confucius said, "That's good, but you're still not there." Another day he came again and said, "I am making progress." "What do you mean?" "I have forgotten ritual and music." Confucius said, "That's good, but you're still not there." He returned another day and said yet again, "I am making progress." "What do you mean?" Yan Hui said, "I just sit and forget." Confucius jolted as if kicked, said, "What do you mean, you sit and forget?" Yan Hui said, "It's a dropping away of my limbs and torso, a chasing off of my sensory acuity, which disperses my physical form and ousts my understanding until I am the same as the Transforming Openness. This is what I call just sitting and forgetting." Confucius said, "The same as it? But then you are free of all preference! Transforming? But then you are free of all constancy! You truly are a worthy man! I beg to be accepted as your disciple.*

The passage in Chapter 6 of the *Zhuāngzǐ* identifies three different stages of forgetting (*wàng*, 忘): forgetting the sentiments of humaneness and rightness (*huí wàng rényì yǐ*, 回忘仁義矣) (stage 1 or 2), forgetting of rites and music (*huí wàng lǐ yuè yǐ*, 回忘禮樂矣), practices that work upon the natural feelings that are not yet moral in content[336] (stage 1 or 2) and "sitting and forgetting" (*huí zuò wàng yǐ*, 回坐忘矣), which is the last phase of forgetting (stage 3).

I will first concentrate on phase 3 of forgetting, in which the human person becomes the same as *dàtōng*. "Becoming or being the same" as *dàtōng* is first of all a coping strategy and not a spiritual or mystical state. Yan Hui is still Yan Hui; he has maintained his physical appearance and still has the human form. His transformation is an inner transformation, a change in the way he relates

[336] Wong, D. (2000). "Xunzi on Moral Motivation" In: T.C. Kline & P.J. Ivanhoe. *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*, Hackett, 149

to his heart-mind, his body and to the outside world. We can also discern that Confucius' exclamation that Yan Hui is a worthy man who one should follow is an implicit mockery of Confucius who is still the "nook and corner scholar," and still assumes that being worthy is preferable to being useless. The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that the Course cannot be captured in words but needs to be performed: it is an exercise in self-adaptation that transforms the heart-mind its relation to the body. Furthermore, while our inborn characteristics might resemble *dàtōng*, our circumstances, abilities and social position are unique, which is why we should not follow others, but follow our natural selves.

"Sitting and forgetting" is a state in which we no longer hold on to the distinctions "self-other" or "life-death" and are in a state of emotional tranquillity, a state in which we have made the heart-mind like dead ashes and made the body like dried wood. When we fast the heart-mind and let the organs, - which all have their natural desire-, take their turn in ruling us, we will become free of mental, personal, and social constraints. Key to the dialogue is "dispersing one's physical form and ousting one's understanding." Dispersing one's physical form is the movement from the *tǐ* (體)-body to the communal-body (*tōngtǐ*, 通體). *Tōng* (通) is translated as "thoroughness," but has in Chinese several meanings. In the *Zhuāngzǐ tōng* encompasses all there is, referring to a whole that contains more than its parts. *Tōng* signals connection, thoroughness, or pervasiveness and signifies as a concept the absence of demarcation.[337]

Residing in the common body entails the rejection of differences between things and recognizing the co-emergence of "this" and "that," of "life" and "death" of "happiness" and "unhappiness." The single (human) *tǐ* (體)-body is part of the larger corpus; that is created from the bodies of her ancestors and her future children and grandchildren. The single *tǐ* (體)-body is related to other human bodies through mutual labouring, by sharing food and by being in each other's co-presence. In the *Zhuāngzǐ* the communal body has a broader metaphorical meaning and also refers to the interdependency between opposites, the interlocking of the different perspectives and the transformation of meaning.[338] Becoming one with *dàtōng* is the accomplishment of a wandering, empty and mirroring heart-mind that is not seeking after an artificial and restricted completion. The *Zhuāngzǐ* treats thus difference *as difference* and not as oppositional to sameness. Difference

[337] Hong, L.C. "Clearing up Obstructions: An Image Schema Approach to the Concept of 'Datong' 大通 in Chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi*" *Asian Philosophy* 23 No 3, (2013):281.

[338] Sommer, D. *Concepts of the Body in the Zhuangzi*, 224

only is neutralized or becomes sameness when humans artificially group things together and cling to evaluative *shìfēi*-distinctions.

"Sitting and forgetting" does not refer to not making distinctions between things; making distinctions between things is what makes us human. The aim of sitting and forgetting is that we do not evaluate the distinctions and cling to that what is "right" or "good" or "desirable." Understanding means here "cleverness," or "keenness of sight and hearing," (*cōngming*, 聰明)[339] that leads to clinging to objects of knowledge (*zhī*, 知). Sitting and forgetting implies freeing ourselves from the limitations that our thinking projects in concepts. Knowledge should only be used to assess a current situation; the meaning of words should be forgotten when we have grasped the meaning in the ongoing moment. This is only possible when we have emptied our hearts-mind and have practiced stillness.

The Daoist sage is the one who is able to attune to the "self-so-ness" of each thing but is not naïve or destined to be killed by others. We must remember that Master Zhuang Zhou assumingly responded fiercely to the messenger who informed him of the offer of King Wei. Master Zhuang does not lament over those who want to "kill" him by fixing his heart-mind and "piercing" his heart-mind with desire for fame and remuneration, but specifically keeps these influences at a distance. The Sages do not let others penetrate holes in them for the sake of satisfying some need these others have.

This aligns with Moeller's interpretation, which is that the Hundun parable in the text is not only a parody, but also satire in its purest form.[340] First, Moeller places the parable in its historical context by classifying it as a "charter myth," a parody of mythological tales that were well-known in the Warring States Period. Hundun (*hùndùn,* 混沌) is depicted in Chinese mythology as a "faceless being" that corresponds to the self-generating power of the origin of the cosmos. The *Zhuāngzǐ,* however, turns the mythological character of Hundun into a parody by combining it with the "sage kings" who – ultimately – kill the very origin of the cosmos by trying to give him a face.

Moeller observes that the Hundun parable can be read as a parody of all lineages of thought that rely on some form of cosmological theory of origins or

[339] Hong, L. *Clearing up Obstructions*, 283

[340] Moeller, H.G. "Hundun's Mistake: Satire and Sanity in the *Zhuangzi*" *Philosophy East & West* 67 No 3, (2017):783-800

mythological tales of sage kings who express perfect moral behaviour to justify their ideals. Especially the use of the words "all men have" (*rénjiēyǒu*, 人皆有) is an implicit mockery of the Masters who claim that humans are endowed with special qualities. The parable can, therefore, be considered a parody of a charter myth – a myth that serves to justify the status quo of a society and express the prejudices and desires of the ruling class. Instead of elevating the three earliest lofty sage kings, the *Zhuāngzǐ* depicts the emperors *Shu* (儵) and *Hu* (忽) as goofy idiots, who, in their act of ultimate benevolence, kill Hundun by drilling holes in him because his nature is not "human enough." However, as Moeller illustrates, the Hundun parable can also be interpreted from the Zhuangzian attitude of *wúwéi,* in which the sage resists the temptation to assign himself a fixed identity. Those good at holding onto "what is central to them" keep their distance from attempts to fixate them in any way but remain in a state of *wúwéi.* Hundun, however, makes the mistake of being hospitable to emperors with a fixed idea of what human nature looks like and, as such, Hundun cannot resist the penetrations and loses his great virtuosity. The art of *dào* (*dàoshù*, 道術) is, thus, not only trusting the natural unfolding of the universe, but also the ability not to be disturbed by inside and outside penetrations. The persons in the pivot are thus fully committed but keep their sanity.

When we forget the evaluative schemes of righteousness and benevolence as the culprits of unnecessary suffering, we have already taken a very big step towards becoming free from mental, personal, and social constraints. Forgetting music and ritual is an important next step to become free of constraints. Music and ritual refer to the Confucian social etiquette, formalizing behavioural patterns to harmonize social relations. Ritual and music are embodiments of humaneness and justice but are seen in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as less problematic. Music for example is a natural human activity that nourishes friendship. We should however treat them as natural expressions and not as a standard or instrument that we can use to streamline relations.

The three stages of forgetting are a reversal of the forgotten *dào*, its regeneration. This means that we first should forget humanness and righteousness, which is the stage when right and wrong began to appear in the heart-minds of persons and the Way was destroyed. Ritual and music are in a sense benign, as the fasting of the heart-mind can also be seen as a kind of ritual or committed practice. Nevertheless, when we cling to them and perform these because of expected outcome, we are not genuinely free from constraints.

When we are the same as *dàtōng* we let *dào* flow through us and we can hold to the "pivot of *dào*."

§4.13 The Pivot of *Dào*

In this chapter I have presented the *Zhuāngzǐ* as an important resource for comparative philosophy. Comparative philosophy compares a variety of sometimes incompatible perspectives that deems concepts from disparate cultural philosophical traditions "comparable" or "not comparable," "similar" or "different". This present study has highlighted that it is particularly important for comparative philosophy not to approach the other from a fixed normative framework or to essentialize difference.

In this Chapter I have concentrated on explaining what it means to be at rest in the pivot of *dào* on the basis of a crucial passage in the *Zhuāngzǐ* which describes how we can harmonize seemingly incompatible perspectives. Throughout this chapter I have described this position as an "objective perspectivism," in which the person responds to the other from an attitude of emotional equinity. I will now synthesize the different findings of this chapter and will discuss what it specifically means to be in the pivot. I will start with quoting the crucial passage:

> 物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是，方生之說也。雖然，方生方死，方死方生；方可方不可，方不可方可；因是因非，因非因是。是以聖人不由，而照之于天，亦因是也。是亦彼也，彼亦是也。彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。果且有彼是乎哉？果且無彼是乎哉？彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。是亦一無窮，非亦一無窮也。故曰「莫若以明」。

> *There is no being that is not "that." There is no being that is not "this." But one cannot be seeing these from the perspective of "that": one knows them only from "this," [i.e., from one's own perspective]. Thus, we can say: "That" emerges from "this," and "this" follows from "that." This is the theory of the simultaneous generation of "this" and "that." But by the same token, their simultaneous generation is their simultaneous destruction, and vice versa. Simultaneous affirmability is simultaneous negatability, and vice versa. What is circumstantially right is also circumstantially wrong,*

> *and vice versa. Thus, the Sage does not proceed from any one of them alone but instead lets them all bask in the broad daylight of Heaven. And that too is only a case of going by the rightness of the present "this."*
>
> *"This" is also a "that." "That" is also a "this." "THAT" posits a "this" and a "that" – a right and wrong – of its own. But "THIS" also posits a "this" and a "that" – a right and a wrong – of its own. So is there really any "that" versus "this," any right versus wrong? Or is there really no "that" versus "this"? When "this" and "that" – right and wrong – are no longer coupled as opposites – that is called the Course as Axis, the axis of all courses. When this axis [pivot] finds its place in the center, it responds to all the endless things it confronts, thwarted by none. For it has an endless supply of "rights," and an endless supply of "wrongs." Thus, I say, nothing compares to the Illumination of the Obvious.*[341]

We can now see that the *Zhuāngzǐ* here tries to show that we cannot rely on any meta-standard that can evaluate *shìfēi*-judgments. Debates on what is "right" and "wrong" are deluded because what is "right" is dependent upon a particular perspective and certain circumstances. What is right from one perspective is wrong from a different perspective, revealing that *shìfēi*-judgments are not fixed and are always underdetermined. Every perspective is relative to a particular context and consists of certain preferences of what is "this" and "that," in which the *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasizes that these preferences are not only cognitive, but also emotional commitments.

Persons in the pivot are only committed to take the situation as it is and have the ability to see how the different disputations are mere opinions and express only preferences. These Sages "harmonizes with others," by using "various right and wrongs," indicating that the sage does not prefer a certain method or approach but is familiar with a variety of methodologies and approaches. In this chapter I have tried however to show that the *Zhuāngzǐ* does have a method, which is more a position or a way of life that embodies beliefs, comportments, and commitments. The Sage at the pivot uses the method of "the radiance of drift and doubt" (*gùyízhīyào*,故疑之耀) and uses the "illumination of the Obvious" (*Yǐmíng*,以明) and "[goes] by the rightness of the present "this" (*Yīnshì*, 因是).

[341] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 12.

The difference between the *Rúmò*-scholars and the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that the latter argues that we cannot know beforehand what "that" is and "this", "right" or "wrong," but that these distinctions are mere convenient ways to navigate a particular situation. *Yīnshì* 因是 thus means being responsive to the situation, which requires an attitude of flexibility and creativity. The *Zhuāngzǐ* gives a very good example between being responsive to the situation and clinging to predetermined, rigid distinctions:

> 已而不知其然，謂之道。勞神明為一，而不知其同也，謂之朝三。何謂朝三？曰狙公賦芧，曰：「朝三而莫四。」眾狙皆怒。曰：「然則朝四而莫三。」眾狙皆悅。名實未虧，而喜怒為用，亦因是也。是以聖人和之以是非，而休乎天鈞，是之謂兩行

> *But to labour your spirit trying to make all things one, without realizing that it is all the same [whether you do so or not], is called "Three in the Morning." What is Three in the Morning? A monkey trainer was distributing chestnuts. He said, "I'll give you three in the morning and four in the evening." The monkeys were furious. "Well then," he said, "I'll give you four in the morning and three in the evening." The monkeys were delighted. This change of description and arrangement caused no loss, but in one case it brought anger and in another delight. Thus, the Sage uses various rights and wrongs to harmonize with others and yet remains at rest in the middle of Heaven the Potter's Wheel. This is "Walking Two Roads."* [342]

The persons who are at rest in the pivot, see knowledge as a convenient way to communicate with others, not as something that is objectively so, as our limited perspective prevents us from ultimately knowing what is right/wrong/this/that. Distinctions are furthermore not rigid opposed terms but are interdependent and often ambiguous. In a situation it might be that a variety of, seemingly opposed perspectives, are appropriate or right. In the pivot, we are able to value pluralism and indeterminacy and are, as a consequence, most open to the other and the other's perspectives.

The pivot is the broadest perspective in which persons are the most open to the other and the other's perspectives and can be seen as an objective perspective in which they are freed from unwanted bias. A requirement for being open is not being dogmatic and to be aware of one's implicit biases. The persons in the pivot

[342] *Zhuangzi*, 14

who constantly are committed to keeping their heart-mind at rest are keenly aware of how their emotions, expectations and beliefs influence the encounter with the other and try to respond spontaneously to the situation.

In the place, called in the text the "pivot of *dào*," which provides humans a stance from where they at once recognizes that other individual perspectives are limited by their circumstances, while at the same time acknowledging that they are circumstantially valid. Harmonizing thus means that we attune to the preferences of each perspective and respond to them without condemning their preferences. The person in the pivot has the flexibility to approach comparative philosophy from a plurality of perspectives. We should first remember that, for the *Zhuāngzǐ,* Heaven does not make distinctions, but nourishes all the myriad things. It generates, transforms, and changes all beings and all existence, but remains itself untransformed. Human consciousness and language create distinctions and humans mistakenly take their heart-minds as the governor of the other organs. Taking the heart-mind as the governor leads to clinging to objects of knowledge that are mis-taken as necessary to attaining social order and harmony. Instead of clinging to these artificial distinctions and classifications, we should adopt a conscious perspective that moves along with the fleeting temporal things in a tranquil and detached way.

The Sages recognize that valuing "this" is dependent upon a situationally proper assessment of "that," and thus feels no need to justify or defend their position. They also recognize that their preference for "this" is a situational choice and can easily become a "that" in the next moment. Because the Sages have freed themselves from preferences and constancy, these Sages are able to "shed an impartial light on things," which gives the Sage the advantage of seeing things very clearly and free from bias.

The Sage's perspective is a flexible position that can see "through" things in a way and is as such the most objective, while still being a human perspective, because the person in the pivot sees that there is ultimately no ground to favour only one of the many perspectives. Instead of seeing self and other as oppositional alternatives, the Sage in the pivot thus can see their relatedness, as they both affirm what they prefer and deny what they do not prefer. Their affirmations and denials are as such interchangeable and are mere opinions. The *Zhuāngzǐ* raises questions that challenge epistemological claims and criticizes philosophical debates that try to discern what is ultimately "this/that," "so/not so" or "right/wrong." The text attacks one of the most important features

of philosophy as it questions the very task of philosophy as aiming for truth and transparency.

Philosophy is in the *Zhuāngzǐ* related to embracing doubt and indeterminacy as a way of life and promotes an extensive form of self-adaptation and self-liberation to restore the natural interconnectedness of the myriad things. The Sage resonates with the infinite process of change and transformation, a following along that experiences more than that can be captured in words or can be known. In the pivot, these persons remove the blockages between the different perspectives, and use "the same as the transforming oneness," (*dàtōng*, 大通) implying that they do not impede any perspective and let the perspectives exist in their own right. The Sages also recognize that the preferences of others can easily change and as such respond each time to them from the current situation. In the pivot of *dào*, persons have emptied themselves of all expectations and prejudices and open themselves completely to what is presented to them. For the *Zhuāngzǐ,* this is what it means to go along with transformation and change and to find the connection between the different perspectives.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* recognizes that language cannot adequately capture reality; interpretation is always a mis- or re-presentation, particularly because transformation from one thing into another cannot be adequately captured in fixed distinctions. This is also the point of the famous butterfly parable. The seamless transformation from dreaming that I am a butterfly and awaking as myself is a transformation in which awakening is seen as reality and dreaming as fiction. Treating things equally does not mean that there is no distinction between being awake and dreaming, between being a butterfly and being a Master Zhuang. Treating things equally frees us from preferring or giving more weight to one side of the transformation than the other.

In the same sense, finding the pivot of *dào* dissolves the self-other opposition. Treating the other and myself equally recognizes that I can only be myself when there are others, without others I am no-self. What I call me is in my perspective "myself," whereas in the perspective of my brother "me" refers to "him." Being in the pivot enables us to see that we are simultaneously self and other, indicating that the self-other dichotomy is an artificially constructed opposition.

Scholars who claim that the text is committed to scepticism, or embraces relativism, are all trapped in dichotomies of what is "so" and "not so" and fail to see the overall intent of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. In the pivot, we recognize that there

is not a very clear distinction between the perspective that claims that "the *Zhuāngzǐ* is a sceptic," and the perspective that claims that "the *Zhuāngzǐ* is not a sceptic" (or only a sceptic in a specific way, or to highlight something). This point also applies to the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s linguistic scepticism, which is not meant as a rhetorical trick but is the natural outcome of the cultivation of the peaceful heart-mind that recognizes that reality cannot be adequately conveyed in terms of distinctions. The text's linguistic scepticism is not just philosophical standpoint – as conceived by Zhuāngzǐ's best friend Huizi, used merely to win an argument.

I would even suggest that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s linguistic scepticism is not a therapeutic strategy to make its readers sensitive to the limitations of language, as Wong (2017) and Schwitzgebel (1996) argue, as this suggests that the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s scepticism is a mere rhetorical trick. I think the key to the text's use of linguistic scepticism is that, through emptying, wandering, and mirroring, such scepticism is the only way the sages can speak without disturbing their heart-mind. Letting go of rigid distinctions, giving up on preferences and finding the pivot of *dào* changes our language: our use of language in the pivot can only be a specific kind of detached, non-involved language that communicates but does not cling to preferences and standards.

The language used by a person who embodies *dào* should adapt itself to the ongoing process of transformation, implying that the meaning of words is always provisional. Language should not be used to stir up a debate or win an argument but should be aimed at communicating that which at this moment is present(ed). Language spoken by a person who embodies *dào* and has fasted his heart-mind is aimed at informing the listener rather than convincing the listener. Language is as such an instrument to facilitate communication and is only a description of the current, fleeting temporal situation. Language as a means of communication is, therefore, not fundamentally different from the chirping of baby birds. The *Zhuāngzǐ* rejects the scholarly model, - which leads to disputation, bickering and quarrelling-, because it uses language to impose artificial standards on the world, preventing the myriad things from unfolding their 'self-so-ness' and causing us unnecessary frustration and anxiety.

Instead of matching words with proper action, we should rely on "spill over-goblet words" (*zhīyán,* 卮言); that is, words that, like a hinged vessel, tip over when they become full and fill themselves when empty. Spill over-goblet words are described in the *Miscellaneous Chapters* as words that "give forth [new

meanings] constantly, harmonizing them all through their Heavenly Transitions" (*Zhī yán rì chū, hé yǐ tiān ní*, 卮言日出，和以天倪).[343] The meaning of words is context- and speaker dependent; they are not exchangeable but mark a unique moment in time. True language is not the "rectification of names" in which the father fulfils the specific duties of being a father and a son fulfils his; true language is when this particular father in this particular situation praises his son because his son does something in this particular situation that is remarkable at this moment in time.

Spill over-goblet words, thus, hold meaning for a particular person in a particular situation and in a specific moment in time. This aspect aligns with the observation that the *Zhuāngzǐ* does not reject language nor claims that we should never make *shìfēi*-distinctions. Making *shìfēi*-distinctions is crucial for humans to navigate their lives; even the *Zhuāngzǐ* as a text would become utterly meaningless without making distinctions. However, the *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that when we attune to *dào* and roam freely with an unbounded heart-mind, our language can only mirror this unboundedness. There is no need to rectify names because, when we roam with a peaceful mind, we attune to the spontaneous "self-so-ness" of the world and can trust in the meaning we receive from it. Instead of preferring one kind of meaning, or one kind of interpretation, we should let go of all our expectations and beliefs and approach that what is other in the most open, detached way. Only when we no longer cling to our own perspective and preferences are we able to transcend ourselves and understand and use an endless range of perspectives.

To summarize, the Sages as the comparative philosophers who are at rest in the middle of the pivot, do make distinctions, but do not cling to them as they recognize that human language cannot adequately capture reality. Instead, these Sages use language to describe, to express a particular, provisional perspective that is faithful to the openness created in the pivot. Truthful language, - not signifying "true language", but a "being faithful to"-, is language that is open to change and is driven by the recognition that the relation between meaning and that which it describes is never fixed. When we experience the world as moments of emergence, we need to trust that the language used to express those emergences can arise from the circumstances of the event itself, without needing to be pre-emptively shaped to represent reality in accreted modes.

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[343] Ziporyn, B. *Zhuangzi*, 114.

Spill over-goblet words are open to change and ascribe a loose meaning to a thing. This playful, loose language is particularly evoked language that is ambiguous, distils seriousness and emphasizes indeterminacy. Indirect, implicit, and ambiguous language is an important instrument for conveying multiple forms of messages that allow for the "righteousness" of different perspectives. The language of persons who embody *dào* attunes to the different perspectives by according to their own understanding, which is why the *Zhuāngzǐ* states that the sage "says something by saying nothing and says nothing by saying something." This aspect is more evident in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as the recognition that there is always something "left undivided."

Thus, persons who embody *dào,* empathize with all perspectives by affirming the circumstantial rightness of these perspectives, but at the same restrain their heart-mind from becoming fixed and keep themselves from entering into a debate. Debates do not reveal what is ultimate right, but are only an interplay between affirmation and denials that stir up intense emotions. Emotions in comparative philosophy are personal, but at the same time tell us something about clinging to particular *shìfēi*-distinctions. The *Zhuāngzǐ* offers a challenge to philosophers who are emotionally committed to their preferred perspective and try to discern right perspectives from wrong ones. Instead, the *Zhuāngzǐ* wants us to embody doubt and indeterminacy as a way of life, so that we can equalize all perspectives through intense self-adaptation and self-transformation and urges us not to engage in any debate. This challenges some important aspects of philosophy such as the search for truth and the desire to find universal, neutral standards that can ensure how to do (comparative) philosophy.

I will pick up on this topic in Chapter Five, but for now, we can say that being in the pivot enables us to see that perspectives argued over in a scholarly debate have some rightness in them and are equally different in their strategies of approaching a text. As comparative philosophers, we do not need to affirm the correctness of one of them which necessarily leads to denying the correctness of the other, but we can simply highlight the value of each perspective and the way they shed light on a text from a different angle. This implies exactly what the *Zhuāngzǐ* calls "Walking Two Roads."

The *Zhuāngzǐ* is an important resource to comparative philosophy because the text teaches us how to embrace an all-encompassing perspective or an realist perspective in which we have freed ourselves from as much bias as possible. Through the deconstruction of language, logic and morality, the self can

liberate itself from its artificial limitations and can transcend its perspective. In the pivot of *dào*, we can accept that each perspective is circumstantial and sheds a partial light on reality and recognize that what perspective A affirms is denied by perspective B, which reveals that A and B both affirm and deny at the same time. Being at rest in the middle of the pivot enables us to see how perspectives come about and how the various rights and wrongs are endless in nature, revealing that there is no true ground for claiming the ultimate rightness of any perspective.

The Sages, who are at rest in the pivot, do not claim the ultimate truth, nor enter in a debate to affirm a particular perspective and to deny the other ones, but use their words to communicate and align different perspectives. The Sage remains in a position in which all the perspectives are recognized as limited perspectives but are at the same time affirmed in their rightness, a position in which the self and other are no longer approached as oppositional terms, but as interconnected terms.

§4.14 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have discussed the significance of the pivot of *dào* as the most important technique in the *Zhuāngzǐ* to harmonize seemingly opposed perspectives. Key to understanding the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s perspectivism as a position that consists of certain beliefs, comportments, and commitments, is its belief that each perspective is limited and produced by particular and circumstantially situated preferences of what is "so" and "not so." The *Zhuāngzǐ* is not merely interesting when placed in its cultural context, but also offers us a fundamental reorientation for comparative philosophy. I have shown how being at rest in the middle of the pivot can help us to shed light on debates in comparative philosophy from multiple angles so that we can see how these perspectives are not opposed to each other but are equally different. These topics will be rehearsed in Chapter 5 when I will discuss the findings of this current study in the light of the research question and its sub-questions.

The rhetorical style of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is highly appreciated today, but the text itself needs to be contextualized within the Warring States Period and the Masters' literature. The *Zhuāngzǐ* needs to be viewed as a reaction to Confucianism, Mohism and to the *Lǎozǐ*, but is unique in its emphasis on becoming free of mental, personal, and social constraints. Instead of interpreting the *Zhuāngzǐ*

as a text that endorse withdrawal from social relationships and political life, I have interpreted the *Zhuāngzǐ* as a text that proposes coping strategies to help us to relate differently and more harmoniously to different relationships. Key for the *Zhuāngzǐ* is the acceptance of fate, which is constituted by the natural love and devotion we feel for our parents and loved ones and the acceptance of our social responsibilities. We have a human form, and humans are mandated to live in the human community. Self-adaptation not only involves acceptance of fate but also the fasting of the heart-mind and nourishing what is central to us, which is nourishing our vital energy. But the purpose of these efforts is precisely the acquisition of the ability to recognize the perspectives of others, so that way may refrain from harming them and do justice to them.

Similarly to the *Dàodéjīng,* the *Zhuāngzǐ* urges us to follow *dào* and celebrate the existence of the myriad things in the world and the existence of human life. Central to understanding the *Zhuāngzǐ* is its rejection of intellectual disputation (*biàn*, 辯), the prevalent method that justifies fixed ideals and socio-political programs. Masters such as Mozi and Mencius claim that their specific ideals were those that the Course prescribed, which led to the fierce rejection of ideals and moral principles of other lineages of thought (*jiā*, 家).

The *Zhuāngzǐ* attempts to describe *dào* from the perspective of human life and relates *dào* to Virtuosity (*dé*, 德): the ability to see a situation from spirit and act from a state of emotional equanimity, The *Zhuāngzǐ* is distinguished from other Masters texts by its uniquely different solution to the challenge of political and social instability. While the other Masters plead for the following of fixed norms or adhering to universal standards of rightness, the *Zhuāngzǐ* questions the ability of humans to arbitrate right and wrong. The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that Heaven created all things and living beings as singular, which profoundly influences the *Zhuāngzǐ's* philosophy of the good life and his strategy of "treating all things as equal." Based on reality, which consists of a plurality of singular, generally incompatible perspectives, the *Zhuāngzǐ* aims to liberate the individual from his/her unnecessary anxieties and frustration.

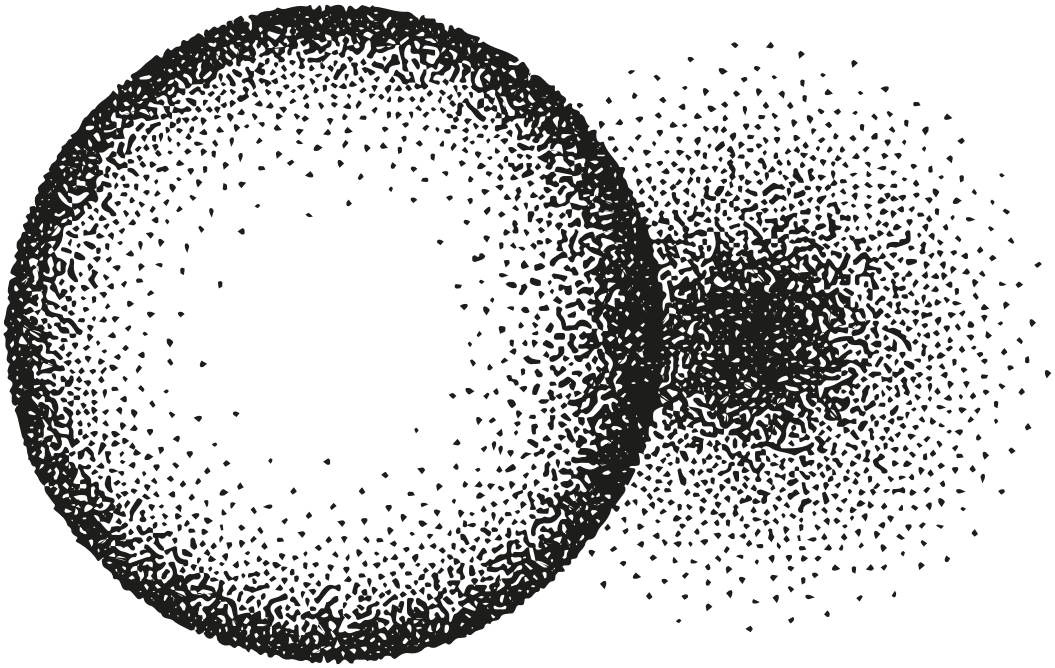
The *Zhuāngzǐ* offers a realistic philosophy of the good life that argues that humans can only be content and free from constraints through radical self-adaptation and the affirmation of life. The explicit recognition is that all perspectives of the world are manifestations of *dào* and need, therefore, to be regarded as natural. The historically conditioned temptation to add something to nature by imposing fixed moral norms prevents us from becoming truly in

accord with how nature has generated the unique, myriad things and causes us to "sprout weeds." The *Zhuāngzǐ* observes that the heart-mind can be, just like the eyes and the ears, deaf and blind to reality. Instead of taking the heart-mind as the governor of the other organs, we should restore the natural vitality of the heart-mind by practicing emptying, wandering, and mirroring.

Although the "fasting of the heart-mind" seems to restrain the heart-mind's ability to interact with the world and to manage the world – the sages presented in the text are not passive; they are skilful artists who perform their daily activities smoothly, beautifully and without experiencing resistance. Instead of concentrating on predetermined knowledge, values, aims or goals, the Sage's peaceful heart-mind switches its attention from one's own personal body to the communal body, enabling the Sage is able to embrace all other perspectives in his own perspective.

Becoming free of preferences and free of constancy enables the Sage to respond from an impartial and therefore clearer situation in which he sees what can be mastered and what not, a position that calls for a "contrapuntal awareness" in which we reflect on a variety of voices, interests, and identities. The *Zhuāngzǐ* highlights this ability of "finding the pivot of *dào*" as a larger, more objective perspective that is preferred above being confined to a limited perspective. And it is primarily in this latter respect, the respect in which the full recognition of the validity and vitality of other perspectives, that the *Zhuāngzǐ* can, along with Levinas, make a needed contribution to comparative philosophy in the modern era. It is to that contribution which we now turn.

4



Chapter 5

Levinas, the *Zhuāngzǐ* and the Task of Moving Beyond Identity

§5.1 Introduction

In this study, I have presented the work of Emmanuel Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* as important resources for comparative philosophy. More particularly, this study has tried to provide a contribution to comparative philosophy and its methodology by highlighting how comparative philosophy is always a form of intercultural communication. Comparative philosophy is aimed at understanding and learning from another cultural philosophical traditions by identifying concepts or conceptual schemes that share family resemblance. Comparative philosophy as a philosophical praxis also appears to be an incitement to communicate with cultural others. In this study, I argued for the need to adopt a transformational-critical discourse that can facilitate the intercultural dialogue. The necessary condition for comparison or intercultural dialogue is aimed at becoming responsive and open to the cultural other.

At the closing of the age of Western imperialism and colonization, comparative philosophy should not only reflect on how to do comparative philosophy, but should also reflect on how the person doing the comparison should approach the cultural other. Reflecting on the self-other relation is crucial for comparative philosophy to become sensitive to its unreflected assumptions, in which the assertion of commonality and notions such as "similarities and differences" are presupposed without justification or critical assessment. Instead of concentrating on making these unreflected assumptions transparent, this study proposes to invest in ethical competence as the willingness to become open to the other and the other's perspectives. Intercultural communication is often confronted with significant cultural differences that cannot be overcome, which necessitates us to reflect on the ethical aspect of comparative philosophy.

Both Levinas as the *Zhuāngzǐ* have recognized the need to reconfigure the self-other relation and can help us to redefine the task of comparative philosophy as the ethical vocation to overcome the binarities that permeates our interpretation of the cultural other and to become aware of our biases and presuppositions that influence and govern our comparative praxis. Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* suggest a radical rethinking of identity and highlight the relation between knowledge and violence. Instead of solely defining comparative philosophy as comparing two or more distinct cultural philosophical traditions and identifying similarities and differences, this study shows that comparative philosophy should also include the desire and willingness to deconstruct essentialist views of culture and the cultural other. Comparative philosophy is both the practice of identifying

differences and similarities between disparate cultural philosophical traditions, as the awareness that its claims are never entirely satisfying and are always open to indeterminacy and doubt.

Comparative philosophy is inherently a matter of "philosophical translation;" we are only able to engage with a text like the *Zhuāngzǐ* when we have gained access to it, - when we understand the text and its context-, but we at the same time have to realize that our understanding can never be objective or absolute. Ralph Weber's (2014) insight that all comparison is always done by someone and that it consists of at least two relata (*comparata*) that are compared on the basis of a chosen tertium, has been the main motivation for this current study to define comparative philosophy as a discipline that consists of a variety of different, sometimes incompatible, perspectives. Weber's analysis of comparison also draws attention to the fact that we as philosophers bring ourselves to the table, particularly because the choice of the concepts that are going to be compared and in what respect is dependent upon the philosopher's pre-comparative assertion of commonality. Comparative philosophy is a hermeneutical practice in which persons doing the comparison always remains shackled to their own cultural horizon.

Caution is therefore needed when we engage in comparative philosophy and while current methodologies try to address the problem of incommensurability and bias, few of them ask the question how we can approach the cultural other in the most open way possible. Comparative philosophy requires philosophers to approach cultural others on their own terms while at the same time recognizing that as philosophers, we need to capture and understand these others in our own language. This study has tried to illuminate how ethical competence as a form of intercultural communication or conversation can broaden our conception of what comparative philosophy entails. The *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas are thinkers who can offer us a fundamental reorientation for comparative philosophy in our own times. Reading the *Zhuāngzǐ* along with Levinas is not merely interesting when we try to compare these two lines of thought, but their thinking offers us some important insights on how to approach another cultural philosophical tradition.

The intercultural encounter is marked by the absence of a solid common ground, which makes the transmission of thought contents between the self and the other a risky endeavor that is haunted by various issues of incommensurability and ethical problems. The most pressing problem in postmodern comparative

philosophy is the problem of theoretical colonization, in which we (implicitly) privilege our own beliefs, assumptions and value the other from our own normative framework. Colonizing the other denies the uniqueness of the other and reduces the other either to our alter ego (the same) or to the absolute other (the absolute negation of ourselves).

These two approaches to the self-other relation need to be avoided in the practice of comparative philosophy as it jeopardizes the aim to learn from the other cultural philosophical tradition and leads to philosophical hegemony and the refusal to attune to differences. Learning from what is other requires a certain kind of ethical competence in which we approach the worth of the cultural other on its own terms. Comparison in intercultural philosophy is achieved through an active process of decision-making and evaluation and an interpretation of what counts as 'similarities' and 'differences'. This study contends that the position of the person doing the comparison and the way his or her emotions, beliefs and comportment influence the comparative process has been overlooked by modern European approaches to comparative philosophy. Comparative philosophers need to be aware of their emotional commitments, beliefs and biases, which illuminates the urgency for comparative philosophy to see its praxis as requiring a specific ethical attitude aimed at self-transformation. The central question of this study is therefore how comparative philosophy can employ a critical-transformation discourse that helps us to approach the cultural other in an open way.

In this chapter I will provide an understanding of what it means for a comparative philosopher to be ethically competent, which I have defined as the ability to become open to a variety of different perspectives and methodologies. In this chapter I will try to conceptualize ethical competence first by focusing on Levinas and then on the *Zhuāngzǐ*. In the last part of this Chapter, I will bring the *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas into a dialogue, in which I will answer the question of how comparative philosophers can relate to another philosophical tradition without relying on a stable, unified, and fixed vantage point. I will show how the reconfiguration of the self-other relation in Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* calls for the need for self-transformation and entails that we should deconstruct our beliefs in language, logic, and knowledge. The comparative encounter calls for an ethical position of competence in which we embrace the indeterminacy and incompleteness of our assertions and respond to the infinite task to move beyond identity. Ethical competence also reconceptualises comparative philosophy as a practice in which we can learn and understand from the cultural

other by becoming less biased and to become responsive and adaptive to an infinite variety of perspectives.

Part I: Comparative Philosophy as Levinasian Ethical Competence

§5.2 Cultural Identity, Imperialism, and the Relation to the Cultural other

Comparative philosophy tries to connect disparate cultural philosophical concepts or thinkers by asserting commonality and identifying concepts or conceptual schemes that resemble, resonate or are the same. The comparative process is aimed at the reconciliation of difference, which is a necessary step when we want to compare two or more cultural traditions. Seeing concepts and conceptual schemes as sharing "family resemblance," or by seeing them as "quasi-universals" sees cultural difference as a problem that can be resolved. This reconciliation interpretation of cultural difference in which difference is seen as an obstacle in being able to learn and understand the cultural other, can be complemented by an ethical interpretation of difference in which the cultural other is approached on their own terms.

Levinas is not a philosopher of culture, but he did have something valuable to say about conversing with the cultural other and the tension between difference and sameness. Especially Levinas' essay *La Signification et le Sens* can help us to understand how we can articulate an ethical orientation that does not originate in any assertion of commonality. Levinas is in search for the possibility of meaning that cannot be determined by Being. In his essay, Levinas' question with respect to meaning is whether a wholly immanent understanding of meaning does not restrict meaning in a way that violates or muffles any alterity that cannot be subsumed under Being.

Levinas primarily attacks the anti-Platonic, immanent worldview in which relationality is conceived in terms of a neutral term; in which, to apply it to this current study, the cultural other is approached by using "neutral" quasi-universals. In this early essay we already find the trace of his critique on cultures, when he describes Heidegger's phenomenology of *Dasein* and its relation to *Being* as a form of barbarism. Culture originates in the desire for a

communal identity and is rooted in blood-ties and enrooted in a shared common language. Racism is thus a "permanent possibility woven into the dynamic of our very being."344 At the same time, the European civilization has thought idealism or transcendence as that what is beyond mere Being:

> *And yet the value of European civilization consists incontestably in the aspirations of idealism, if not in its path: in its primary inspiration idealism seeks to surpass being.*[345]

While Western philosophy has systematically neglected that which is other and has failed to see that its quest for universality has led to the theoretical colonization of the other, it at the same time has thought transcendence as the "Good beyond Being" (*epekeina tês ousias*).346 The value of Levinas' thinking for comparative philosophy is that Levinas can provide us with the possibility of a non-colonizing (or totalizing) relation between self and other. For Levinas the self is implicated in its relation to the other, an implication that concretizes in ethical discourse.

Transcendence provides the world of Being with its ethical orientation, an orientation that concretizes in the face-to-face encounter with the Other. The ethical relation is the move towards transcendence, an infinite responsibility to the Other that Levinas classifies as "liturgical work." For Levinas, human fulfilment as the move towards transcendence is not a withdrawal from the world, but a full commitment to our embodied existence and the incarnated vulnerability we have to the Face of the Other. The ethical (intercultural) encounter with the Other gives the self the surplus of a teaching that "is a movement going outside of the identical, toward an other who is absolutely other."[347] Intercultural conversation as the encounter with the other, is an ethical relation of interruption, a disruption of self-identity and a disruption of cultural identities.

Instead of aiming at the erasure of differences by relying on methodologies that rely on a common identity, resemblances or a shared understanding and trying to reconcile two or more disparate cultural philosophical traditions, Levinas maintains the absolute separateness of self and other. Philosophy as "vision"

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[344] Levinas, E. (1988) "La vocation de l'autre", In Hirsch, E., *Racismes. L'autre et son visage*, Cerf, 89–102.
[345] OE:73; DEE:98
[346] Plato, *Republic*, 6, 509b8-10
[347] CPP:91; HAH:41

or "light" centres around the autonomous thinking subject that perseveres in its being and "weaves between the incomparables, between me and the others, a unity, a community."[348] Levinas offers an alternative approach to comparative philosophy in which we can only learn and understand the cultural other because of the prior ethical relation. Levinas shows how my relation to the Other, which I will describe as ethical competence, is a necessary precondition for any comparison to be possible, indicating that ethical openness to the Other is prior to any intentional activity.

The Levinasian conception of ethical competence gives comparative philosophy some important insights. First, it emphasizes the close connection between knowledge and violence. Levinas correlates ontology with imperialism that attempts to bring everything to light and neglects the Other. We need to take the inherent tension between cultural difference and radical alterity into account; comparative philosophy is not only weaving together concepts and conceptual schemes but is also a moment of face-to- face contact with the cultural other. When comparative philosophy does not recognize the way it is responding and indebted to th cultural other, is ultimately ad odds with itself as it refuses its own heteronomous structure.

Secondly, Levinas shows that each assertion about the other is at the same time conversing with and to that other. Levinas shows the need to see comparative philosophy as a form of intercultural communication or conversation. The ethical relation as ethical transcendental discourse gives humanity a common orientation that is not dependent upon a historical culture, but which also does not destroy or negates culture. Transcendence allows us to judge and evaluate the cultural other as our neighbour and provides an invitation to approach the cultural other not in terms of the one who can be known, but from his or her ethical dimension.

Thirdly, Levinas' thinking on transcendence shows us how we are always hospitable and open to the Other and provides us with a transformational-critical discourse in which we are being questioned in our assertions and beliefs. The Other as the stranger is the first comer, revealing that the Other is every human being I am responsible for, whether this human being is culturally close or not. The plurality of first comers makes it necessary to compare that which cannot be compared, indicating that we have been burdened by the difficult task to concern ourselves at each instant with the question of social justice. The ethical

[348] OTB:182; AE:

and the cultural can never be bridged, revealing that comparison is a never-ending commitment an infinite being put into question, an infinite suspension of the "right to keep anything for myself "[349] While Levinas himself is reluctant to translate transcendence into any practical commitment or competence, we can argue that the Face of the cultural other questions our tendency to colonize the entire world and makes us guilty of not taking other perspectives into account. For Levinas, the epiphany of the Face interrupts the *I*'s *being-at-home* and transforms the *I* to an infinite responsiveness to the Other.

Relying on identity, even if it is the loose form of resemblances, potentially involves the use of social categories that neglect the alterity of the cultural other. It might also implicitly privilege the paradigm of the Wester philosophical tradition by only using elements of other cultural traditions that are seen as useful to us. As comparative philosophers it is thus not only our task to erase or minimize differences between cultural traditions by relying on the assertion of commonality, but we also need to take the separateness between self and other into account. Ethical competence as the recognition of the other as my interlocutor, is an embodied vulnerability to be questioned by the Other; an ethical competence that is a "non-competence," or a "beyond competence," and entails the willingness to be disrupted, traumatized, and haunted by the Face of the Other. Comparative philosophy has thus a paradoxical and risky task and is haunted by provisionality, inaccuracy and indeterminacy. In the next section, I will show how the ethical relation disrupts the idea of transparency in language and what consequences this has for our current conception of comparative philosophy.

§5.3 The Ultimate Unsayability of the Other

Levinas distinguishes in his essay *La Signification et le Sens* "meaning" from "sense". "Sense" is amidst our existence but resists and escapes every appropriation, while "meaning" articulates a determined intelligible content. In his later work, *Autrement qu'Etre*, Levinas formulates "sense" as "the semantics of proximity, in which the Saying (*le dire*) signals itself in the Said (*le dit*). The Saying attests to the infinite and transcendent properties of the ethical relation in which the self is implicated in a constitutive relation to the Other.

[349] CPP:94; HAH:46

Levinas' articulation of radical alterity originates in the idea that the realm of the Same, despite its totalizing tendencies is open to pure transcendence. The egological self has the infinite desire for the other, a desire to overcome Being as a plea to be liberated from one's own materiality. The self is for Levinas essentially the Same; the self forms an egological culture in which alterity is annulled; this culture of immanence is thus inherently violent towards that what is other. In this egological immanent worldview, we can only evaluate and judge the other from a common denominator; a common ground that secures the *dia-logos* between self and other.

Levinas shows us that we can never fully attest to the otherness of the other when we ground ethics in representation and thinking. Only transcendence as the infinite relation of responsibility can give the ethical orientation that is prior to and precedes representation and thinking. The relation of the infinite conceived as ethics produces a fundamental diachrony in language between the saying and the said and denotes the never-ending status of our utterances. Transcendence is disruption, displacement, an infinite move towards the Other that never can be exhausted, an asymmetrical, non-reciprocal relation that interrupts any logic of identity that connects the cultural other and me.

Intercultural communication is initiating a dialogue with the other without being able to resort to a common ground. The tension between the cultural other as knowable and the cultural other as the radical alterity that interrupts knowledge is the tension between the saying as ethical discourse and the said. Levinas sees true discourse as the saying that is inseparable from the person responding to questions, which to Levinas is an ethical discourse of pure goodness. Levinas reaffirms Plato's idea that the Good is not to be spoken about but is nevertheless the very precondition for language. The Saying is as ethical discourse, the command of the Face, the primordial expression of the first word "Thou shalt not kill," the saying that interrupts and traumatizes my egocentric spontaneity and is at once transformed to the demand for social justice when the third party enters the stage. The saying as ethical discourse is the encounter between self and other in speech, in which any thematization must be "unsaid" for the possibility to begin a dialogue.

It is from the saying that the said is produced, which paradoxically is also the moment that the said erases and betrays the saying by representing, grasping and understanding the other. This however does not mean that the tension between ethical discourse and propositional language is resolved; the saying

always leaves an imprint, a trace, in the said. This is why we cannot refute philosophical skepticism, as skepticism expresses the very tension between the saying and the said. The return of philosophical skepticism indicates that reality consists of a plurality of others who cannot be fully integrated within a particular framework. The transcendence of the Other always overflows each totality that tries to capture the Other.

It is thus the Said as the language that we use to speak about the cultural other that reveals the "beyond Being" and moves us in the direction of the ethical orientation of the Saying, even in betraying it. The ethical orientation moves us to an unknowable, ungraspable future and reveals how the openness to the Other, as an openness to yet unexplored and alternative perspectives, which makes language possible. Meaning comes as such from the Other, because the Other overflows our thinking. The ethical orientation as "sense" or "the Saying" makes it possible to understand and to evaluate the cultural other; an evaluation that concretizes as the infinite task to move beyond that what is said. In line with Robert Cummings, we can say that the task of the comparative philosopher is the never-ending task to "[develop] and [correct] actual comparisons and developing and correcting the categories that constitute the respects in which things are being compared."[350]

Comparative philosophy is the infinite ongoing desire to understand the cultural other by (mis)representing this other. Based on my reading, comparative philosophy entails both becoming responsive to the cultural other and taking the otherness of the cultural other into account, while at the same time bringing the cultural other closer to use by comparing concepts and conceptual schemes. While methodological competence requires us to identify commonalities between disparate cultural philosophical traditions, the ethical relation endlessly questions and resists this logic of identity. Ethical competence as non-competence is the disruption of any identity between meaning and concepts that the comparative philosopher tries to establish. It is a constant tension between giving the cultural other a meaning and the ongoing demand to be questioned in each attempt of categorization and thematization.

Levinas' work offers an important ground for a promising intercultural theory of ethical competence that premises comparative philosophy on the demand for openness and infinite self-transformation that concretizes in language.

[350] Neville, R.C. (2022). "Reflections on Methods of Comparative Philosophy" In: S. Burik, R. Smid & R. Weber (eds), *Comparative Philosophy and Method*, Bloomsbury Academics.

Language bears for Levinas the trace of the relation with pure exteriority, the moment in which the self gains the essential surplus of becoming incessantly preoccupied with the Other. Levinas shows us that apart from the ontological and epistemological aspects of openness towards the cultural other, becoming open to the other is primarily and ethical, personal vocation that will help us to make comparative philosophy more inclusive to alternative understandings and perspectives. While pluralizing the discourse on arguments and methodologies is indispensable for decolonizing philosophy, but we recognize that this pursuit requires self-critical and ethical responsible philosophers.

Levinas' ethical orientation as a relation between singularities is based on a personal vulnerability that cannot be thematized but is a "move towards the other as our neighbor," a move towards transcendence that frees us from being chained to our own perspective. A mere appreciation or tolerance of cultural pluralism is not enough to overcome imperialism and colonization of the other; what is needed is an ethical competence that makes us non-competent, a competence that takes the cultural other as our teacher instead of judging the other from our own cultural, philosophical horizon. The cross-cultural dialogue is the encounter with the otherness of the other who summons me to reflect on the question of whether I have not usurped the place of the other. It is this considering of my tendency to erase differences, my tendency to essentialize and categorize the cultural other that marks a Levinasian notion of ethical competence, a competence that recognizes the infinite incompetence or violence of my statements and propositions.

For Levinas, the said always and necessarily betrays the saying; every attempt to say something about the Other violates his or her otherness and brings him or her to light. But, based on the reading of Chapter Three, we can to some degree formulate a Levinasian position that attests to the saying even though at the same time betraying it. When we want to attest, bear witness, to the saying, we must acknowledge that saying something is always already revealed as a prior ethical vocation or responsiveness to the Other. The openness of being questioned and interrupted by the other requires a specific kind of ethical competence in which we do not take ourselves as the absolute truth but recognize that our activities, ideas and beliefs are provisional, fallible and (sometimes) egocentric. The ethical relation reveals itself in everyday contact and concern for the other, a concern that reveals a prior responsiveness to the other qua other. Speaking involves speaking about others and speaking to them, a tension between grasping and identifying others in my own terms and

at the same time being questioned in my very subjectivity, a being traumatically exposed as a person that already assumes too much.

Ethical competence as responding to the ethical orientation in the cultural encounter is thus the recognition to see comparative philosophy as an ongoing practice of re-saying what is said, an ongoing exposing us to the Other without hope of reaching a conclusion. Language is for Levinas foremost a responding to the Other, in which we attune to the ethical interruption instead of solely focusing on bridging the knower-known relation. For comparative philosophy, this entails that we are never done responding to cultural others and questioning the way we represent and understand them. In other words, there is no final moment of understanding, no method that can overcome the incommensurability between disparate cultural traditions. What is needed is becoming responsive to the ethical relation that calls for hospitality, which is a concrete call to action, a call for a sense of responsibility for the cultural stranger, to respect and learn from the cultural other in an ethical way. Ethical competence can only have significance as a non-knower-known relation, as an attempt to respond to the cultural other who interrupts me.

Comparative philosophy is focused on theory, knowledge and interpretation so that we can understand differences and similarities between disparate cultural philosophical traditions and is driven by the metaphor of vision. Levinas' critique on the vision in which we connect self and other through mediating anonymous concepts raises the question of the link between the logic of identity and the erasure of differences. The ethical orientation highlights the need to reconfigure comparative philosophy as an ethical vocation, a personal relation between self and other in which the self, as the comparative philosopher, is willing to respond to his or her responsibility for the cultural other. Taking ethical competence serious entails seeing language not only as a way to bridge the gap between me and the cultural other but also as an apology, an offering of myself to the Other, which is the "difficult freedom" as Levinas calls it, of conversing through and with the other while bringing that other under our own categories.

Levinas argues that we need Greek language as the Said to be able to hear the ethical calling of the Saying. We have seen that the ethical relation is beyond culture, beyond identity and social characteristics. In §3.10 I have discussed the work of scholars of Sikka, Ma Lin, Drabinski, Caygill and McGettigan that challenges using Levinas as a resource for comparative philosophy, as these scholars argue that Levinas' thinking excludes or neglects the non-European

other. In the next section, I will elaborate on the question of whether Levinas' ethical relation applies to today's postcolonial world.

§5.4 Comparative Philosophy as the Infinite Task of Moving Beyond Identity

Levinas' thinking revolves around the discovery of the primordial ethical relation to the Other as the very constitution of the subject. The subject is primarily infinite responsibility to the Other and only after that a freedom and autonomous being. True freedom and true autonomy are for Levinas a freedom and autonomy that bear the weight of the command of the Face; a command that questions the self in its egocentric spontaneity. The subject is thus heteronomous; it is both same and Other, both a *being-for-the-Other* and *a being-for-itself.*

The main question in Chapter Three was how to apply Levinas' thinking to the relation to the cultural other. Scholars such as McGettigan, Ma Lin and Drabinksi have rightfully questioned Levinas' troublesome political statement seem to clash with his idea of the ethical relation. In chapter Three I have explored the relation between immanence, transcendence and culture and have shown that the problem for Levinas lies in the violence of an immanent worldview that cannot provide an ethical orientation in which we value the cultural other on their own terms. Levinas' thinking in a sense indeed privileges the Greek-Judeo tradition that has revealed the relation to infinite as the good beyond Being, a relation to pure goodness that signifies the Jewish teachings of the trace of God revealed in one's personal responsibility for one's brothers.

How can we reconcile Levinas' classification of non-European traditions as "exotic" and "mere dance,"[351] with his insistence on transcendence of the Other beyond cultural identity, ethnicity and historicity? There is an inherent paradox in Levinas' statement that the cultural other lacks significance because it has not thought transcendence and the call to take the Other on its own terms. In Chapter Three I have tried to outline why Levinas' thinking is still important to comparative philosophy without erasing Levinas' Eurocentrism. With the help of Derrida and his work on the duty of Europe, I have tried to show what it means to be the privileged tradition. The duty of Europe, and as such, of comparative philosophy as a European discipline of philosophy, is for Derrida the infinite task

[351] Rötzer, F. (1995). *Conversations with French Philosophers*, 63.

to move beyond identity. It is the infinite task to unsay the said and an infinite hospitality to that what cannot be known, grasped or understood.

In Chapter Three I have argued that scholars such as Drabinski and McGettigan who criticize Levinas' Eurocentrism have paid too little attention to Levinas' critique on immanence as a pagan, hostile world. Levinas' belief is that sincerity as taking the other on its own terms is not possible within a pagan, primitive world. Humans are the only ones capable of moving beyond Being, of sacrificing their life for the other, of giving the stranger the bread from one's mouth, an ability that is "sacred" and breaks with the self's egocentric enjoyment of the world. This holiness cannot be found in an immanent, pagan world but comes from pure exteriority. A culture that is wholly immanent, as the Chinese culture primarily is, is seen by Levinas thus as "barbarian," "pagan," and "primitive," a culture that needs to be translated into Greek and the Bible to become ethical.

The paradox in Levinas' thinking that revolves around the idea that a wholly immanent worldview cannot provide an ethics of the Other leads him to evaluate non-Western cultures as lacking significance. We have to note here however that Levinas is not classifying the cultural other as "barbarian," or "primitive," but points to the tendency of cultures to become immanent totalities. Immanent cultures cannot provide us with an ethical orientation to evaluate and judge the cultural other, but only provides us with the esthetical appreciation of the cultural other in which the cultural other becomes a form of idolization.

The reason that Levinas dismisses the significance of non-European cultures is the same reason for his rejection of multiculturalism and his critique on the Western tradition that is anti-Platonic: all these critiques originate in his belief that an immanent world is pagan and primitive. What we have to conclude is that transcendence as conceived by Levinas is not a European invention, but transcendence is however revealed in the European tradition. The privilege consists not in the supremacy of the geographical, ethnocentric place of Europe but in its thinking tradition that has opened up to transcendence. Only the thought of infinite can break up the thinking cogito, can interrupt the realm of being without negating or destroying it and his conviction is that only the Greek, Judeo-Christian tradition has articulated the relation to infinity as transcendence.

Unconditional hospitality is a theme in both Levinas' as in Derrida's work. Derrida even calls *Totalité et Infini* "an immense treatise of hospitality."[352] Derrida seems to interpret transcendence also as unconditional hospitality, something that becomes apparent in Derrida's work on the duty of Europe. Derrida reminds us that Levinas' thinking is motivated by the inhumane and horrific treatment of the stranger, the refugee and of the immigrants[353]; even amidst his alleged Eurocentrism and racism he was deeply concerned with the Western failure to protect human lives.

In Levinas work' Europe is thus the privileged tradition that has articulated transcendence as the relation to infinity that suspends the thinking cogito, but at the same time it has failed to respond to this revelation; it has failed its duty to become infinitely responsible to each and every human other. Levinas and Derrida articulate a hospitality that unconditionally opens the door to the radical stranger, to be hospitable and to give all my words and my possession to the Other without expecting anything in return. Peace as goodness exists in an *I* that has given up its enjoyment of the world for the sake of the Other. The ethical relation is a relation in which the Other as my master transforms my embodied existence and gives my entire subjectivity a new meaning. A meaning that is however ungraspable, unknowable and a movement towards infinite transcendence.

It is precisely from this framework of infinite hospitality towards the unknown, and unthematizable future that informs Derrida's thinking of the duty of Europe. The duty of Europe is for Derrida the infinite move beyond identity, an infinite task to doubt and to unsay what has been said. Ethical competence is responding to the call for self-recognition and self-reflection that is embodying that my responsiveness is mistaken, is betraying the Other; it is as such the infinite task to deconstruct any identity, any reliance on a common ground. If the European tradition is privileged, it can only mean that it has to respond to the call of the Other and to become infinite hospitality to a future that is *non-European*. This entails that any Eurocentrism has to be unsaid, has to move towards the openness of the Other.

I have tried to synthesize Derrida's work on the duty of Europe and Levinas articulation of ethical culture to outline the task of comparative philosophy as

[352] Derrida, J. (1999). Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas. Transl P.A. Brault & M. Naas, Stanford University Press, 59

[353] Ibid., 64

an infinite self-questioning discipline. Comparative philosophy has thus the task to infinitely move beyond identity and to move towards the openness of the (cultural) Other as a non-European future. A future, perhaps in which Levinas' own statements such as that other cultures need to be translated needs to be unsaid and needs to move to other alternatives and possibilities. Hearing the call of the Other is an embodied responsiveness, an incarnated vulnerability that cannot be thematized or grasped, an infinite openness toward that what it is not, or not yet. But above all, comparative philosophy as a branch of European philosophy is always an attempt to become non-European. Comparative philosophy will become ethically borderless, or, better said, the comparative philosopher has the ethical vocation to become borderless and to become non-European.

To summarize, Levinas' phenomenology shows us the need for self-transformation when we want to become open to the cultural other as the other whose otherness is of concern to us. Levinas argues that the self is constituted and fulfilled in its human capacity by the proximity of the Other. The transcendence of the Other as the relation to the infinite takes primacy over the self's ontological enjoyment of the world. Based on my reading of Levinas' work, I have outlined how ethical competence originates from the embodied personal relation between self and the cultural other in which the proximity of the Other interrupts the self's egocentric concerns. Ethical competence is responding to the call of the Other, which entails that we are called to infinitely question and reflect upon our tendency to essentialize and thematize the cultural other. Levinas criticizes the essentialist conception of knowledge and calls for the need to take the ethical dimension of the self-other relation into account. In Levinas' thinking (cultural) knowledge is not associated with truth, but with erasing differences and the theoretical colonization of what is other. Knowledge thus becomes an ethical question; the question of whether I do not assume too much.

Intercultural communication is important to comparative philosophy because every comparison is initiated by someone whose emotional commitments, beliefs, and cultural background influence how philosophers approach the cultural other. In engaging with a disparate cultural philosophical tradition, we are broadening our horizon and as such the scope of our philosophical community. The challenge is how comparative philosophy can train its participants to become responsive to the ethical relation. Levinas maintains that the Other cannot be known and thematized, which raises the question of whether we can train and teach (future) comparative philosophers to respond

to the otherness of the other. To be competent, even if I have classified Levinas' conception of competence as a kind of non-competence, because competence will be an infinite attempt, involves the infinite move towards the unknown, unthematizable Other.

The most important insight of Levinas' thinking is his critique on the egocentric self that reduces everything to the same and fails to consider the otherness of the other. This insight is strengthened by the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on self-transformation and the need to overcome the opposition between self and other. Instead of alienation ourselves from the other and the other's perspectives, the *Zhuāngzǐ* urges us to respond to reality as it is and to celebrate the variety of different expressions.

Part II: Abiding At The Pivot: A Zhuangzian Perspective Of Ethical Competence

§5.5 Abiding at the Pivot: Dissolving the Self-Other Dichotomy

Levinas' thinking has shown the need for transcendence as the ethical orientation that gives each person the surplus of being infinite responsible for the Other. We can only think about cultural others due to a prior responsiveness in which we are hospitable to their otherness. While Levinas shows us why we are indebted to the ethical discourse that concretizes as the critical-transformational discourse of becoming responsible for each and every other human being, Levinas gives us little insight in which concrete strategies we can adopt to become more responsive to our ethical vocation. In contrast to Levinas' thinking that primarily gives us insight in the phenomenology of the self-other relation, the *Zhuāngzǐ* can teach us practical strategies to harmonize the self-other relation by means of self-transformation. Essential to the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s philosophy is restoring the natural connections between perspectives.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*' shows that the egocentric self who usurps the world and violates the otherness of the other, is a perverted self that fails to see how the self is naturally embedded in nature that consists of various expressions and interdependent relations. To genuinely become "oneself" is to become responsive to the continuous context of alternative expressions and experiences

and to attune to the specific circumstances that produces these expressions and experiences.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* provides a convincing critique of why certain cultural convictions and emotional commitments can become oppressive and can make us blind to appreciate and recognize alternative expressions and possibilities. We especially constrain ourselves and alienate ourselves from genuinely appreciating alternative perspectives when we take our own perspective as the absolute truth. In the introduction of *Comparative Philosophy and Method* (2022) the authors state that "debates [in comparative philosophy] are often undertaken for the purpose of demonstrating the superiority of (one's) own opinion,"[354] an insight that strongly resonates with the Zhuangzian concern to overcome *shìfēi*-debates. We can easily see how comparative philosophy can slip into emotional quarrels in which persons no longer try to understand and learn from each other, but only hatefully oppose to and try to defy the other. The *Zhuāngzǐ* challenges philosophical debates in which philosophers debate about what is comparable or not comparable, what is right (justified) or wrong. These debates originate in the failure to recognize how all perspectives exist in an interdependent web of relationship.

In this study I have addressed the need to interpret comparative philosophy as a collective enterprise that consists of different perspectives that all can be seen as circumscribed opinions of what is comparable to what and in what respect. In other words: the perspectives in comparative philosophy are all singular affairs and are dependent upon certain circumstances, personal beliefs, and commitments. I suggest seeing the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s articulation of abiding at the "pivot of *dào*" as a form of ethical competence in which comparative philosophers respond from a position in which they recognize that their assertions are dependent upon their subjective point of view and in which they embody doubt and indeterminacy as a way of life. This entails that to become ethically competent; comparative philosophers need to train themselves to become free of harmful emotional commitments and biases that prevent them from approaching cultural others on their own terms. Instead of clinging to a particular content or methodology, the *Zhuāngzǐ* focuses on the suitability of a perspective to its circumstances, eschewing debates on what is correct and incorrect, comparable, or incomparable.

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[354] S. Burik, R. Smid & R. Weber, *Comparative Philosophy and Method*, 15.

The position of ethical competence entails that we are at rest (emotionally undisturbed, disinterestedly engaged) in the middle of the pivot, so that we can respond limitlessly to the different views expressed in comparative philosophy, including the perspectives that take themselves as the ultimate truth. The ethical ability to respond to situations in their indeterminate character will prevent us from colonizing the other and the other's perspectives and will help us to open ourselves to an endless range of alternative understandings and possibilities.

From the pivot, we can equalize the different, often incompatible perspectives by dissolving the self-other relation and see the fundamental unity of these perspectives. This entails seeing that each perspective is dependent upon a specific background, on specific methodological choices, on preferences and value judgments that produce the outcome of what is "comparable" and what is "not comparable," which leads to Jullien's claim that China is the "absolute other," who can help us in a Heideggerian way to retrieve our own origin or can lead to the claim that "there is only one correct translation of the *Zhuāngzǐ,*" which is Billeter's approach.[355] From the pivot, we can see that these perspectives are both limited, we can respond to the perspectives from a concern with *this* (*shì*, 是) aspect (e.g. from Jullien's perspective), and see it as *this*-aspect, or we can attune to the perspectives from a concern with *that* (*fēi*, 非) aspect (e.g. Billeter's perspective) and respond from a concern of *that*-aspect. In the middle of the pivot, we can see that these *this/that*-perspectives are mere opinions appropriate from the points of view of those who assert them. Furthermore, we can also see them as equal in their difference: they both express a limited and underdetermined perspective and necessarily reflect differently on reality.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* particularly highlights the interconnection between rigid patterns of thinking, emotional commitments, and violence. Disputes are often characterized by anger and an inability to take the other's perspectives into account. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s rejection of philosophical disputation and its articulation of a more positive, life-affirming position can provide us with a conception of comparative philosophy that is more inclusive and more open to the (cultural) other and the other's perspectives. We need to approach the cultural other and the other's perspectives in a non-coercive way. This entails that we should respond to the uniqueness of the variety of different perspectives and appreciate the open-endedness and indeterminate nature of comparative philosophy.

[355] Billeter, J.F. (2006). *Contre François Jullien*, Allia, 45 ; Billeter, Jean-François (2018). *Quatre essais sur la traduction*, Ombres Blanches, 23.

The pivot enables comparative philosophers to see how different perspectives are produced by assumptions that are mistakenly taken as indubitable foundations. Because comparative philosophers in the pivot embody the method "of drift and doubt" (*gùyízhī*, 故疑之耀), they can value pluralism and do not take the variety of different perspectives (or *shìfēi*-judgments) as incommensurable. Each perspective sheds a small light on the ambiguous and complex flux of reality, and is circumstantially produced by *shìfēi*-judgments and emotional commitment. The claim that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is comparable to Levinas because they both are committed to a non-being self, is a perspective produced by the belief that their notions of the self are similar enough to be comparable, which is a subjective evaluation, and can be evaluated as "right". There are indeed some similarities between the two thinkers that make it interesting to compare these two thinkers. Nevertheless, a person who argues that the *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas are not comparable because they do not share the same notion of the self is equally right. There are some significant differences between the two thinkers that make them incomparable. Levinas is, for example, committed to the relation to infinity as pure goodness, while the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s primarily aim is to nourish life as it is, and to promote longevity and social harmony.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* challenges the ability of comparative philosophy to generate absolute claims on what is "comparable" or "right." It raises the question that we cannot rely on an objective standard that can ground our assertions; our assertions are subjective opinions that nevertheless bring something of the cultural other to light. What we bring to light is however not fixed, it is circumstantially produced and might also be wrong. This is why the *Zhuāngzǐ* urges us to use only doubt and indeterminacy as our method, which does not mean that we should become philosophical sceptics, but entails that we should be open to the possibility that we might be wrong and recognize that there are many alternative interpretations that are equally valid.

We need to see *shìfēi*-distinctions as mere instrument to shed light on the cultural other, but when we have freed ourselves from rigid patterns of thinking and dogmatic expectations, we are more able take the cultural other on its own terms. The insight into the nature of debate and knowledge produced in the field, the comparative philosopher who responds infinitely by alternating endlessly between the various rights and wrongs is not prone to pursue a blind universalism in which we colonize the other and the other's perspectives. Genuine openness toward the other and the other's perspectives is characterized by the willingness to abide at the pivot in which we assess the

different perspectives without having a fixed point of view. Ethical competence as the ability to value the cultural other on its own terms is in the *Zhuāngzǐ* related to having "greater knowledge" (*dàzhī*, 大知). Abiding at the pivot improves our epistemic situation, as the deconstruction of our conflated sense of self-identity enables us to appreciate rather than to affirm or deny the other and the other's perspectives. David Sturgeon (2015) particularly illuminates how greater knowledge originates in the person's willingness to become open to the other and the other's perspectives. Greater knowledge is not gained by studying texts or gaining knowledge of the cultural other, but consists in our willingness to *change ourselves*:

> *This appears to explicitly link greater knowledge to appreciation of a form of perspectivism – in particular, to the agent's willingness to explore different perspectives on the matter under consideration, and also to the range of available perspectives, including those which might at first appear contradictory or counter intuitive.*[356]

Ethical competence is thus a personal commitment, a desire to approach the other and the other's perspectives as equally valuable. In the pivot, comparative philosophers are able to "walk two roads simultaneously," indicating that they accommodate with the different perspectives by asserting the rightness of each perspective while simultaneously not seeing any of these perspectives as ultimate right or wrong. The position of the pivot is thus not a perspective in which comparative philosophers are indifferent to or radically sceptical of the endless range of roads that can be walked on, but a position in which they do not cling to any self-identity and can therefore identify with anyone and anything.

While Levinas offers a way to interrogate and question egological culture that neglects the Other, the *Zhuāngzǐ* offers us specific strategies for dealing with an egocentric culture that is based on reducing that what is other to the same. It is from the tension between Levinas' distinction between the Saying and the Said and Derrida's thinking on the duty of Europe that we can define ethical competence as the vocation to critique our own assertions and biases and open ourselves to a heterogeneous, unknown future. This is essentially also what the *Zhuāngzǐ* aims for, though for distinct reasons. While Levinas emphasize the uneasiness and restlessness of the self in the encounter with the Face, the

[356] Sturgeon, D. (2015). "Zhuangzi, Perspectives, and Greater Knowledge" In *Philosophy East & West*, 65 No3, 897.

Zhuāngzǐ focus on wandering with ease in the world and adopting a flexible, playful attitude towards life.

Both thinkers however offer us a way to consider the uniqueness or singularity of the cultural other. They both see how the egocentric self is the cause of violence and instead of empowering the self, both Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* decenter the self so that the non-allergic or harmonious relation between self and other can become known. When comparative philosophy wants to avoid the theoretical colonization of the cultural other, it needs to invest in a position that allows comparative philosophers to see that their assertions, arguments and methodologies can be structured differently.

In order to become genuinely open to the other and the other's perspectives, - an openness that is crucial to doing philosophy comparatively-, philosophers need to become aware of their motives and interests and how their emotional investment leads to asserting a certain belief of what is comparable and which methods should be used. When we want to approach the other cultural philosophical tradition as equally different to our own tradition, it is important to give up our self-contained identity and embrace a heterogenous self in which the self is always already other.

Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* both show how comparative philosophy requires an openness to thinking that is not simply recognizing that there are different perspectives possible, but they also alert us to the fact that these different perspectives form our thinking. Genuinely valuing the cultural other *as other* is not merely identifying differences and similarities between our own tradition and the other cultural tradition but requires the ethical competence of wanting to think otherwise. Moving beyond identity calls for a willingness to adopt a critical-transformational discourse in which we are willing to give up our confined perspective and our implicit or explicit egocentrism.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'argues that the self-other relation becomes conflictual when the self holds on to a certain identity and becomes clogged with fixations, which leads to dogmatism, prejudices and biases. The pivot of *dào* is as a guiding strategy is important to comparative philosophy because it takes bias seriously and sees it as the culprit of a troublesome self-other relation. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'observes that we become closed-up dogmatic entities when we think that language, logic, value judgments and preferences are able to capture the truth. This is partly due to social institutions such as universities that teach their

students the right way or the only (Western) way to do philosophy, confining them rather than liberating them from a clogged heart-mind. The need to decolonize and to open academia up to the (cultural) other and the other's perspectives is not only essential for doing justice to the (cultural) other, but also vital to liberating ourselves from artificial constraints.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s articulation of the pivot of *dào* calls for the need to redefine philosophy. Instead of defining it as the practice that generates rational arguments that solves philosophical problems and raises new issue (see §1.4), we should see it as the discipline that is infinite hospitable to a variety of different approaches, methods, and practices. Comparative philosophy is a personal assignment, an ethical competence in which comparative philosophers attempt to liberate themselves from rigid patterns of thinking, of clinging to fixed evaluative standards so that they can become genuinely open to the other and the other's perspectives. In the pivot, comparative philosophers have attained a position of emotional detachment and sees the self-other relation as "equal in their difference," revealing that in the pivot philosophers are able to listen to the other and the other's perspectives and converse and work together with them.

I think however that we have to adapt the *Zhuāngzǐ* on one important point. While the *Zhuāngzǐ* urges us to eschew debates, I would like to highlight the positive contributions of philosophical debates. Being confronted with the other and the other's perspectives helps comparative philosophers to become aware of their biases and is such a vital aspect of becoming ethically competent. Comparative philosophers should however avoid becoming entangled in emotional discussions in which they respond to the other from their own emotional commitments. The *Zhuāngzǐ* uses the metaphor of the mirror to highlight the detached, preferred position: the person in the pivot responds to the situation without storing or possessing. The Sage in the pivot responds to the other but does not seek to cling or promote any shìfēi-distinction and while this is not an easy position, the position of the pivot does provide us with a way to approach the other and the other's perspectives with the most clarity and equality.

We should wander at ease in comparative philosophy by practicing emotional equanimity and letting go of any assumptions and beliefs that interfere with seeing the other and the other's perspectives as equal in their difference, but we should also hold on to the ethical vocation of responsibility in which we concern ourselves with the question of social justice. Ethical competence entails that comparative philosophers should not confine themselves to one way of doing

philosophy, nor commit themselves to one particular method, yet it also includes the responsibility to object to any perspective that is excludes and dehumanizes the (cultural) other. Comparative philosophy should not be seen as the discipline in which "anything goes," and in which ethical competence is the mere celebration of the variety of roads that can be taken. While I do agree with the benefits of embracing indeterminacy and doubts and the attempt to overcome clinging to preferences and outcomes, I do think that there are some emotional commitments that we should not get rid of. I do not think that overt racist and sexist perspectives are part of comparative philosophy and while philosophers in the pivot have freed themselves from any of these harmful commitments, I think it is necessary for philosophers in the pivot to be emotionally committed to resist and fight any form of sexism and racism or other forms of dehumanization. Taking the need for philosophy to decolonize serious entails that we should reject and deny the rightness of any claim that dehumanizes the other. In the next section, I will take up on this problem and will concentrate on how we can quell expectations and disputations by bringing clarity (*míng*, 明).

§5.6 Quelling Expectations and Disputations

We have seen that, in the pivot, the comparative philosopher has transcended the self-other dichotomy and embraces an objective perspectivism in which the philosopher affirms the rightness of each perspective, but at the same time sees these perspectives as finite points of view influenced by our own preferences for action and thinking. Abiding at the pivot of *dào* entails responding spontaneously to the current situation by following the rightness of each perspective without allowing personal biases to influence the situation. In this section, I will outline how the comparative philosopher is able to bring clarity (*míng,* 明) and can quell expectations and disputations. I will concentrate on what knowledge comparative philosophers in the pivot use and how they can learn to remain at rest in the centre of the pivot. I will also demonstrate why the resistance of perspectives that dehumanize the other need not to be seen as a form of bias that we should get rid of, but provides us with the necessary ethical commitment to practice comparative philosophy. In other words: the Zhuangzian conception of ethical competence thus needs the surplus of the ethical orientation as the attempt to do justice to the Other.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* argues that a person in the pivot does not discuss knowledge extensively, particularly not the knowledge that transcends human capability.

Rather than reason, the *Zhuāngzǐ* seems to endorse action guided by intuitive knowledge, although it is clear from the passage of Cook Ding that this intuitive knowledge needs to be learnt. The story of Cook Ding shows that intuitive knowledge is performative; it is a skilful engagement with the world that is characterized by an unbiased openness to the different things that are presented to us. In the pivot, we have thus trained ourselves to respond to all possible and existing roads that can be taken, which gives the us the freedom, as Jiang argues, to create and discover new possibilities and to navigate constraints in novel ways.357 This personal freedom, which is at the same time an ethical competence to become open to the cultural other, is however a creativity unrestrained but nonetheless a trained capability not to be disturbed by emotions, a skill that cannot be taught by the transmission of verbal knowledge but needs to be individually performed.

Persons in the pivot is at rest because they have trained themselves extensively to keep his or her heart-mind empty, wandering and mirroring. The responsibility to abide at the pivot is entirely placed on the shoulders of the individual; finding the pivot is not a matter of following a set of rules but is an infinite exercise of restraining ourselves for the purpose of affirming life as it is. The centre of the pivot corresponds to the stability of the person's heart-mind, it is a position of emptiness in which the person does not hold on to any expectation or preference and is therefore in the best position to see the perspectives as they are. This means that observation of us and of our environment in a detached way is very important to shed light on the situation. Bringing clarity relates to knowledge and action and the alignment between self and other through rigorous self-transformation and adaptation. The desire for self-transformation seems to rely in the love for life as it is, a willingness to accept the various contingencies of life and remain within the limits of our natural capabilities.

The dialectical relation between self and other unfolds within the events of self-loss, finding the pivot of *dào* and endlessly responding to the transformation of things (*wùhuà*, 物化), which indicates that the first step is to deconstruct the egocentric self that sees its own preferences and perspective as the ultimate truth. The clogged heart-mind is the reason why disputation arises and is as such also the reason for the non-harmonious relation between self and other. Only when we have liberated ourselves and have lost ourselves, we are able to take the holistic point of view of *dào* which is seen by the *Zhuāngzǐ* as the great

[357] Jiang, T. *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, 292.

equalizer of things, since the pivot simultaneously affirms the rightness of a particular perspective and denies its rightness as the all-encompassing truth.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* endorses a self-other relation that is harmonious because self and other are seen as unique expressions that are equally valuable. When we become aware that we are emotionally invested in the comparative study we undertake and adopt the transcending view of the pivot, we can see that our perspective, in which we claim that x is comparable to y in respect to z, is the result of preference (e.g. preferring to compare x to y instead of b to y) that originates in value judgments (judging x to be more relevant to compare to y than b).

Confronted with an opposing perspective, we can easily see, as we are not committed to our own perspective that another perspective is equally right in comparing b to y in respect to z, as we can see that both perspectives are equally the result of certain preferences that originate in value judgments. What I prefer and value is different to what the other values and prefers, but both are equally different in the sense that in the pivot I can see that when both the self and the other claim to be right, it reveals that both self and other are simultaneously also wrong.

Perspectives produced in comparative philosophy are subject-dependent, they are the result of positioning ourselves in a certain way, which indicates that we can position ourselves differently and become practically position-less in the pivot. This practically entails that methodologically constraining ourselves and forcing comparative philosophy in a particular direction is unwarranted and counterproductive. Unwarranted because any commitment on how to do comparative philosophy leads to more and not less bias; counterproductive because it confines us to a particular perspective and prevents us to approach the cultural other on its own terms and to learn from a variety of methods, approaches, and practices.

There is however one challenge that we have to tackle which is how we should respond to perspectives that dehumanize the other and are racist or sexist. While we can affirm the rightness of perspectives that claim A to be comparable to B simultaneously with perspectives that claim that A is not comparable to B, it would be unwarranted for comparative philosophers to assert the rightness of perspectives that are ethically troublesome. Instead of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, which promotes an ethically neutral position, I think it is necessary to hold on in the pivot to the ethical commitment to oppose to any perspective that is racist or

sexist or dehumanizes cultures or persons. In other words, we should hold on to the ethical commitment to do justice to the Other and the stranger as the one whose otherness is not considered. I reject therefore the Zhuangzian strategy, as discussed on pages 164 and 165, to mirror the behaviour and preferences of the oppressor. The emotional commitment to see racism, imperialism, sexism, and theoretical colonization as ultimately wrong and not as circumstantially wrong is a necessary and vital characteristic for any comparative philosopher and should not be seen as a bias that prevents us from becoming open to the other and the other's perspectives. The *Zhuāngzǐ* sees anger as a counterproductive, artificial emotion that emerges from a clogged heart-mind (*chéngxīn*, 成心). However, anger might be an apt emotional response to a moral violation and a justified way of bearing witness to the dehumanization of others. Uma Narayan (1988) and Alison Jaggar (1989) both argue that anger can even be epistemologically productive and can give us insight in unrecognized forms of injustice.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s central concern is to illuminate the limitations of personal points of views, which is an epistemological and not an ethical concern. The text is responding to philosophical disputation (*biàn*, 辯) that concentrated on which *shìfēi*-evaluations were right or wrong, beneficial or harmful. The *Zhuāngzǐ*'attacks this conception of philosophy because imposing categorizations in a fixed way does not agree with the way things are. Instead of imposing fixed standards and distinctions on things, we should use *shìfēi*-evaluations in a more fluid or fitting (*yí*, 宜) way. Becoming open to a variety of perspectives broadens our understanding of the world and helps us to better respond to alternative possibilities. At this point, the *Zhuāngzǐ* gives us insight in how becoming open to the cultural other has epistemological benefits for ourselves and enriches our understanding.

We also have to consider that philosophical disputation in the Warring States Period was also a risky endeavour in which Masters sometimes were executed for expressing their political views. The *Zhuāngzǐ* therefore argues that mirroring the needs of the oppressor is an effective strategy to prevent execution. Debates in comparative philosophy often tend to result in arguments that claim to have the best or right comparison; arguments that indeed are futile as these arguments cannot be objectively right nor do they correspond to how cultural reality, which is ambiguous and heterogeneous, really is. Furthermore, perspectives in comparative philosophy are subjective expressions that shed a particular light on the relation between concepts and conceptual schemes between two distinct cultural philosophical traditions; these perspectives are produced by certain

distinctions of what is comparable and which methods is "right," or "relevant." The Zhuangzian articulation of the pivot of *dào* can help us to make comparative philosophy more inclusive and less a practice that tends to rely on a primarily Western notion of what it means to do philosophy. Nevertheless, comparative philosophy should not be an "all-inclusive" discipline; its core commitment, and the emotional commitment of the comparative philosophy should be aimed at approaching and value the cultural other in its otherness.

§5.7 Wandering and Clarifying

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s questions debates and offers some practical strategies for dealing with debates. The text argues that aligning oneself with any side in a debate will lead to continued conflict and emotional disturbances. In the pivot, persons align themselves with the various perspectives that are expressed. The text advises us to particular pay attention to how each perspective expresses an alternative point of view and how these perspectives can enrich our understanding of life. Instead of aiming to win an argument or to be right, the *Zhuāngzǐ* advises us to choose for contentment and harmony by realizing that our point of view is a personal preference rather than the absolute truth.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* sees debates as a failure to understand each other and as a failure to accept that comparative philosophy consists of a variety of different alternative perspectives. Debates in comparative philosophy are centred around what is "comparable to what" and "what is not comparable," which methods are "right", and which ones are "wrong" to compare disparate cultural philosophical traditions. These debates are as such nothing more than scholars attacking and criticizing each other's perspectives; perspectives of what is "so" (*shì*, 是) and "not so" (*fēi*, 非). The *Zhuāngzǐ* shows us that these perspectives are just expressions of situated opinions; opinions that are presented as the absolute truth by clinging to these particular patterns and standards. Knowledge in comparative philosophy is a product of limited perspectives that can only represent and convey a part of reality and that are dependent upon particular interpretations formed in relation to other perspectives. Each comparison is the result of different starting points that produce different ways of looking at a text.

Instead of pondering over what is "comparable" and "not comparable," and bickering over what methods we should use and should not use, we are able to see how all these assertions are the outcome of particular preferences and

circumstances. The person at the pivot recognizes the equal validity of these two perspectives while at the same time also recognizes their difference and limitations. The tendency to treat these perspectives as either/or alternatives, fails to shed light on something: it is a failure to see that these alternatives are both the same and not the same. The *Zhuāngzǐ* shows us that there are no objective criteria available for claiming that certain distinctions or evaluations are universally generalizable. In other words: each perspective is contaminated by subjective bias and is open to being questioned.

Comparative philosophy should not only concentrate on bridging the gap between cultural distinct concepts and conceptual schemes but should also take the position of the persons who do the comparison into account and how they approach the other and the other's perspectives. While we cannot compare without making assertions, we can however train ourselves to become ethically competent. We can only transcend our own confined perspective when we have liberated ourselves from a calculative heart-mind and acquire an understanding of the way our interpretation and responses are affected by our emotions and our clinging to specific methods and ways of seeing things. Committing ourselves beforehand to a specific definition of comparative philosophy and a specific methodology diminishes our openness towards the (cultural) other and the other's perspectives and diminishes our ability to draw distinctions in a flexible and creative way. The *Zhuāngzǐ* furthermore shows us that disagreement is a constructive moment in which we learn novel ways of seeing the comparative project, a moment of understanding and learning as long as we do not see the other and other's perspectives as opponents. In the pivot we no longer act like a judge but as a peer and can assess a given perspective based on its relevance and coherence.

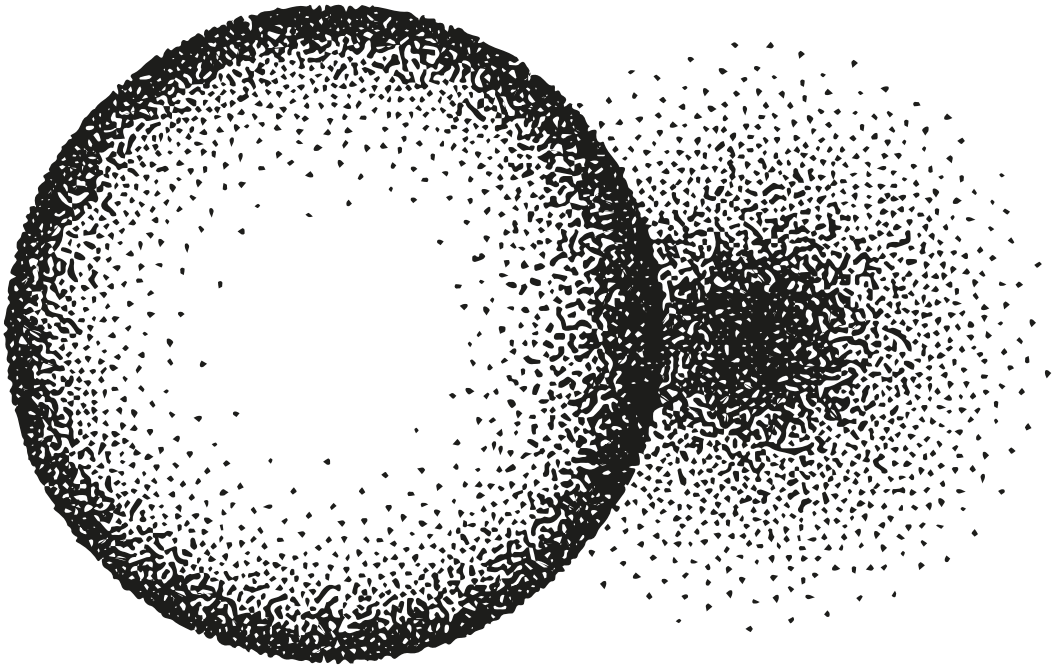
In conclusion, ethical competence from a Zhuangzian point of view entails that we should familiarize ourselves with a variety of methodologies and approaches and see comparative philosophy as a practice that shows its relevance in the comparative praxis. I agree with Burik (2022) who argues that we should not believe in the inherent value of building a philosophical system or taking a systematic approach to comparative philosophy. Instead, we should commit ourselves to become free of bias and respond to every possibility. Detaching ourselves of emotional and cognitive biases requires training and effort. It took Cook Ding for example three years to "go along with things," (*yīnshì*, 因是) and to wander carefree (*xiāoyáoyóu*, 逍遙遊).

While embracing indeterminacy and doubt as our only map will help us to see many more alternatives and possible interpretations, we still have to make philosophical choices about how to approach the cultural other and how to respond to other's who do take themselves as the mediators of what is "so" and "not so." At this point we can see that in the pivot we are responding to the other as other which entails responding to the tension between the *saying* and *the said*. While we have detached ourselves in the pivot from emotional and cognitive biases, we still have to approach the cultural other by making use of our own linguistic and philosophical frameworks. Nevertheless, we personally embrace the infinite task to move beyond identity, as we do not claim to be right nor reject possible alternatives, which changes our approach to language. Meaning and words are in the pivot not fixed and can change under different circumstances. Furthermore, in the pivot we respond to what the cultural other takes their needs to be, which implies that we take their socio-historical, cultural, and linguistic context into account and are aware of the limitations of our comparisons.

Remaining ethically open is similar to staying in the pivot as it urges us to minimize the violence of the otherness of the other by, for example, falling back on our privileged conception of what philosophy should be or taking our perspective as what is objectively "so" or "not so". Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ* both see the need to deconstruct the egocentric self, a self that does harm to what is other but that remains also confined to its own perspective. The egocentric self that clings to its own rules and standards is never able to evolve, since overcoming one's perspective requires the capability to understand and accept the standards and rules used by the other. Being able to shift between different perspectives, methodologies, standards, and rules frees us of bias and makes us better able to engage in comparative philosophy.

To summarize, I have called the position of the pivot as described in the *Zhuāngzǐ* as ethical competence, despite the fact that the *Zhuāngzǐ* is not concerned with ethics but sees the pivot as the natural position in which we are able to follow our own self-so-ness and complete our natural life span. Being in the pivot requires an ethical vocation to do justice to the Other, a desire to want to think otherwise. In the pivot we have the flexibility to shift between different perspectives and see their acceptability while at the same time acknowledging their limitations, which is the best position available to comparative philosophers. Nevertheless, attuning to our duty to become ethically competent as being at rest in the pivot can only be motivated by the faith of the person(s) involved, and their

love for comparative philosophy as a constructive endeavour, which entails that we should be emotionally committed to reject and criticize any claim that dehumanize the other and are sexist or racist. Comparative philosophy as a discipline that consists of an endless variety of perspectives, including the cultural relativist one, but it is also a discipline with an ethical orientation that is committed to doing justice to the otherness of the other.



Chapter 6

Conclusion: Ethical Competence and The Self-Other Relation

In this dissertation, I have developed an interpretation of the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s and Levinas' reconfiguration of the self-other relation to provide an alternative conception of comparative philosophy. Comparative philosophy seeks to learn and understand from the cultural other by erasing differences by assertion one or several commonalities between concepts and conceptual schemes of disparate cultural philosophical traditions. I have drawn attention to the fact that comparative philosophy cannot evaluate claims from a neutral vantage point and needs to consider that these claims are always biased by the background and choices of the person doing the comparison.

Comparative philosophy is a discipline that consists of a variety of different perspectives that need to be appreciated. The ability to appreciate a range of alternative perspectives and methodologies requires philosophers to adopt an open, flexible and understanding attitude in which we do not see ourselves as the ultimate truth but recognize that our position is based on certain preferences. I have showed that the person who abides at the pivot will be able to value the other and the other's perspectives and will be trained to celebrate alternative perspectives rather than evaluating them as "right" or "wrong". Abiding at the pivot is a willingness to become open to the other and the other's perspectives, and, from a Levinasian point of view to desire to do justice to the other. For Levinas and the *Zhuāngzǐ*, becoming open to alternative possibilities and the other, is a personal invitation to move beyond identity and to become less egocentric and dogmatic.

Instead of being a discipline that aims for justified arguments and discerning what is "right" or "comparable" and what is not, comparative philosophy should see itself as a discipline that converses with and works together with various voices from various cultural philosophical traditions. Comparative philosophy is thus learning from and conversing with the cultural other, in which the otherness of this other is of concern to us. The question of how to approach the other and the other's perspectives in the best way is conceived in this study as a question of ethical competence which amounts to adopting a critical-transformational discourse. Only when we are willing to critically reflect on our beliefs, preferences and presuppositions are we able to transcend our own confined perspectives.

Levinas' notion of transcendence can help us to adopt a discourse of responsibility that is not based on any assertion of commonality. A Levinasian notion of ethical competence is a personal vocation to openness rather than

closure; it is an infinite exercise in opening ourselves to alternatives. Levinas shows that the ethical dimension of language emerges when we take the relation to the cultural other as our teacher, as our interlocutor and recognize the violence inherent in our essentialization and categorization of the cultural other. Responding to the saying entails that the comparative encounter's outcome is marked by indeterminacy and open-endedness. The Levinasian approach to comparative philosopher emphasizes the personal relation between the comparative philosopher and the cultural other and calls for the need of the comparative philosophers to take the cultural other in their otherness into account.

When we engage in comparative philosophy, we should be committed to learning from and understanding the cultural other, which is a commitment that reveals a love for the other in their otherness as well as a willingness to give up our privileged position. Although we are always culturally situated and we necessarily need to rely on our own cultural horizon to approach the cultural other, the ethical encounter opens up a way in which we can still respond to the cultural other's otherness. In this study I have outlined that this entails that comparative philosophers need to move beyond identity and need to recognize the interconnection between the reliance on commonness, resemblances and identities and cultural hegemony.

Levinasian ethical competence to the cultural other can be translated as a willingness to be questioned by the cultural other, which originates in the re-appreciation of the interdependence of self and other. Comparative philosophers need to embody uncertainty and indeterminacy as ethical competence, through the awareness of the relation between essentialization and categorization and violence. Comparative philosophy is always a mis- or representation of the cultural other, it is always a responding to the alterity of the other by categorizing and grasping that other from our own cultural horizon. This highlights once more the need to become ethically competent as comparative philosophers and try to approach the cultural other and the other's perspectives in the most open, unbiased way.

Ultimately, the Levinasian conception of ethical competence cannot be translated into practical strategies on how we can approach the cultural other and the other's perspectives in an open, unbiased way. While it does define the task of the comparative philosopher to try to move beyond identity, Levinas does not provide us with strategies on how we can embody this task. I have shown

how the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s articulation of finding the pivot of *dào* through the adoption of an empty, wandering and mirroring heart-mind can help us to see what needs to be done in order to become open to the other and the other's perspectives.

The *Zhuāngzǐ*'s sceptical concerns challenge the idea that there is a unique, neutral vantage point and shows how each claim in comparative philosophy is biased and produced by certain emotional commitments. As comparative philosophers, we cannot take an unbiased position in which we can evaluate what is "comparable" or "right," but can only argue what is circumstantially and subjectively "comparable" or "right."

Instead of seeing comparative philosophy as a discipline that tries to discern similarities and differences between disparate cultural philosophical traditions, comparative philosophy can be better seen as a form of intercultural praxis in which we responsibly approach the cultural other in which we keep the space between the same and the other open. Keeping this space open entails that we should recognize that all our arguments and presuppositions are indeterminate and provisional. Most comparative studies rest largely on unquestioned notions of comparison and amount to claims of what is "comparable" and "not comparable," and what is the right methodology or approach and what is not. This attitude prevents us from considering alternatives and moving towards what is other. As we have seen in this study, what is right or comparable can easily change when we focus on a different tertium, and the right methodology might easily become the wrong methodology when we change our perspective. The relation between what is "comparable" and "not comparable," "right and wrong," and "similar and different" is obscured in comparative philosophy and it is only in freeing ourselves of our egocentric preferences and value judgments that we can see how these relations naturally interconnect.

The *Zhuāngzǐ* shows how most scholars are predisposed to understanding the comparative encounter through a fixed epistemological framework. The reliance on such fixed frameworks is the cause of the failure to recognize that self and other are equal in their difference. Instead of being hostile to the claims of others, we should abide at the pivot and actively free ourselves from harmful biases that make us intolerant to the cultural other and the other's perspectives. In contrast to approaching the cultural other as either the negation of us or the affirmation of ourselves, the *Zhuāngzǐ* promotes taking doubt and indeterminacy as our only method. The equanimity of the person in the pivot is grounded in a balance between engaging in comparative philosophy and a detachment of

philosophical disputation. For the *Zhuāngzǐ*, the comparative philosopher who abides at the pivot seeks to act responsively and flexible to each comparative encounter, yet withdraws from the world when confronted with oppressive, racist, and sexist perspectives.

I have argued that this strategy to simply mirror the behaviour of these perspectives, which entails "playing racist with the other when he wants to play the racist," is not suitable for comparative philosophy. Although we should become open to the cultural encounter and take the other's perspectives equally into account, we have the ethical commitment to reject and criticize perspectives that overtly violate the otherness of the cultural other. A Zhuangzian inspired conception of ethical competence originates in embracing indeterminacy and doubt as a way of life, which entails the recognition that our perspective is never free of bias and is circumstantially produced. Abiding at the pivot is a personal commitment to become a *no-self*, a personal commitment to deconstruct rigid patterns of thinking and expectations that might negatively influence the comparative encounter. Learning to engage responsively in comparative philosophy however should also entail that we actively seek to reject perspectives that seek to dehumanize the cultural other and are racist or sexist. Although the *Zhuāngzǐ* seeks to avoid any emotion that disrupts our emotional equanimity, I suggest the need to consider the aptness of anger when confronted with oppressive perspectives. In contrast to the *Zhuāngzǐ*, which argues that our emotional responsiveness to situations should not merely rely on conventions, I argue that the conventional ethical emotional commitment to do justice to the other is needed. This ethical commitment is the necessary form of communication in which the comparative philosopher bears witness to the dehumanization of the other and needs to be seen as a justified convention of a shared negative appreciation of racist, xenophobic, and sexist claims.

To summarize, ethical competence thus entails seeing comparative philosophy as a form of intercultural praxis that requires an ethical responsible position in which we embody indeterminacy and doubt as a way of life and the need to empty ourselves from emotional and cognitive commitments to become open to the cultural other and the other's perspectives. Across many studies and methodological inquiries in comparative philosophy there appears to be a desire to understand and learn from the cultural other, and thus to communicate with that other, but in which the ethical grounds remain unquestioned and undisclosed. Taking the ethical grounds of comparative philosophy into account requires the person doing the comparison to train him- or her to become open

and responsive to a variety of different methodologies and perspectives and to do justice to the otherness of the other. The pivot is the best position for comparative philosophers, because it is a position in which we actively question and deconstruct our beliefs, biases, and presuppositions in which we create a space to be interrupted in the rigidity of our fixed designations.

When we abide at the pivot, we can see how perspectives are just expressions of opinions, produced by different backgrounds, methods, and choices, which enables us to accommodate to a variety of alternative points of views. The pivot is however not a relativist position I which everything goes, and each perspective is justified. Ethical competence also entails being committed to do justice to the otherness of the cultural other, which is the need to reject oppressive claims at all times. The Zhuangzian/Levinasian conception of ethical competence highlights the importance of becoming responsive to the tension between self and other in the comparative process. This conception of ethical competence embodies the personal task to attempt to move beyond identity and endorses open-endedness and indeterminacy as the fundamental nature of comparative philosophy.

The Zhuangzian/Levinasian conception of ethical competence as abiding at the pivot and the ethical concern to do justice to the cultural other as other, entails becoming open to being questioned by the cultural other so that we can lose our unwarranted fixations and become open to alternative meanings, approaches, and methods. This entails that the Zhuangzian/Levinasian conception of ethical competence calls for reconceptualising comparative philosophy. Ethical competence originates in the recognition that amidst competing argumentative claims in which each perspective asserts their own truth, we have no neutral vantage point from which we can decide which perspective is ultimately right. Instead, ethical competence requires us to affirm each of their circumstantial and subjective rightness. Ethical competence originates in valuing a plurality of alternative possibilities, although claims that dehumanize the other, such as racist and sexist claims, are necessarily excluded from being appreciated.

Ethical competence as informed by the thinking of the *Zhuāngzǐ* and Levinas is hospitable to a variety of approaches, methodologies and practices and is as such defined by the infinite attempt to move beyond identity. To maintain the position of the pivot in comparative philosophy, is to learn to appreciate personal responsibility and responsiveness as essential ingredients to evolve in comparative philosophy.

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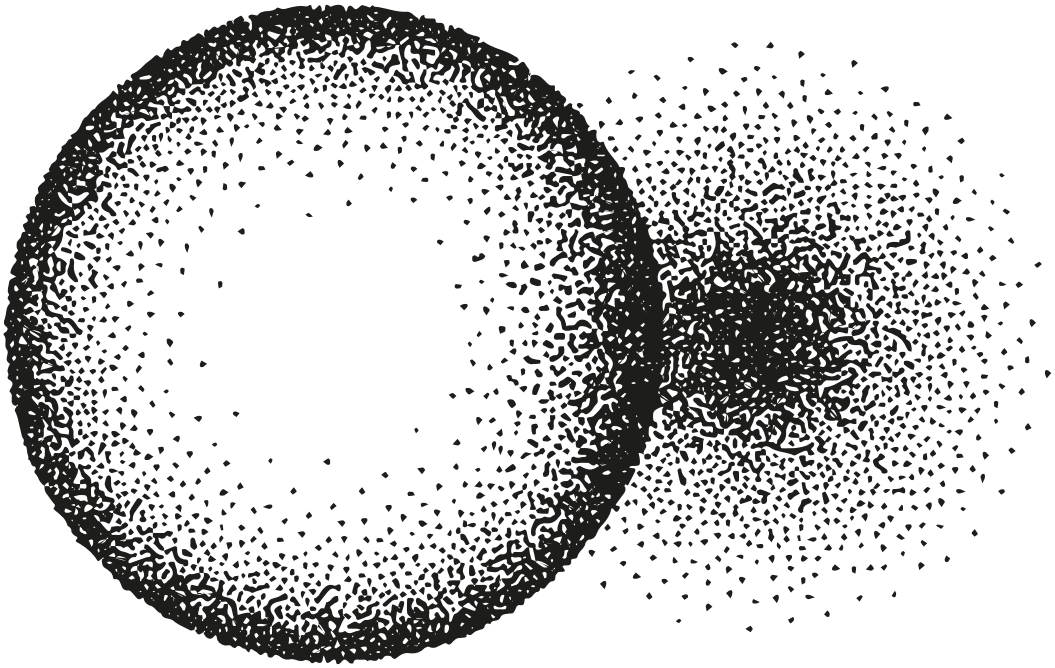

Chapter 7

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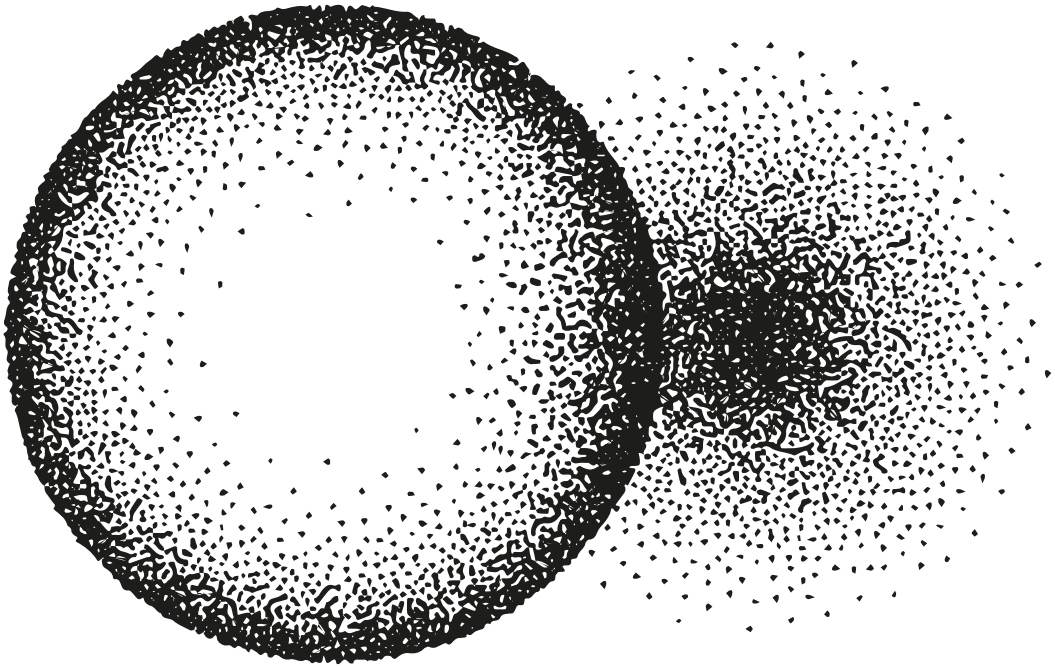

Appendix

Summary
Samenvatting
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Propositions

Summary

This study aims to show the relevance of the work of Emmanuel Levinas and the proto-Daoist text the *Zhuāngzǐ* for comparative philosophy. The question that is at the heart of comparative philosophy is how we can approach another cultural philosophical tradition in its otherness, while at the same time bringing this other tradition closer to us through familiar philosophical concepts. The study argues that current methodologies and practices in comparative philosophy are too much aimed at overcoming incommensurable differences between cultural traditions. Comparative philosophy requires an openness of thinking in which comparative philosophers are willing to be interrupted and questioned in our assumptions and emotional commitments. This study shows how Levinas' ethical relation to the Other and the *Zhuāngzǐ*'s emphasis on finding the pivot of *dào* (*dàoshū*, 道樞) can help to formulate a notion of ethical competence in which comparative philosophers can approach the other and the other's perspectives in an open, less biased way and do not try to close the space between same and other.

The problem of epistemic injustice and the theoretical colonization of another cultural philosophical tradition is one of the most pressing challenges of the intercultural encounter. Comparative philosophers tend to understand and grasp the cultural other by finding resemblances and similarities, which as a practice has the consequence that differences between self and other are ignored or erased. Current methodologies in comparative philosophy are all based on the assertion of commonality, which raises the question of whether these methodologies are equipped to take the otherness of the other into account. While comparative philosophers can never adopt a neutral point of view, they can reflect on and minimize bias, which will help them to be able to encounter cultural others on their own terms. This study claims that it is important for comparative philosophers to train themselves to become open towards what is other and to exercise the ability of critical reflection on and a letting-go of their presuppositions, beliefs, and value judgments.

In this study, I will present Levinas as the philosopher who reconfigures the self-other relation as a personal embodied relation of contact in which the self is summoned to take the otherness of the other into account. Levinas attacks the anti-Platonic tendency of modern philosophy and seeks to overcome the primitivism of a wholly immanent worldview. In this study, I will relate Levinas' critique on an immanent worldview to the problem of culture and cultural

identity. Immanence is for Levinas the tendency to approach the cultural other as the same or by a purely aesthetic appreciation of the cultural other. The ethical relation as the infinite transcendence of the Other is presented as a surplus that gives the intercultural relation its necessary ethical orientation which is grounded in the personal unconditional responsibility of the comparative philosopher.

Nevertheless, Levinas' work on the transcendence of the Other cannot be uncritically accepted. Several scholars such as McGettigan (2006) and Drabinski (2013) raise the question of whether Levinas' thinking does not exclude non-Western others who do not share the Judaeo-Greek foundation which Levinas' thinking relies on. In response to these critiques, I investigate the relation between culture, transcendence, and immanence, in which try to show how Levinas' troublesome political statements need to be traced back to his rejection of a wholly immanent worldview. Instead of dismissing Levinas' thinking as Eurocentric, I will answer the question of what the privileged position of the European tradition consists in. Drawing on the work of Derrida, I will argue that the infinite duty of Europe and of comparative philosophy, is to move beyond identity, which calls for the need to become open to being questioned in our categorizations and essentializations of the cultural other.

A Levinasian conception of ethical competence entails responding to the tension between sameness and radical alterity and recognizing that the other is always my interlocutor whose otherness affects me. As comparative philosophers we should attune to the tension between the saying, our ethical vocation to do justice to the otherness of the other, and the said as the inevitable grasping of that other in common concepts and ideas. Ethical competence is the willingness to be questioned in our assumptions, beliefs, and claims; a willingness to take alternative voices into account. While this task can be distilled from the work of Levinas and Derrida, their thinking does not provide us with practical strategies on the best way to approach the cultural other on their own terms while simultaneously ignoring differences by bringing the cultural other under our own categories. The *Zhuāngzǐ* is introduced as a necessary correction to Levinas' thinking which will help us to define a position in which we can respond to the otherness of the cultural other and can reconceptualise comparative philosophy as a discipline that is hospitable to an endless range of possible methods, approaches, and practices. The *Zhuāngzǐ* articulates a position in

which we can harmonize seemingly opposed perspectives and can gain clarity on the nature of comparative philosophy. The central claim of the *Zhuāngzǐ* is that one can harmonize different perspectives when one has dissolved the self-other relation and no longer clings to knowledge, language, and logic. Instead of the other Masters who all articulated the Course in terms of what is "so" (*shì*, 是) and "not so" (*fēi*, 非) the *Zhuāngzǐ* questions this form of philosophy as debate (*biàn*, 辯) and articulates a position in which we see how these debates between conflicting perspectives are deluded. This self-enclosed perspective prevents us from responding adequately to the other and the other's perspectives.

I will argue that a Zhuangzian conception of ethical competence entails that comparative philosophers need to embrace the perspective found at the centre of what the *Zhuāngzǐ* calls "the pivot," a position in which we have freed ourselves from clinging to any preferences or standard of what is "so" or "not so" and can respond to the other and the other's perspectives from a position of emotional equanimity. This position is the perspective in which we approach the other and the other's perspectives in the most open and least biased way and it is therefore a position that can help us to become ethical competent as comparative philosophers. Based on the reading of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, ethical competence is the requirement of inner transformation and the willingness to put the heart-mind on a diet. These are in this study seen as necessary steps for comparative philosophers to gain clarity and to recognize the connection between different perspectives.

As comparison is dependent upon the perspective of the interpretive comparer, it is not only important to rely on methods that are able to connect concepts and conceptual schemes from disparate cultural philosophical tradition, but also to invest in ethical competence. This study concludes that abiding to the pivot, by means of repetitive and extensive self-adaptation and transformation is an ethical competence that can help comparative philosophy to resolve several issues and challenges. Instead of focusing on one way of doing comparative philosophy or focusing only on one possible method, comparative philosophers should familiarize themselves with a variety of methodologies, approaches, and practices in which they always have to justify any choice in the light of their ethical commitment to do justice to the cultural other. While comparative philosophers necessarily need to rely on family resemblance or quasi-universal concepts to initiate the intercultural comparison, they should always initiate the intercultural dialogue from a position of ethical competence in which they take responsibility for their assertions, beliefs, comportments, and emotions.

Samenvatting

In deze studie wordt de relevantie aangetoond van het werk van Emmanuel Levinas en de vroege daoïstische tekst de *Zhuāngzǐ* voor het begrijpen en uitoefenen van comparatieve filosofie. Het vergelijken van concepten en conceptuele systemen van verschillende culturele tradities brengt diverse uitdagingen met zich mee. Deze studie concentreert zich op de manier waarop comparatieve filosofen nooit een neutrale houding kunnen aannemen, maar altijd vanuit hun verwachtingen, overtuigingen en emotionele inzet het comparatieve proces vormgeven. De belangrijkste vraag hierbij is hoe wij een andere culturele filosofische traditie benaderen met de grootst mogelijke openheid. Deze studie probeert aan te tonen dat comparatieve filosofie een vorm van interculturele communicatie is, waarbij comparatieve filosofen zich op een ethische manier moeten verhouden tot de culturele ander om recht te kunnen doen aan de andersheid van de ander. De studie probeert te laten zien hoe Levinas' denken over de ethische relatie en de *Zhuāngzǐ*'s nadruk op het vinden van de spil van de *dào*, de comparatieve filosofie kan helpen om de culturele ander te benaderen vanuit een open, responsieve houding waarin rekenschap gegeven wordt van het feit dat de ander nooit volledig kenbaar is.

Comparatieve filosofie is een hermeneutische activiteit waarin comparatieve filosofen proberen om concepten van verschillende culturele tradities met elkaar te verbinden door het identificeren van zogenoemde "familiegelijkenissen concepten." Deze familiegelijkenissen concepten zijn niet identiek aan elkaar, maar vertonen enkel punten van gelijkenis, waardoor het mogelijk wordt om verschillende culturele concepten met elkaar te vergelijken. De huidige methodes die worden gebruikt in de comparatieve filosofie proberen allemaal om concepten en conceptuele systemen van verschillende culturele tradities met elkaar te verbinden door te kijken naar deze zogenaamde "familiegelijkenissen". Hoewel deze methodes noodzakelijk zijn voor het kunnen praktiseren van comparatieve filosofie, is het niet voldoende om recht te doen aan de culturele ander. De huidige methodes richten zich op het opheffen van verschillen en kunnen geen rekenschap geven van het spanningsveld tussen verschil en gelijkenis dat ontstaat wanneer wij de culturele ander proberen te begrijpen. Een analyse van de zelf-ander relatie zal ons helpen om ons op een competente manier rekenschap te kunnen geven van de spanning tussen gelijkenis en verschil in de comparatieve ontmoeting. Deze studie stelt dat het essentieel is om de ethische dimensie van de culturele ontmoeting in acht te nemen, waarin

de comparatieve filosoof reflecteert op de manier waarop vooroordelen en emotionele betrokkenheid het comparatieve proces beïnvloeden.

Het probleem van epistemologische onrechtvaardigheid en de kolonisatie van andere culturele filosofische traditie is één van de belangrijkste uitdagingen van de comparatieve filosofie. Hoewel comparatieve filosofen nooit de culturele ander kunnen benaderen vanuit een neutrale houding, kunnen zij wel de verantwoordelijkheid nemen voor de manier waarop zij de culturele ander benaderen. Comparatieve filosofie is het bereid zijn om open te staan voor wat anders is en het kritisch kunnen reflecteren op en het veranderen van onze vooroordelen, opvattingen en waardeoordelen.

In de studie zal ik het denken van Levinas gebruiken om een alternatieve benadering van de zelf-ander relatie vorm te geven, waarin deze relatie gezien wordt als een persoonlijke verantwoordelijkheid die niet voorkomt uit het zelf, maar voortkomt uit het gelaat van de Ander die de inbreekt op het egocentrische genieten van het zelf. Levinas bekritiseert de anti-Platoonse insteek van moderne filosofische theorieën en pleit voor de noodzaak van de relatie tot het radicale andere als de pure transcendentie die in staat is om het zelf in zijn egocentrische spontaniteit te onderbreken. Levinas is van mening dat een immanente wereld een primitieve wereld is waarin de culturele ander enkel als "gelijk aan ons," of vanuit zijn esthetische kwaliteiten benaderd kan worden.

Levinas stelt dat de ander een "Ander" is, omdat in het menselijke gelaat van de ander de transcendentie van alle anderen oplicht. Levinas stelt dat het noodzakelijk is om na te denken over de transcendentie van de Ander, waarin het moreel appel van de Ander inbreekt in het egocentrische genieten van het zelf, zonder daarbij de vrijheid en de autonomie van het zelf te beperken of te vernietigen. Op grond van twee essays die Levinas geschreven heeft over de cultuur en de culturele ander, zal deze studie laten zien hoe transcendentie het noodzakelijke surplus aan de interculturele ontmoeting geeft die de vrijheid van de comparatieve filosofie niet beperkt, maar verzwaart.. De ethische relatie is een uitnodiging tot gastvrijheid, een uitnodiging om de ander te zien als onze naaste die in acht genomen dient te worden.

Levinas' denken over transcendentie kan echter niet kritiekloos worden toegepast. Een aantal filosofen zoals McGettigan (2006) en Drabinski (2013) beargumenteren dat het denken van Levinas vertrekt vanuit de absolute voorrang van het Griekse en Joodse denken en daarom geen recht kan doen

aan andere culturele filosofische tradities. Levinas stelt dat de Joods-Griekse traditie een bevoorrechte plek heeft omdat zij in staat is geweest om de transcendentie als het goede voorbij zijn en niet-zijn te denken. In deze studie geef ik antwoord op het vermeende eurocentrisme van Levinas door de relatie te onderzoeken tussen cultuur, immanentie en transcendentie. Ik zal laten zien dat Levinas' politieke uitspraken over de culturele ander gezien moeten worden in het licht van zijn kritiek op een geheel immanente wereld.

In plaats van het denken van Levinas af te doen als eurocentrisch, stel ik in deze studie de vraag wat het betekent vanuit Levinas om als comparatieve westerse filosofen deze bevoorrechte positie in te nemen. Om deze bevoorrechte positie van Europa duidelijk te maken, bespreek ik Derrida's denken over de plicht van Europa om gastvrij te zijn voor de absolute Ander, wat concreet betekent dat Europa de plicht heeft om voortdurend te breken met zijn eigen identiteit. Bevoorrecht zijn als oneindige gastvrijheid behelst de plicht om telkens de vraag te stellen of comparatieve filosofen de culturele anderen geen onrecht aandoen door hen onder te brengen onder een bepaalde categorie of door hen een specifieke identiteit toe te kennen.

Recht doen aan het spanningsveld tussen gelijkenis en absolute andersheid vertaalt zich als de oneindige taak ondervraagd te worden over onze veronderstellingen, overtuigingen en uitspraken. Comparatieve filosofen hebben de persoonlijke verplichting om zich open te stellen voor de andersheid van de ander en om zich telkens te bewegen voorbij de identiteit. Het is echter vanuit Derrida en Levinas moeilijk om te bepalen welke praktische strategieën we kunnen toepassen om ons rekenschap te geven van het spanningsveld tussen het respecteren van de andersheid van de ander terwijl wij deze ander enkel kunnen benaderen vanuit onze eigen culturele horizon. Aan de hand van de *Zhuāngzǐ* zal duidelijk worden hoe wij in staat zullen zijn om de andersheid van de ander in acht te nemen.

De *Zhuāngzǐ* is erop gericht om de onderlinge afhankelijkheid tussen het zelf en de andere perspectieven te herstellen en te harmoniseren. De *Zhuāngzǐ* ziet de positie van de spil van de *dào* als de beste manier om de relatie tussen zelf en ander te kunnen harmoniseren. De belangrijkste overtuiging van de *Zhuāngzǐ* is dat we tegengestelde perspectieven in een ander licht kunnen zien wanneer wij de tegenstelling tussen zelf en ander hebben losgelaten door ons te actief te bevrijden van rigide vormen van kennis, taal en logica. In tegenstelling tot de andere Meesters in de tijd van de Strijdende Staten die de Weg probeerden

te begrijpen en te fixeren in termen van wat "zo" (*shì*是) is en "niet zo" (*fēi*, 非), trekt de *Zhuāngzǐ* deze vorm van filosofie bedrijven (*biàn,* 辯) in twijfel. Wanneer wij loskomen van ons beperkte perspectief en ons rekenschap geven van het feit dat wijzelf niet in staat zijn om de absolute en universele scheidsrechter te zijn van wat "zo" en "niet zo" is, kunnen wij ons waarlijk open stellen voor de ander en voor alternatieve perspectieven.

Het beste perspectief waarin comparatieve filosofen het meeste recht kunnen doen aan de culturele ander, is de positie van de spil van de *dào*. In deze positie hebben comparatieve filosofen zich losgemaakt van cognitieve en emotionele overtuigingen die de interculturele ontmoeting belemmeren. Omdat zij niet langer vasthouden aan een bepaalde standaard en zich realiseren dat ieder perspectief tot stand komt door bepaalde preferenties, kunnen zij flexibel en adaptief gebruik maken van en reageren op verschillende, schijnbare tegengestelde perspectieven. Door het loslaten van hun identiteit, verwachtingen en rigide denkpatronen, kunnen comparatieve filosofen nieuwe mogelijkheden ontdekken en kunnen zij vanuit de meest open houding de culturele ander benaderen.

Comparatieve filosofie dient zich rekenschap te geven van het feit dat het comparatieve proces wordt bepaald door de positie van de persoon die de vergelijking initieert. Hierdoor is het van belang om niet enkel te concentreren op methodes die het mogelijk maken om concepten en conceptuele schema's van verschillende culturele tradities met elkaar te vergelijken, maar ook te investeren in een vorm van ethische competentie waarin de comparatieve filosoof zich rekenschap geeft van het spanningsveld tussen gelijkenis en absoluut verschil. De conclusie van deze studie is dat ethische competentie betekent dat comparatieve filosofen de positie van de spil van de *dào* innemen, waarin zij de ethische intentie hebben om recht te doen aan de andersheid van de ander. Ethische competentie is het intensieve en oneindige proces van zelf-adaptatie en transformatie waarin comparatieve filosofen volledige verantwoordelijkheid nemen voor hun cognitieve en emotionele vooroordelen en veronderstellingen.

Ethische competentie stelt dat de comparatieve filosofie zich moet openstellen voor verschillende mogelijkheden en alternatieve methodes en benaderingen waarin comparatieve filosofen zich in hun verhouding tot de culturele ander telkens rekenschap geven van de ethische intentie om recht te willen doen aan de andersheid van de ander. Hoewel comparatieve filosofen enkel de

culturele ander kunnen begrijpen vanuit hun eigen culturele horizon, is ethische competentie de noodzakelijke voorwaarde om vanuit de juiste houding de culturele ander te benaderen en de diversiteit en pluraliteit binnen de comparatieve filosofie te kunnen waarborgen.

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Curriculum Vitae

Martine Berenpas was born in Warnsveld the Netherlands, October 23rd, 1979. She obtained her MA health psychology in 2009 and her MA philosophy in 2010. Subsequently, she spent time in the United States where she studied for half a year at *De Paul University* in Chicago. After living in Singapore for two years, she returned to the Netherlands and enrolled as a PhD student at Leiden University Institute for Philosophy. Currently, she works as a teacher at Fontys University of Applied Science.

Propositions

1. If philosophy wants to learn and understand a disparate cultural philosophical tradition, it has to reflect on the self-other relation into account (Chapter 1).

2. Current methodologies in comparative philosophy insufficiently reflect on the hermeneutical nature of comparative philosophy and do not respond to the problem of bias (Chapter 2).

3. Although Levinas' ethical relation to the Other originates in Jewish religion and Greek universalism, it can provide comparative philosophy with an ethical orientation that does not depend on any particular culture (Chapter 3).

4. The Zhuangzi's articulation of the "pivot of *dào*" is the best perspective that the comparative philosopher can adopt when he or she wants to learn and understand another cultural philosophical tradition (Chapter 4).

5. When comparative philosophy wants to avoid the theoretical colonization of the cultural other, it needs to invest in adopting a Levinasian/Zhuangian discourse of critical self-transformation (Chapter 5).

6. In contrast to the Zhuangzi who endorses carefree wandering, comparative philosophers who abide at the pivot need to eschew and reject the colonization or dehumanization of the cultural other. Being in the pivot also entails that philosophers have the Levinasian infinite responsibility to the Other, which makes their freedom in the pivot a "difficult freedom" (Chapter 5).

7. How to understand and deal with truth in an intercultural context still is an open issue that comparative philosophy needs to reflect on.

8. The Levinasian/Zhuangzian conception of ethical competence relies on personal vocation and commitment and can therefore not be taught to future students in comparative philosophy.

9. Being in the pivot and committing ourselves to ethical responsibility enables us to become more sensitive to our beliefs, emotional commitments and assertions and allows us to create space for novel approaches and methodologies.

10. Philosophy departments should require their students to study and understand the different modes of knowing and epistemologies in a variety of disparate philosophical traditions.

11. The Levinasian/Zhuangzian position of ethical responsiveness and emotional constraint can be used as a framework of critical-transformative reflection to illustrate how an intercultural dialogue can be initiated by undermining cultural hegemony.

12. The Levinasian/Zhuangzian position of ethical responsiveness and emotional constraint can make the broader social contribution as offering a resource to promote human flourishing in our modern, liberal world. It offers persons a way to see how different opinions and ways of life can peacefully co-exist.

*