

Is Intercultural Philosophy a New Branch or a New Orientation in Philosophy?

*Franz M. Wimmer, Vienna**

Summary:

Probably every human culture has developed typical ways of philosophising in the sense that there were given explanations of the world, of what man is, and of the right relationships between human beings. Some of the cultures of the past have invented systems of writing and documentation, thereby establishing long lasting traditions of thought. Amidst a period of globalisation of many aspects of human life, the problem now arises, whether there will be one single form or method of philosophy in the future. If so: what then will be the role of the different traditions in shaping this future thinking? If not: must we give up the idea that philosophy ever can argue for universally acceptable truths or insights?

This paper deals with some aspects of these questions by discussing the role of (Euro_)centrism in the historiography of philosophy, and by analysing the impact of the different languages of philosophy on thinking itself.

Introductory remarks

There are two important questions with respect to intercultural philosophy which this paper is *not* going to deal with: firstly, whether or not there are several culturally different origins of philosophy, and secondly, how understanding and communication is possible between such different philosophical cultures.

Concerning the first question I take it for granted that contemporary philosophising is dependent on different cultural frameworks and that philosophy originated not only in Europe, but elsewhere as well;¹ at least if we agree that philosophical questions concern mainly three objects: the structures of reality, knowledgability, and argumentations on norms and values - if, in other words, we consider *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *ethics* to be the central fields of research in philosophy.

The contrary view holds that philosophy ("in a strict sense") developed only once, namely within the European, the Occidental culture. This view, however, is based not on reflections of the *contents* but rather of certain *forms* of thinking and argumentation. This

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Sincere thanks to the students in my seminary in Vienna, and especially to Sergius Koderer and Josef Mitterer, who commented critically to that English version or to the original German one.

¹Cf. Heinz Hülsmann and Ram A. Mall: *Die drei Geburtsorte der Philosophie*. China, Indien und Europa, Bonn: Bouvier 1989; and: R. Moritz, H. Rüstau, G.-R. Hoffmann (Hg.): *Wie und warum entstand Philosophie in verschiedenen Regionen der Erde?* Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1988

view orientates - or rather occidentates - until this day most discussions of professional philosophers all over the world. However, it is not convincing. There are good reasons to hold that philosophy today and in the future will have serious shortcomings if it continues to discuss global questions only within the framework of concepts and methods derived from occidental lore.² If philosophy will not be able to surpass its occidentation by going forward to a true globalisation, it will fail to give answers to humankind in the future. So there are reasons to accept the view that philosophy in a general sense has several - and perhaps many - origins. But is it true?

There are sources of different character - and not always texts, or academic treatises - which show that philosophy developed independently, in Africa as well as in America, Asia, and Europe. In all these cases we do not find monolithic systems but rather a web of ways of thinking and arguing, which continue to influence contemporary philosophy. This leads to the first question: how can philosophy, which never can be expressed independently from linguistic and conceptual tools coming from particular languages and cultures, aim to provide us with answers which are intended to be universally true or valuable? This is the crucial question with respect to the possibility and necessity of intercultural philosophising.

Concerning the question of the possibility of *understanding* I believe that this matter should be viewed from the angle how communication and understanding between philosophers is possible at all. This would be a very general subject, and I am not going to deal with it here.

Instead, I will discuss the problem of the title, *Is Intercultural Philosophy a New Branch or a New Orientation in Philosophy* in four steps.

First I want to draw your attention on the „*story*“ of philosophy which has been told by philosophers and historians of philosophy in Europe. It mainly is the story of a unique and developing human reason whose main representatives happen to be male, white, and occidental. The first task will be to evaluate and to revise this kind of story.

Second: Philosophers will never have anything else than their words to show what they think. Words from certain languages, words that were formed within certain cultural contexts. In other words: the questions, methods, plausibilities and beliefs of philosophers originate within a temporal, social, and cultural framework. And yet: if they will philosophise, they always will try to arrive at transcultural insights. Therefore, the question whether philosophy with an intercultural orientation is possible, is not just another exotism, but is fundamental for every thinking which knows about the cultural contingency of all modes of thinking, and yet aims to know. Philosophy under these conditions will only be possible by a *polylogue* rather than by multiple dialogues which was the leading idea behind comparative philosophy so far. It will be necessary to philosophise systematically, but in new ways.

²For a critical discussion of the widespread equation of "philosophy" and "European philosophy" confer e. g.: Franz M. Wimmer: *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Theorie und Geschichte*. Wien: Passagen 1990

Thirdly I will outline what often is considered to be a solution to the dilemma between universalism and particularism: to negate universalism and to „let flourish hundreds of flowers“. I do not think that this kind of „ethnophilosophy" solves the problem.

In the *fourth* paragraph I shall outline some consequences for the historiography of philosophy as well as for systematic argumentations in this field.

(1) Is there an alternative to the One-Way History of Philosophy?

In a "strict sense", we have been told, philosophy is occidental. By way of cultural theory philosophical thinking has been distinguished from not-philosophical thinking. It may not always be stated explicitly, but it lures in the background when departments, conferences, book series or bibliographies in philosophy are planned. If there are descriptions of Chinese or Indian thinking to be found in general histories of philosophy at all, they regularly are restricted to antiquity - to thinkers who seem irrelevant to contemporary philosophy. On the other hand, one can read that (say) an Indian thinker of the 19th or 20th century is not an "Indian" philosopher because of his Western influence³ - but no one would imagine Heidegger not being a European philosopher, because of his reading of Lao Tze. The underlying assumption of such classifications seems to be the silent conviction that authentic and pure "cultures" will be lost under the impact of foreign influences. One wonders whether and how Occidentals are supposed to have lost a comparable authenticity.

In that situation non-occidental thinkers are at a mess: either they behave like occidental philosophers, in which case they are not considered *authentic representatives* of their respective cultures. Or they behave like their forefathers were supposed to behave, in which case they are not considered to be *true philosophers*, at least not in the sense that contemporary academic philosophers would feel bound to take their arguments seriously. From their point of view, one or the other behaviour can be judged positively or negatively - according to the degree of the desirability of global Westernization - but the picture of philosophy as purely and exclusively Occidental remains untouched. It does not make a big difference, whether one says that philosophy is a burden of Occidental culture (as Heidegger says), whether it is considered to be just one neutral characteristic of Occident (Rorty thinks so) or whether it is seen to be one of the great achievements of this culture (as most people seem to think) - it does not make much difference for non-occidental thinkers: they thereby are excluded from the history of philosophy, before their voices can even be heard.

Not only Occidentals think this way. The practice and teaching of philosophy at African, Indian, Japanese or Latin American departments show that a Eurocentric stance is quite globally agreed upon; that the pedigree of all of today's philosophers consists in a

³Cf. the discussion of this question by K. H. Potter: *Are all indian philosophers Indian Philosophers?* in: *Journal of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research*, Vol. 11, 1985, No. 2.

series of European names. Of course mention will be made that Confucianism influenced the period of Enlightenment, or Islamic metaphysics the medieval philosophy. But all this is considered to be important only with respect to the developing of a *unique tradition*: the Western.

We have to ask how historians of philosophy *should* behave under such circumstances.

Firstly, the preconditions and the functions of the delimitations against the foreign have to be analysed: the *barbarian*, the *exotic*, and the *pagan*.⁴ In other words: the discipline of philosophy has to reconstruct its own ideology, in order to establish an egalitarian basis of communication between philosophies from different parts of the world, a basis of polylogue communication.

Before we begin to do that, judgements about the philosophical thinking of humankind are premature. To establish a polylogue is easier to say than to do, because we will only succeed by presupposing that *all* traditions of thinking are epistemologically equivalent to every other. It is difficult to imagine how under such presuppositions philosophy can be done at all, but it is almost impossible to imagine how philosophical thought can be derived from all valuable traditions avoiding a polylogue.

There are at least some practical rules which foster this new concept of philosophy: not to publish books about or in Indian philosophy within series of „Indology“, and alike. Obviously philosophy in Japanese, Chinese, or Indian tradition is *philosophy* and *not* only of interest to ethnographers or readers in search of the "soul of Asia".

(2) Transcultural philosophy: the universalistic dream

Speaking about philosophy, we are confronted with a permanent dilemma: philosophers never can demonstrate what they conceptualise other than by concepts, formed by words in a certain language, a language that is tied to a cultural, social, historical context. Yet philosophers always at least pretend to speak in the name of reason, which means that their judgements are true for all people and forever. So the dilemmatic question is: how can we achieve transcultural, globally valid „insights“ or „truths“ if our perceptions of the world - and the means to express these - are particular (not to say „parochial“) out of necessity?

One way out of this dilemma, the one chosen by Hegel and Heidegger, is giving confidence to one language which then is said to be exceptional; another way is to construct a method (e.g. Descartes, Husserl or the Vienna Circle).

Hegel's use of the German verb „aufheben“ is an example for the first way. Hegel reminds us that „aufheben“ renders the significances of three Latin verbs, „conservare, negare, elevare“ - and he believed that the German language not only was different from Latin in this case, but that it actually grasped reality. Heidegger turned confidence into faith.

⁴These concepts are discussed in Wimmer 1990 (cf. note 2)

Nowadays, many sneer at such „atavistic“ behaviour, yet it is not easy to confront the problem.

With respect to the relation of his mother tongue *Akan* to *English*, his professional language, Kwasi Wiredu talks about the "Need of Conceptual Decolonization" since for a person whose mother tongue is Akan the meaning of words like "truth, reality, knowledge, self, person, space, time, life, matter, subjectivity" and many others is different from the meaning English native speakers ascribe to these terms. Consider Wiredu's proposal to that:

„Try to think them through in your own African language and, on the basis of the results, review the intelligibility of the associated problems or the plausibility of the apparent solutions that have tempted you when you have pondered them in some metropolitan language."⁵

I think that Wiredu is right, but his idea leads very far. To „decolonize" so many concepts by commenting and reviewing „metropolitan" languages with the means of very different languages will not be sufficient. It will be necessary to do the same job with respect to every language involved, which means that in the case of the terminology of philosophy „dehistorization" will be the consequence. In any case it remains necessary to *translate* the discoveries into new terminologies. Since the whole process of revision, criticism and translation of philosophical concepts and descriptions of problems requires understandable results, there must be some standardised terminology - such standards only can develop within a *tradition*. So the question is rather: can we criticise or analyse traditions without relying on or creating traditions at all? We can not.

There are two thinkable ways out of this dilemma. One way is, to search for a single method of reasoning that goes beyond every cultural conditioning. This was the way of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Husserl and the whole of Analytic Philosophy. However, neither in the past (nor likely in the future) any one method has convinced every thinker.

The second way out consists in cultivating ethnic particularities and calling that "philosophy". In such a case the problem of translation and interpretation will be reduced, and equally reduced will be the audience.

Raúl Fornet Betancourt has formulated the dilemmatic situation:

"Es cierto que hemos criticado explícitamente la universalidad filosófica europea u occidental; pero lo hemos hecho por lo poco que tiene de verdadera universalidad y por lo mucho que transpira de etnocentrismo europeo."⁶

The decisive question for philosophy is: who knows how about "la verdadera universalidad", about true universality? Without criteria to distinguish true from false universality, every criticism of "eurocentrism" or of anything similar will be little more than empty noise. The task here is at least threefold: to reflect on the culturality or regionality of

⁵Kwasi Wiredu: *The Need for Decolonization of Philosophy*, to be published in: Heinz Kimmerle und Franz M. Wimmer (eds.): *Studies in Intercultural Philosophy*, vol. 3, Amsterdam: Rodopi (forthcoming 1995)

⁶Raúl Fornet Betancourt: *Filosofía intercultural*. México: Pontificia Universidad de México 1994, p. 97.

every kind of thinking on every level; to search for universally valid arguments and concepts; and to do justice to the respective regional philosophic traditions.

(3) Is "ethnophilosophy" the way out, or is it a dead end?

In a description of the philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder, written in the period of German fascism in the heydays of nationalism, the proposition can be found: "*language nationalises knowledge.*"⁷ Such a proposition easily serves as a programme for the numerous trials to reject the dream of universally valid knowledge and to express instead of it national, regional, specific feelings or *weltanschauungen*. Quite often such an attempt is linked to emancipatory political or ideological movements. Intellectuals of formerly colonised countries argue against the predomination of the colonising culture. More generally this tendency is growing also in Europe itself as a result of regionalist and nationalistic movements. A "Russian soul" as well as a "Croat philosophy" can be found in texts from the past couple of years.

At first glance, the intention behind such a way of thinking seems to be emancipatory: it is a reaction against academic and cultural centres which set the standards of knowledge and thinking, and imposed them on the periphery. In that process bilateral communication between „centre“ and „periphery“ is virtually absent. Ethnophilosophers therefore argue that it has always been erroneous from the side of occidental philosophers to pretend that their philosophy is valid and representative for all humans - or even for *reason* itself. In fact occidental philosophers expressed the thoughts of *their own* class or their cultural tradition.

If this is true - why should we not recognise the right of every cultural tradition to express their own thoughts, and to call these expressions *one's own philosophy*? Why, after all, should different philosophies be in competition with each other in an objectivistic way? They could as well be on equal terms with each other. This concept of philosophy would lead to a situation where there are „one hundred flowers" flourishing, different from each other in perhaps every respect, which looks like an ideal in an era of post-modernism.

Yet, this view remains somewhat suspicious - since the project of argumentation itself, the fundamental prerequisite in any theoretical practice, is put into question. If particularity and separateness of culturally bound ways of thinking are true, there is no distinction between *convincing* and *manipulating*, between *logic* and *rhetoric*. Of course this in itself is no argument. What we need to reflect upon is the possibility of philosophical argumentation itself. Let me illustrate this by some discussions in contemporary African philosophy about ethnophilosophy.

„Ethnophilosophy" in African context often has been discussed in relation to the famous book on *Bantu Philosophy* of the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels.⁸ The most

⁷"Sprache nationalisiert Erkenntnis": Benno von Wiese: *Herder*. In: Theodor Haering (ed.): *Das Deutsche in der deutschen Philosophie*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2. Aufl. 1942.

⁸Hountondji wrote in 1969: "This Belgian missionary's *Bantu Philosophy* still passes today, in the eyes of

characteristic items which have been criticised in Tempels' approach are: that thinking in African traditional cultures always had been *implicit*, *anonymous* and *unchangeable*. This would be an ethnological point of view. There has been a vivid discussion about Tempels' stance (which was practised by Africans as well as by non-Africans) within Africa, especially after the period of decolonization. Tshiamalenga Ntumba summarised the discussions about this topic. He lists the following to be implicit or explicit concepts that shape Tempels' description of „Bantu philosophy“:

1) There is a traditional philosophy of the Bantu people.

2) This philosophy is an ontology in the strict sense.

3) The central concept in Bantu ontology is a concept of force rather than of essence, as compared with occidental ontology.

4) Bantu philosophy cannot express itself explicitly, but is rather an unconscious and hidden layer structuring Bantu languages and institutions. Occidental concepts are necessary and apt to make this implicit thinking explicit.

5) Bantu ontology belongs not only to the Baluba - whom Tempels was living with - but to all Bantu, even to all "primitive" men.⁹

Although there have been controversies about all of these points, the most interesting point remains number 4. Especially in the years following political decolonization academic philosophy became institutionalised in many African universities.¹⁰ There it permanently remained a central topic whether or not one only can say that there are philosophers in Africa today (which is of course a triviality, although the function of this discipline in modern African societies ought to be questioned), and even more so, whether there is a traditional philosophical thinking which is distinctively African - and which perhaps is influential up to now. A bundle of questions arise: what are the characteristics of such an African philosophy supposed to be? Is there some unity across the many languages and traditions of the continent? Whether and how can such traditions be reconstructed, and so on.

Those who think that there is „African philosophy" and not only „philosophy in Africa" have tried to answer the question in different ways.¹¹ Historically, the question has been discussed long before Tempels' book was published after World War 2.

One of the most influential settings of these pre-tempelsian approaches came to be known by the name of the „négritude"-movement, a term that was coined by the poet Aimé

some, for a classic of 'African philosophy'. In fact, it is an ethnological work with philosophical pretensions, or more simply, if I may coin the word, a work of 'ethnophilosophy'. "Quoted from: Hountondji, Paulin J.: *African Philosophy. Myth and reality*, London: Hutchinson 1983, p. 34.

⁹Tempels, Placide: *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine (1959). The book had been published first in French in 1945. Tshiamalenga, Ntumba: "Die Philosophie in der aktuellen Situation Afrikas". in: *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, vol. 33, 3 (1979) pp. 428-443

¹⁰Cf. Bodunrin, Peter O.: "Philosophy in Africa - the Challenge of Relevance and Commitment". in: Nagl-Docekal, Herta; Wimmer, Franz Martin: (eds.): *Postkoloniales Philosophieren: Afrika*. Wien: Oldenbourg (1992) pp. 15-39.

¹¹Six "ethnophilosophical" approaches are distinguished by Hoffmann, Gerd-Rüdiger; Neugebauer, Christian: "Ethnophilosophie = afrikanische Philosophie? Bemerkungen wider den Zeitgeist". in: Hountondji, Paulin J.: *Afrikanische Philosophie. Mythos und Realität*. Berlin: Dietz (1993) pp. 219-240.

Césaire, and which gained publicity especially by the writings of Léopold Sedar Senghor, the president of Senegal. Senghor repeatedly tried to express his view that „négritude" can be characterised by a different form of reason compared to „francité", „arabité" and the like. Taking René Descartes as one of the most outstanding representatives of „francité", Senghor argued that the characteristic of Cartesian philosophy is a distant, an objective relation of the thinking subject to reality. This *visual reason* is distinguishing between subject and object, and it analyzes the realm of objects in a sober and calculating way, which according to Senghor is the characteristic of the French or, more generally, the Occidentals.¹²

This sort of objective reason is seen to be superior to any other in some areas of human activities, especially in the sciences and in technology. On the other hand, if practised exclusively, it reduces the possibilities of human emotionality and social life. Therefore, the complementary to the *visual reason*, called *embracing reason* by Senghor, is not an inferior form of reason, but one which is equally necessary - and is represented by „the negroe".

The „négritude"-movement produced beautiful texts, poems and imaginations. But there remained objections against this kind of role ascription to Africans within humankind. Opponents, such as Marcien Towa from Ghana and Paulin J. Hountondji from Benin, put it this way: „négritude" as an expression of an ethnophilosophy creates a sort of *illusionary consciousness* with respect to one's own cultural identity, thought to be totally different, and is therefore part of the ideology of neo-colonialism.¹³

Not only this kind of metaphysical ethnophilosophy, represented by the „négritude", was criticised. If, for example, a so-called „philosophy" of a people, a nation, a culture, is distilled out of institutions and linguistic structures, even from myths and sayings, one certainly ought to ask about the philosophical relevance of such findings. Who can learn what from it? At least in the context of African discussion, such work usually is done by using interpretative concepts from one or the other occidental tradition. People show an emancipatory interest, if they document the sayings and tales of their tradition or reflect on the history and the structures of their language - Europeans have done so in the period of beginning nationalism during the late 18th and in the 19th century. But: do these collections of sayings, of tales and myths, these analyses of linguistic patterns and structures provide any arguments in philosophic matters? Can we ever expect to get arguments in favour or against Kantian concepts of time (or of moral duties) by reading Grimm's tales? It sounds no less absurd to me when I hear that Kant's theory of the categorical imperative is proved to be invalid by some Gikuyu sayings. What we do not learn from Gikuyu - or Tyrolian or whatever - sayings is the one thing which we ought to know: what exactly are the criteria, the methods, the proofs and where can they be found, which could entitle us to say that a proposition is true or false? The proverbs may have

¹²Senghor, Léopold Sédar: *The Foundations of "Africanité" or "Négritude" and "Arabité"* Paris: Presence Africaine (1971)

Senghor, Léopold Sédar: "L'esprit de la civilisation ou les lois de la culture négro-africaine". in: *Premiers Jalons pour une politique de la culture*. Paris: Présence Africaine (1968) pp.11 - 25.

Senghor, Léopold Sédar: "Pourquoi une idéologie négro-africaine?". in: *Présence Africaine*, vol. 82, (1972) pp. 11–38.

¹³Cf. Marcien Towa: *Essai sur la problématique philosophique dans l'Afrique actuelle*, Yaoundé: Editions Clé, 1971, and Paulin J.Hountondji: *African Philosophy - Myth and Reality*, London: Hutchinson, 1983

taught us to be cautious, they do not teach us the way to obtain knowledge. A proverb never "refutes" any (philosophical or other) argumentation, as the majority of ethnophilosophers seems to think, who are confident to their respective authorities (race, language, "authentic thinking" or whatelse).

Kwasi Wiredu once stressed the simple fact that every people is an "ethnos" and could therefore develop its own ethnophilosophy. Yet, Wiredu says, "A reference to British philosophy is unlikely to be interpreted as alluding to the communal *weltanschauung* of, say, British rural communities."¹⁴ Why should we expect anything different from rural communities in Ghana, or Kenya, than in Britain, or Austria?

There is a dilemma with every sort of ethnophilosophy. On the one hand it is justified to draw attention to traditions neglected and ignored so far, by the mere fact that occidental historiography, in philosophy and elsewhere, is parochial. On the other hand, such emancipatory projects regularly take their ground on occidental concepts and methods of analysis. So the impression one gets is at least twofold: that there is "the" Occident, which did injustice to all other traditions - and yet occidental conceptualisations are not only adequate but necessary for the interpretation of any tradition of thought.

Although the subject of ethnophilosophy seems to be predominant in contemporary African discussion, the phenomenon of ethnophilosophy is by no means restricted to that region, but includes Latin America, Asia, and even Europe. Characteristically no branch of ethnophilosophy accepts the idea of a transculturally authoritative philosophy. Further, there is a typically restricted set of authors and positions to be criticised, most prominent among them Hegel. Discussions about the need to criticise eurocentric pretensions to universalism rarely fail to quote Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history, for instance his statement that there had been nothing of importance in American history so far, except an echoing of Europe. Similar - or even worse statements - we find in Hegel's lectures when he is dealing with African matters.

Accordingly, among ethnophilosophers Hegel is labelled (together with Lévy-Brühl and others) as a leading ideologist of imperialism.¹⁵ I think I'm not overemphasising the role of individual thinkers, if I try to go a little bit deeper into the case of Hegel here.

Firstly it has to be acknowledged that Hegel only explicitly stated what most academic philosophers until this day implicitly presuppose and practice: that there is exactly *one* history of mankind and of reason, and that this history *necessarily* has led to the present state.

Secondly we can detect silent, but rather unambiguous convictions about the virtues and vices, the advantages and shortcomings of different traditions and languages with respect to philosophy. To exclude Spanish as an official language from a World Congress of Philosophy means to take sides with Hegel's opinions. But Hegel at least tried to argue for what he did.

¹⁴Wiredu, Kwasi: How not to compare African traditional thought with Western thought. in: *Philosophy and an African culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1980, p. 37.

¹⁵Cf. Dieng, Amady Aly: *Hegel, Marx, Engels et les Problèmes de l'Afrique Noire*, Sankoré

Thirdly the protest against a Hegelian view on history and on history of philosophy, does not necessarily lead to a fundamentally different view. For instance, African authors tried to show that it was not true that Africa was of no historical importance, before the period of Westernization. They did so by showing that Greek philosophy and science had been imported from Egypt, viz. from Africa. Anta Diop or Mubabinge Bilolo depict Aristotle as a pupil of African philosophers, a view that is rather uncomfortable to Europeans.¹⁶ Yet, in doing so, Diop and Bilolo - consciously or unconsciously - create a new and so far unacknowledged history of humankind which centers on Africa, a concept that is not so far away from Hegel's ideas – with the minor exception that the place, the content and the form of this unique history are perceived differently.

One has to be serious in this question. Hegel was not unique in his efforts to conceptualise all the facts known from history and to dovetail them into one great scheme. Marx did the same, and so did Burke, Spengler, Toynbee, Jaspers, to mention only a few from the long list of Europeans who tried to depict and explain the long and erratic ways of human beings from its beginnings to its present state. Why these authors have done so, is one question. It is the question about who is interested, and why, to have a complete explanatory framework for all known facts of history. Another question is how one can possibly avoid to be parochial with this kind of problem.

The ethnophilosopher tells us that there is simply no need to quarrel about the Hegel-Project. The nucleus of the project can be seen in the conviction that there has been a unique set of basic questions, all founded in Greek philosophy, and that therefore Greece is not just another culture, just another way of thinking, but the *paradigmatic* culture of humankind.

Perhaps the ethnophilosopher may tell us that there are many - or at least several - "Greeces". In fact, José Martí about hundred years ago wrote: "Nuestra Grecia es preferible a la Grecia que no es nuestra."¹⁷ *His* Greece (the Aztecan culture) must not be *my* Greece, and vice versa. According to Martí there is not *one Greece* for all peoples. According to Hegel, there is. And if there is one Greece, it is not trivial, but remains startling. In Hegel's understanding, Martí's statement can only be described as naive.

Not only Hegel thinks his way out of that. One author who really worked to get the point clear, was Edmund Husserl. In his lectures on "The Crisis of European Science" and in many other texts Husserl does not use a colonialistic shortcut in his argumentation for the statement that there is only one culture which did produce more than just a cultural "Typus" - the question is essential for him in his search for a sound philosophy.

Could Hegel and Husserl be right? Could Martí and Diop be right? Who is entitled to judge, and according to what criteria?

¹⁶Cf. Bilolo, Mubabinge: "Die klassische ägyptische Philosophie. Ein Überblick", in: Neugebauer, Christian (ed.): *Philosophie, Ideologie und Gesellschaft in Afrika: Wien 1989*, Frankfurt/M.: Lang (1991), pp. 199-212.

¹⁷José Martí: *Nuestra América*, In: *Obras Completas*, vol. 6, La Habana 1975, p. 18.

What is at stake here? The question is no more and no less whether philosophy in its traditional (occidental) understanding is possible or not. This understanding primarily means that certain judgements can be searched for, which will become evident by purely reasoned arguments. If this is not the case the intention of occidental philosophy always has been illusionary, and whenever people believed in the possibility of that project they betrayed themselves. If it is not illusionary, to renounce the engagement to find the right way implies a serious loss.

Who is to judge? There is no extraterrestrial, no extracultural intelligence whom we could expect to come and to decide between the Hegel-Project and the Martí-Project. We will have to use our own minds again. We will have to continue using different languages to find and to express our ideas. All of these languages will have particularities, none will be completely adequate to what we are trying to think and to express. The game of differentiation and of definition will go on. We will never have the certainty that any of our expressions really hit the point, because as philosophers we will never have other means than our words to show what we mean, and all of these words will be rooted in certain, very particular cultural settings and experiences.

But: we do not necessarily have to look for the one and unique *Greece* only in the past. It could yet be to come. To philosophise in an intercultural orientation means to be aware of the multitude and the diversity of the many cultures of humankind. At the same time it helps our argumentation, not to recede in relativism. Such ways probably will turn out not to be pathed only by occidental thinkers of the past, they will be found in cooperation rather than separation.

(4) Consequences

a) The first consequence considering the situation of a globalised humankind with basically different regional ways of thinking consists in a (self-)critical evaluation of philosophy as a profession. We have to acknowledge that any professional training of philosophers, that equates the general term "philosophy" with the culturally bound term "occidental philosophy" is misleading. This equation has been the normal case with almost all professional philosophers, at least in the West, for a long period. This will be no easy task, since a necessary precondition for it - by far not a sufficient one - Euro-centrism has to be criticised and developed into a general criticism of centristic ways of thinking, and moulded into a theory of non-centristic philosophy.

b) The relevance of cultural traditions for the present and the future has to be analysed. The first step again will be to reconstruct different traditions of thought in a comprehensive and differentiated way. In that field, contemporary African philosophers did pioneering work. However, if their work is not limited to provide better self-understanding, but to lead to better understanding between persons of different cultural coinage, new categories and

concepts must be elaborated. This will be a continuation of the project of European enlightenment with different means: not by relying on a unique method of science, but by creating a polylogue of traditions.

We have to consider the preconditions and the limitations, as well as expectable results of such a polylogue. Different grades and forms of the influence of one or more traditions upon other traditions have to be distinguished. For the purpose of an illustration, let us take the case of, say, four relevant traditions: A, B, C, D.¹⁸ Between all of these traditions there might be unilateral () or bilateral () influences. Under these conditions we can formally distinguish the following models:

(1) *Unilateral centristic influence:*

A B and A C and A D

In this case, it is logically possible (but not expectable in real life) that there are no dialogues (and of course there is no polylogue) between A, B, C, and D. Every tradition with the exception of A is considered to be barbarian¹⁹ i.e. that B, C, and D have to be changed and eliminated by some means, in order to be finally overcome. The task is the extension of A and the elimination of B, C, and D. The idea behind that concept is expressed in terms like "civilisation", "westernisation", "cultural imperialism", or "Euro-centrism". It should be noted that in this model B, C, and D are *ignoring* each other.

(2) *Unilateral and transitive influence:*

A B and A C and A D and B C

In this stage, no dialogues are necessary, although by the double sided influence of C (by A and by B) comparative descriptions between A and B become possible. For the tradition A in this case every other tradition remains barbarian; B ignores D, C also ignores D. But B imitates A and therefore "civilises" C with concepts partly derived from A.

(3) *Partially bilateral influence: the period of dialogues*

There are many logically possible stages from

A B and A C and A D

via

A B and A C and A D and B C

up to

A B and A C and B C and B D and C D and A D

Between each of these models several stages can be distinguished. We can skip listing all of them. Partly bilateral influences are processes of selective acculturation. For tradition A some other traditions are not barbarian any longer, but *exotic*. The same holds for B, C, and D in an increasing manner, but mutual influencing is never complete. The stage

¹⁸It is not at all evident in a given discussion that there will be unanimous agreement about what "A,B,C,D" means, nor about what traditions are relevant. However, I only want to consider the formal side of the question.

¹⁹The terms "barbarian" and "exotic", used here, are introduced in Franz Wimmer: *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Theorie und Geschichte*, Wien: Passagen 1990.

symbolised in the last line represents a polylogue between all relevant traditions with the partial exclusion of D. In that situation, comparative philosophy is firmly established.

(4) *Complete bilateral influence: the period of polylogues*

A B and A C and A D and B C and B D and C D

For every tradition any different is exotic: the consequent form of a polylogue, and of intercultural philosophy is achieved.

We have to ask whether philosophy is possible under the conditions of a polylogue. The question can perhaps be answered by analysing processes from the (European) history of ideas, something I do not want to do here.

c) For the present, when describing and explaining the history of philosophy, we have to avoid the picture of one continuum. We rather will establish the concept of *concert continua*, existing relatively independent from each other. If we begin with periodisations, classifications, and interpretative concepts relying exclusively on one of many cultures, we have no evidence whatsoever that entitles us to imagine humankind as thinking solely along one, unique way. The evidence of divergent cultural traditions therefore openly contradicts Western theories, which try to establish a concept of a 'unique philosophy' as valid (and superior) to all other ways of thought, living, or culture.

There are two ways leading to a new view of history of philosophy: first, we can analyse the inconsistency of the western picture of a continuum (as it was sketched in the historiographic tradition of modern times) and second, we can apply different categories and concepts from non-occidental traditions to obtain a new history of philosophy. I want to sketch both points shortly.

Firstly: when reading different descriptions of Kant's thought and contributions to philosophy, it becomes doubtful whether "Kant" is a proper name at all. Let us consider four books describing "Kant". Bertrand Russell in his "History of Western Philosophy" describes an important and influential epistemologist whose main achievement is the "Critique of Pure Reason". The pre critical works lead towards it, whilst Kant's late writings should not be taken too seriously. In the "History of Philosophy" written by a group of scholars from the Soviet Academy of Science we meet a different person: their "Kant" was an important methodologist of science before he got entangled in the contradictions of reality and experience, free will and determination, thereby reflecting the contradictions of a bourgeois thinker in a feudal state. Later on, this "Kant" degenerated into metaphysical questions. Still another "Kant" can be found in Hinrich Knittermeyer's article in "Das Deutsche in der deutschen Philosophie": in Knittermeyer's view "Kant", being a German, simply had to go to the extremes everywhere, and therefore he necessarily had to accomplish the criticism of reason. Later, "Kant" recovered from foreign formalism and wrote his main work: the "Critique of Judgement". With "Kant's" last writings his philosophy was at its best. The last "Kant" under consideration is found in Frederick Copleston's "A History of Philosophy": Copleston again centers on the "Critique of Pure

Reason", but his "Kant's" main achievement is not epistemology, but metaphysics, although in a restricted sense. "Kant" as a metaphysician ignored the right traditions and so ran into contradictions (which the Jesuit describes very similar to the Soviet Academy).

So, every historian of philosophy tells his own story. There is not *one* story of the philosophy of Kant, and even less there is *one* story of Occidental philosophy. Relativity of viewpoints is the first lesson we learn by reading the stories of philosophy.

The second example will show what happens if we apply non-occidental categories to the history of philosophy.

It is common in the Western tradition of the historiography of philosophy to dichotomise, e. g., "materialism vs. idealism", "rationalism vs. empirism", "theory vs. practice" and so on. The motive - though not the argument - for such dichotomies may lie in the fact that in Occidental discussions there is a deep-rooted agreement about possible sources of knowledge, the candidates being two: either the senses or reason (or some combination of the two). Indian philosophers differentiated *six* sources of possible knowledge. The historian of philosophy is in no position to decide which tradition is right. It rather is his duty to describe and to explain philosophically relevant traditions and thoughts as fairly and as differentiated as possible. In this respect, dichotomic classifications can be heuristically deficient. Therefore, innovative forms and contents of periodisation, classification and interpretation can only be expected from a co-operation of scholars with different cultural backgrounds, bringing their views together on a par.

d) Practices of argumentation with respect to systematic questions of philosophy have to be developed, which are bound to cultural frameworks as little as possible. What does that mean?

Take the case of a discussion between representatives of different cultural traditions on the question of "humanity", a central issue with respect to human rights. Philosophers try to find arguments which favour their conception of human rights. They ought to be ready and sufficiently informed, to explicate and to evaluate not only the connotations of such words as "humanum" or "Menschheit", but also of "muntu" in the Bantoo or "ren" in the Chinese language, as well as other relevant concepts. From dia-logues (intending mutual understanding) poly-logues need to be developed, intending mutual convincing on a basis of commonly agreeable ideas. We can expect that ideas expressed in such sorts of polylogues will be linguistically and culturally mixed (although this is not necessarily the case).

(5) Conclusion

Philosophers always wanted to consider ontological, epistemological, and ethical questions relatively independent from their own cultural and religious environment. The specific problem of contemporary philosophy arises out of a situation where *one* of the

cultural settings of the past has been more successful than others in establishing itself on a global scale - as being non-traditional but rather a "scientific" enterprise.

Obviously it is the clandestine claim of philosophers to arrive at judgements which are transculturally valid. Even if that claim is illusionary, philosophers nevertheless tried to achieve this goal. This road has been taken in many different ways in the past. In the present situation, intercultural reorientation of philosophy becomes a necessity that arises from the situation itself. It is not a choice but a need.

However, there seem to be two alternatives.

There is the Cartesian program of method without reliance to tradition. This is the consequent alternative to ethnocentric and traditional thinking, but it is not feasible. It was not feasible in its Cartesian form, nor in the form it took in phenomenology or the Analytic philosophy. Every effort to philosophise in an exclusively methodological manner is lead by criteria and concepts rooted in a cultural context.

There is a second alternative which seemingly is less rigid. It consists in the confidence to one's own position within the *classical* tradition. One's own way of thinking, terminology and methods of argumentation seem reliable in this view. However, this is nothing more than ethnophilosophy, even if it is explicit, differentiated, and well documented.²⁰

We can resume the program of philosophy in an intercultural orientation in two points. Firstly, there has to be created a fresh view on the history of philosophy, and secondly, there is a need for a polylogue in every systematic question of philosophy.

Is there a third way, a real alternative to Eurocentrism and the separatism of ethnophilosophy? I think there is such an alternative: it consists in a procedure, which is no longer merely comparative, or „dia-logical“, but rather „polylogical“. Questions of philosophy - questions concerning the fundamental structures of reality, the knowledgeability, the validity of norms - have to be discussed in such a way that a solution is not propagated unless a polylogue between as many traditions as possible has taken place. This presupposes the relativity of concepts and methods, and it implies a non-centric view to the history of human thinking. At the very beginning there can be formulated a negative rule: *never accept a philosophical thesis from authors of a single cultural tradition to be well founded.*

²⁰Once again, we read in the proceedings of the Heidegger-Gesellschaft. Manfred Riedel there states that the central point is given a „Bedenken des Wesentlichen, das die Sprachgeschichte zuspield“ (l.c., p. 52). It is obvious that he is referring to the German language and its history, but not to any language and to the histories of all human languages.