

On comparative philosophy

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Comparative philosophy is one of the emerging fields in philosophy in the Philippines nowadays not only in terms of scholars' preference but also because it has been included as one of the major courses by the Commission on Higher Education in the philosophy curriculum. What is comparative philosophy? This itself is a philosophical question, a difficult one, which causes much excitement and disagreement within the academy and beyond.

Comparative philosophy is an approach that allows us to look at philosophy in a different light. The area of study, however, needs clarification of the underlying assumption as to whether comparative philosophy should be treated as a systematic approach where philosophies are compared on the one hand, or using philosophy as a method to compare on the other hand. Questions like: 'How did the Western philosophers ask questions compared to the Eastern philosophers?', 'How are the questions raised by the Western philosophers different from the questions raised by the Eastern philosophers?', and 'Is there really a point in comparing apples and oranges?' presuppose metatheoretical assumptions that are helpful in laying down the foundations and setting the direction of a comparative philosophical inquiry. This is a relatively new area of study

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for the Western mainstream philosophers and even for Western-oriented philosophy scholars across the globe.

When we consider comparative philosophy as a systematic approach in which philosophies are compared, we simply compare philosophies beyond national colours. Claiming a comparison between Eastern and Western philosophies is problematic because philosophy is fundamentally Western. Obviously, German thoughts and Filipino thoughts are structurally different so that there is really no point in comparing apples and oranges. If the attempt is to appraise the common ground or similarities, then comparison must be focused on particular philosophies. For example, we compare Paulo Freire's notion of the 'new man' with that of Rajneesh Osho rather than comparing 'Brazilian philosophy' and 'Indian philosophy', because Freire's philosophy is not Brazilian philosophy and Osho's philosophy is not Indian philosophy. Why is this so? Because 'philosophy' is fundamentally Greek. It is the Greeks who described and defined such a system of thought.

There are philosophies in Germany as there are philosophies in the Philippines. But a philosophy in Germany or in the Philippines cannot be properly identified as German philosophy or Filipino philosophy respectively. There is no such thing as German philosophy or Filipino philosophy, only a German or a Filipino doing philosophy. Philosophy should be understood as an activity non-referent to nationality. It is not a citizen-based body of doctrine.

One could ask: If the western philosophers have problematised "being", what was the focus of the eastern thinkers' philosophical problematisation (if there is one)? Put another way: Are there eastern counterparts to the western cosmocentric/logocentric ancient period, theocentric mediæval period, anthropocentric modern period, and linguacentric contemporary period? The western philosophical epochs may serve as templates in the process of establishing a historical comparison of independent philosophical development.

In addition, we may as well contrast different systems of thought, namely *philosophy* (of Greek origin), *tetsugaku* (of Japanese origin), *zhexue* (of Chinese origin), *cheolhak* (of Korean origin), and

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batnayan (of Filipino origin) to determine the points of convergence without necessarily depending on Western light if possible. What is certain is that, first, these systems of thought are geared toward the formulation of meta-theories (theories of theories). For example, the political scientist studies politics to come up with political theory or a *theory of politics*, while the political philosopher studies political theory to come up with a *theory of the theory of politics*. Second, these systems of thought are scientific. They are scientific because they employ a systematic approach. By science, I herein refer to *speculative science* (where questions are more important than answers and in which the focus is on the growth of wisdom) and not *positive science* (where answers are more important than questions and in which the focus is on the growth of knowledge).