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Published online: 06 Dec 2019.

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ABSTRACT

The article opens with a discussion of recent theoretical and methodological innovations in the field of comparative philosophy. In this regard, I propose and explain a new possible method of contrasting particular aspects of divergent philosophical texts or discourses and denote it as a 'philosophy of sublation'. Then, the paper provides a concrete example for such a post-comparative method of reasoning, I will try to apply a 'sublation philosophy' approach for a reinterpretation of certain aspects of the complex philosophical intersections between modern Japanese and Chinese philosophies through the lens of a contrastive analysis of Nishida Kitarō's and Mou Zongsan's dialectical thought. In this way, I hope to shed some new light upon some general questions regarding different models of dialectics.

1. Post-comparative philosophy: from *fusion philosophy to the philosophy of sublation*

In recent years, the theoretical foundations of comparative philosophy have been subjected to many fruitful and interesting debates. Some researchers (e.g. Ouyang, 2018, p. 244) believe that, technically, any philosophy is comparative, because 'comparison in general is a basic function/apparatus of critical thinking, which characterises philosophy' (Ouyang, 2018, p. 244). It is unquestionably true that contrasting different concepts or ideas, categories, and patterns or models of reasoning by distinguishing between and associating them, belongs to the basic features of any reasoning. This implies that not only philosophy, but also the entire system of thinking as such is based upon contrasting objects and forms.

However, one certainly also has to be aware that comparison is a much more complex cognitive method that goes beyond simple contrastive procedures and exceeds them. Therefore, the notion of 'comparative philosophy' is neither tautological, nor redundant (Li, 2016, p. 534).

Yet, recent controversies that arose in the field of intercultural philosophy[1] have plainly shown that the concept of comparison as such is likewise rather difficult. More precisely,

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these debates have clearly pointed out that the very process of comparing different philosophies as such is unavoidably linked to numerous methodological problems, which have hitherto not been comprehensively analysed and are therefore still far from being truly solved. Comparative philosophy in general brings about many tricky issues, but these issues become much more complex in the field of intercultural philosophical comparisons, i.e. when we are comparing philosophies belonging to different linguistic and cultural traditions. As Rafal Bańka reveals (2016, p. 605), intercultural comparative philosophy needs a different methodological approach than other comparative methods that are working in the scope of a single philosophical tradition. The former is primarily and necessarily concerned with problems of possible conceptual and heuristic (in)commensurabilities, because it has to establish a unifying discourse supervening on them. He also points out that even though such comparative philosophies create spaces where different philosophical traditions can be encapsulated in one philosophical language, they necessarily still treat the material they work on as culturally discrete (Bańka, 2016, p. 605).

However, the issue is even more complicated, and the problem addressed above goes even further, particularly when comparing East Asian and Euro-American philosophies. It is not only connected to the fact that we have a 'unifying methodology built on culturally discrete materials' (Bańka, 2016, p. 605). The core problem is that the methodology in question is almost always a system underlying one of the philosophies under comparison, and due to the prevailing historical, social and political aspects of the global relations this 'unifying methodology' is usually the Western one. The methodology that has been developed in the course of the Euro-American philosophical tradition widely serves as the standard methodology for any philosophical inquiry. There is usually no third, 'objective' methodology. Analogously, the same holds true for the abovementioned 'one philosophical language' (Bańka, 2016, p. 605). All this necessarily leads to the unfortunate fact that even in the so-called globalised era, all intercultural philosophical comparisons are still grounded on the 'now well-known but still persisting (political) reality of overall Western-centric academics' (Coquereau, 2016, p. 152). Precisely because of the awareness of these underlying biased standards, any coherent and consistent philosophical comparison cannot remain limited to the method of paralleling and describing differences and commonalities of various abstract entities. In this sense, intercultural comparative philosophy is certainly more than just 'the erecting, detecting, smudging, and tearing down of borders' (Chakrabarti & Weber, 2016, p. 2) between different philosophical traditions. Since these traditions were shaped in 'different parts of the world, different time periods, different disciplinary affiliations', such philosophical comparisons have to 'separate and connect at the same time what are very likely or unlikely pairs of, or entire sets of, comparanda (that which we set out to compare)' (Chakrabarti & Weber, 2016, p. 2). As already mentioned, these questions go far beyond simple divisions and linkages. Any comparative discourse or procedure which aims to provide new knowledge must also include interpretations and evaluations, and hence judgements. In intercultural comparisons, these evaluations are necessarily linked to the abovementioned problems of Western-centric methodology and its axiological presumptions. In their Introduction to the important book *Comparative Philosophy without Borders*, the editors Arindam Chakrabarti and Ralph Weber also repeatedly warn against the relatively common supposition of comparative philosophy as a discourse, which establishes fruitful interrelations and dialogues between different traditions. It certainly holds true that such assumptions

are not only idealist, but also superficial. Ideas, arising from such grounds, may therefore not provide us with any 'magic formula to which all comparison could be reduced' (Chakrabarti & Weber, 2016, p. 2).

Based on reflections and analyses of such conceptual and axiological questions, Chakrabarti and Weber propose the idea of 'fusion philosophy' (Chakrabarti & Weber, 2016, p. 6) that could, in their view, function as an innovative method of transforming traditional comparative philosophy by surpassing its limitations and fixing its inconsistencies. 'Fusion philosophy' refers to cross-cultural philosophising rather than doing merely comparative philosophy. In other words, it means 'philosophically comparing' rather than merely 'comparing philosophies'. This thought-provoking idea was a result of a self-critical account of comparative philosophy that has been long overdue. Chakrabarti and Weber's argumentation provides us with a sound and ambitious definition for the future of such a new model of cross-cultural philosophies (Coquereau, 2016, p. 152).

Nevertheless, in my view, the concept of 'fusion' seems to be a somewhat unfortunate terminological choice, for it denotes the result of a process in which two or more entities have been joined together, forming a single new entity.[2] Moreover, it is often associated with the process of melting, which normally results in a unity in which particular elements of the two or more entities that have been melted (or fused together), become completely unrecognisable and are essentially alienated from their previous forms and contents. The integrated unity, which arises through a fusion, is, of course, a qualitatively new substance, but, on the other hand, it does not include any external and utterly different elements that were not—in one form or another—already included in at least one of the amalgamated entities. If we thus consider fusion as a metaphor for a particular method of philosophical reasoning, then we have to admit that genuine philosophising as a creative process can hardly arise from amalgamated unities of distorted elements. Instead, it has to be shaped upon consideration of discrete, previously existing philosophical grounds on the one side, and enriched by separate new understandings on the other. Only on such foundations can new philosophical insights simultaneously bring about new cognitive substances.

Proceeding from such reflections, we might consider denoting this new methodological transformation with the term 'synthesis philosophy'. Synthesis also implies a qualitatively new stage of development, and one in which some elements of the two or more entities from which it arises are preserved, while others discarded. Yet, especially in philosophy, the term synthesis is often overburdened with the orthodox Hegelian view, in which synthesis is normally a result of two reciprocally excluding and mutually contradictive entities, while comparisons can include both distinctions and commonalities of the compranda. An additional (and perhaps even more severe) problem arises when we consider the mechanistic nature of such dialectical processes, which seem to develop through and by themselves and to proceed more or less automatically from one stage to the next. As such, a 'synthesis philosophy' would probably likewise mostly be seen as something that fails to provide space for genuinely new conceptions created by individual minds.

We might thus consider replacing it with the notion of a 'philosophy of sublation'. Even though the term 'sublation' also represents part of the Hegelian lines of thought and could therefore also be seen as problematic, it is still much less of an issue. Besides, 'sublation' also includes all three connotations that are of crucial importance in any process in which something new arises from interactions between two or more existing entities. In this philosophical sense, 'sublation' refers to the three notions of arising,

eliminating and preserving. Besides, in contrast to 'synthesis', the notion of 'sublation' refers to a process rather than a stage. If we consider the original meaning of the word sublation, which is applied as a *terminus technicus* in the field of chemistry, where it means a technique of adsorbing material to be separated on the surface of an immiscible liquid (mostly in the form of gas bubbles), it could truly serve as a good metaphor for such 'cross-cultural philosophising'. Considering this later (or original) sense of this term, 'sublation philosophy' actually means the exact opposite of 'fusion philosophy'. For of all these reasons, I believe 'sublation philosophy' could better and more precisely denote new forms of cross-cultural philosophising than the term 'fusion philosophy', as proposed by Chakrabarti and Weber. However, as already mentioned, this is probably only a question of nomenclature.[3] In spite of the importance of precise terminology, what ultimately counts is nevertheless the actuality rather than its name, the content rather than its label.

In order to provide a concrete example for such a post-comparative method of reasoning, I will try to apply a 'sublation philosophy' approach for a reinterpretation of certain aspects of the complex philosophical intersections between modern Japanese and Chinese philosophies through the lens of a contrastive analysis of Nishida Kitarō's and Mou Zongsan's dialectical thought. In this way, I hope to shed some new light upon some general questions regarding different models of dialectics. Even though much has already been revealed about the methodological grounds of these systems, such a cross-cultural perspective may offer us a new angle from which their general structure can be perceived in an innovative way.

2. Frameworks of reference

Let us begin with delineating the substantial features of different dialectical models. Because every philosophical system is inevitably embedded into a semantic network that can be called a framework of reference, the same applies for different models of dialectic reasoning, which are necessarily parts of such systems.

The term 'framework of reference'[4] was first introduced by the Chinese analytical philosopher from Hong Kong, Fung Yiu-ming 冯耀明. In his book *Zhongguo zhexuede fangfalun wenti* 中國哲學的方法論問題 [*The Methodological Problems of Chinese Philosophy*], he assumes a certain grade of incommensurability between the methodological systems of the so-called Western and East-Asian traditions (Fung, 1989, pp. 291–292). He asserts that this phenomenon is connected with the incommensurability of referential networks, which is linked to the impossibility of transferring certain concepts from one cultural-linguistic context into the other. All of this leads logically to a certain degree of impossibility with regard to making comparisons among different methodological systems.

These problems are, however, not limited only to theories or methods, which spring out of different cultural traditions; they also occur within every research project, focused on objects within a single language or tradition. Actually, what we are here confronting is a universal problem, which has been discussed by a broad range of Western theories (Kuhn, Quine, Lakatos, Feyerabend, etc.). Fung reminds us in this context of the well-known example of the relation between Newton's and Einstein's theories: because they represent different referential frameworks, the functions and semantic connotations of the same notions applied in them are also different, in spite of the fact that they are described in the same language.

This means that scholars who deal with philosophical texts from different cultural traditions have to take into account that each of these texts always belongs to a specific referential framework. The specific features of this framework are determined by the application of different concepts and categories, resulting in different methodological procedures. The classical Chinese (and most of the traditional East Asian) frameworks, for instance, include the following characteristics:[5]

- They represent dynamic, processual and highly contextual discourses;
- They are holistic systems;
- They include immanent and transcendent aspects;
- They are binary (but not dualistically) structured;
- They operate in accordance with the process of correlative complementarity.

In the following text, I will briefly discuss the main features of these methodological foundations. Already in the pre-Socratic period, i.e. in the earliest development of so-called European philosophy, the kinetic nature of the dynamic Heraclitan framework was replaced by Parmenida's view of the unchangeable substance of being. In contrast to such development, classical Sinitic philosophy always remained rooted in a dynamic worldview of reality defined by everlasting change and transformations. This elementary, processual view of actuality has—*inter alia*—led to the impossibility of the development of formal logic, for its three basic laws could not be established in a continually changing reality.[6] The processual network was embedded into a holistic structure, in which the existence of every single object, idea or category was determined through its relations to the others. Such a holistic, relational framework was not limited to the immanent realm; due to its dynamic nature, it also encompassed transcendent dimensions, which surpassed the limitations of mere empirical reality. But this all-embracing holistic reality is meticulously structured in accordance with the so-called binary categories. This means that every object, every phenomenon can be analysed in terms of its forms, its contents or properties through the lens of two opposing ideas or poles. The most general pair of such opposites is *Yinyang* 陰陽, originally denoting the relation between latent and manifest elements of the object under inquiry. The list of binary categories is endless and here we shall only mention two of the most prominent ones. While *Benmo* 本末 (literary: roots and branches) discusses the relation between cause and effect, or the general and the particular, and even deduction and induction, *Tiyong* 體用 (literally body and application) examines the relationships between substance and function, between the essential and the accidental, the content and the application. However, in our present discussion, the most important binary category is *Youwu* 有無, which refers to interactions between absence and presence.[7] But concerning the topic of this paper, the actual mode of interaction between the two oppositional poles of a binary category is of utmost importance.

The Chinese frame of reference is determined by the previously mentioned principle of correlative complementarity. The central peculiarity of this principle is particularly evident when we contrast it with the model of the Hegelian dialectic. In Hegel's triadic model, a thesis is negated by an antithesis. Thesis and antithesis are mutually exclusive. This means that they are not only in opposition, but also in contradiction to each other. The tension created by this contradiction allows the occurrence or the effect of the sublation in its triple meanings of preservation, elimination and elevation. The synthesis that takes place by virtue

of sublation constitutes a qualitatively new and higher phase of dialectical evolution, and also preserves in itself some elements of the thesis and the antithesis while eliminating others. In the system of correlative complementarity, however, the two oppositions do not exclude one another; on the contrary, they are interacting in a mutually complementary and interdependent relation (see Laozi, n.d., p. 2). This means that the two opposing poles are in opposition, but not in contradiction to each other.[8]

In contrast, in the Chinese framework such an absence of contradictions leads to a formal harmonisation and continuous unification process of the two opposites. Such a system cannot produce any external synthesis that could manifest itself in some kind of a completely new, unprecedented state. The mutual interaction between the two opposing poles, and the movement that they form, is characterised by constant balancing. In other words, it is characterised by the continuous pursuit of harmony. In this dynamic framework, the synthesis is included in the interaction of the two opposites and in all it produces. We will discuss this issue in more detail in later sections.

Based on the differences between these two models, we will now briefly introduce the main features defining two concrete modern East Asian systems of dialectical development. These are Nishida Kitarō's model of *Basho* dialectics on the one hand, and Mou Zongsan's model of the self-negation of the moral self on the other. Let us begin with the latter.

3. Mou Zongsan: ontology of two levels and the self-negation of the moral self

Mou Zongsan aimed to explain how the world of empirical objects and the realm of transcendent *noumena* are related to one another in a Buddhist-inspired 'two-level ontology' (兩層存有論). The first level refers to the empirical, and the second to the transcendental realm. Both levels are part of the one and the same reality, which is composed of two aspects. In delineating the fundamental features of this model, Mou was inspired by the Mahayana Buddhist text *The Awakening of the Faith* (大乘起信論) and its central supposition according to which 'One spirit can open two gates (一心開二門)'. This implies that the subject of recognition has access to two approaches to this reality. Mou based his idea of 'double ontology' on the Kantian distinction between phenomena and 'things in themselves':

> If we start from the assumption that 'man is finite as well as infinite', we must apply ontology on two levels. The first is the ontology of the *noumenal* sphere, or the 'detached ontology'. The second is the ontology of the sphere of appearances, or the 'attached ontology' (Mou Zongsan, 1975, p. 30).

Double ontology is thus divided into the noumenal and phenomenal, or the attached and detached ontology (執的存有論, 無執的存有論). Within the frame of these two ontologies, he defines detachment and attachment as follows:

> 'Detached' corresponds to 'the free and unlimited heart—mind' (in the sense of Wang Yangming's clear heart-mind of the cognitive subject) … 'Attached' corresponds to the 'attachment of the cognitive subject' (Mou Zongsan, 1975, p.39).

Confucian metaphysics, which is also included in Mou's noumenal ontology, is understood as not only 'detached' but also 'transcendental'. A metaphysics of this kind is

possible due to intellectual intuition (智的直覺). Hence, the 'detached ontology' corresponds to the free and unlimited heart-mind (自由的無線心). Parallel to this ontology of detachment is the 'attached ontology'. Thus, both the 'detached' and 'attached' ontologies are linked to the cognitive subject or cognitive perception.

The contrast between finite and infinite does not mean that for Mou both areas have to be excluded, but that ultimately there are two perspectives that are aimed at the same reality and therefore require two different, but not mutually exclusive, forms of knowledge. The form of the finite is characterised by empirical recognition or the cognitive mind. Mou denotes the form of knowledge that characterises the infinite realm of *noumena*, with the term intellectual intuition.[9] Mou's interpretation leads to a positive interpretation of the thing-in-itself and intellectual intuition, although both concepts have only the function of a 'negative concept' within the critique of pure reason. According to Mou, however, both realms of the finite and infinite emerge from the subject and can hence be developed in a positive sense. Although Kant rejects human being's ability to possess and apply intellectual intuition and allows it to God alone, the three major teachings of Chinese philosophy, namely Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, all admit that humankind has intellectual intuition, for humans are infinite subjects (無限的心).

Mou thought that through our capacity for intellectual intuition, human beings are 'finite, yet infinite' (有限而無限). He accepted Kant's system as a good analysis of our finite aspect; that is, our experience as beings limited in space and time and also in understanding, but he also thought that in our pursuit of intellectual intuition we also exceed our limitations.

Mou argued that Kant's refusal to consider intellectual intuition had far-reaching implications, for without the integration of this concept into his epistemology, Kant's entire construct of the autonomous subject would collapse, while the metaphysical construct of the world and of human existence also rests on very fragile foundations. The same was true for Eastern thought, for without this concept traditional Chinese philosophy would likewise be deprived of its ideal foundation. The concept of human intellectual intuition thus occupies the centre of Mou's philosophy. This concept underpins both his interpretation of Chinese philosophy, and his critique and superseding of Kant's thought:

> If we do not recognise that human beings in their limited existence possess the possibility of intellectual intuition then, given Kant's interpretation of the significance and function of such intuition, all of Chinese philosophy is impossible. And not only this: for Kant's entire moral philosophy would also become an empty discourse. But there is no way I can resign myself to this fact. Thus, by means of the Chinese philosophical tradition, we must establish the conditions for the possibility of human intellectual intuition (Mou Zongsan, 1971, *Foreword*/2).[10]

A human being, then, is capable of overcoming her finiteness and of penetrating into the realm of detached ontology. Intellectual intuition can thus overcome the limited subject of the ontology of attachment. However, with the mastery of this higher level of onto-epistemological states of reality, the dialectical process of human realisation is not yet complete. The subject subjects itself to forms and categories in a process that Mou calls the 'self-negation' (自我坎陷) of the transcendent subject (Sernelj, 2019, p. 101). On this lower level of comprehension, which Mou calls the 'cognitive mind' (認知心), the mind uses empirical intuition and the related cognitive processes to grasp things as discrete objects that are subjected to causal laws. On this level, objects are separated from one

another and from reason; they are embedded into particular temporal and spatial positions and possess numerical identities. In spite of the Buddhist and Kantian inspirations, Mou's approach represents a dialectical model that can only be understood and explained within the classical Chinese referential framework of a process philosophy, determined by dynamic correlative complementarity.

4. Nishida Kitarō and the 'self-identity of absolute contradictions'

Let us now turn to Nishida Kitarō's dialectical model. Nishida's philosophy is based on attempts to overcome the subject-object dichotomy, returning to the pure consciousness that exists before this division. In this context, he has developed the dialectic of the 'self-identity of absolute contradictions' (絶対矛盾的自己同一), which his first translator (Schinzinger) translated with the much easier to understand and simpler phrase 'the unity of opposites'.[11] The central term in this system is *Basho* or *Topos* (場所), a 'place' in which subject and object can correlate through mutual interaction as a whole and, as such, it equates to being and at the same time to nothingness.

Basho is neither subjective nor objective existence; since it is the place which comprises both worlds, and since it is where all existences—the objective, but also the subjective existence, which can never be objectified—are 'localised', *Basho* itself is not a form of existence. It is nothingness. However, it is not a nothingness in contrast to being, i.e. it is not a 'relative nothingness', because it is that in which any existence appears as something determined. Hence, it is the absolute nothingness (絶対無). All existences are self-determinations of this absolute nothingness. In this way, Nishida aimed to reach the ultimate principle in which the subjective can be unified with the objective. *Basho* is the place where all opposites are sublated: it is the unity of one and more, of affirmation and negation, of immanence and transcendence. This is what Nishida denotes with the phrase 'the self-identity of absolute contradictions' (絶対矛盾的自己同).

This dialectical method is based on the viewpoint of the dialectical universalities (弁証法的一般者). Nishida distinguishes three possible worlds of such universalities:

- The natural world is the level of objects that are thought and spoken about. These objects exist because they have their place in the natural world. However, their logical place itself is not accessible for judgements, since it is only the background on which the objects appear. In order to perceive itself, the natural world has to become aware of itself as the universal of self-awareness. The resulting self-relation has its place in the world of consciousness.
- The same condition holds for the world of consciousness: its logical place lies beyond the world, which it determines. This difference, in turn, compels the self to pass through the world of consciousness and enter the intelligible world in order to gain self-awareness. The consciousness does not perceive itself; it knows of itself not by perception, but by its being intellectually determined as 'consciousness with a content'. The logical place of this determination, then, lies in the intelligible world.
- The intelligible world is the world of ideas of the true (真), the beautiful (美) and the good (善). Here the transcendental self is defined by intellectual intuition (the intelligible universal) as a spiritual being. The ideas correlate with the aesthetic, moral and religious consciousness. The three ideas follow a certain hierarchy: Since

the artistic consciousness still sees a single self and not the free self, it must be absorbed in the moral consciousness. The moral consciousness has no concrete object in the world, but tends toward the idea of the good. Here, all that is, is what ought to be in a unity of facts and values. However, the idea of the good can only be achieved through a religious consciousness that overcomes and transcends itself in the religious-mystical experience through self-denial.[12] Its ultimate place is the Absolute Nothing, which cannot be described philosophically or conceptually, since every statement about it would destroy its undifferentiated unity by separation and isolation.

The epistemological foundations of this dialectic rest on Nishida's presumption that all knowledge is obtained through judgments. He proceeds from Hegel's premise that the particular is the determined universal (Nishida, 1966, p. 86). In this paradigm, judgments are self-determinations of the universals, since the particular (the judging individual self) is not relevant to the meaning of the truth of the judgment. In this general judgment, the logical categories of the natural world have their place. Here, Nishida understands being as 'having its place' and thereby as 'being determined' (Nishida, 1966, p. 90). The contradictory self-identity is a relation between being and the world in which contradictions are absolute and being is a unity of self-identity.

In a positive ontology of being, it now becomes apparent that the difference between the world and the place cannot be eliminated, because the place remains the background of the universals that cannot be discursively grasped. This leads Nishida to conclude that the universal must have the meaning of the place. While independent things interact with each other, the place determines itself. As such, as long as something determines itself, it cannot affect other things. As the place determines itself, things interact and influence each other.

The particulars, however, convey themselves. In order to overcome this subjective dialectic, Nishida then defines the place as non-representable and thus as nothingness. The religious self does not point to another place, but is itself its place that cannot be grasped. Hence, this place is nothing and at the same time it allows everything that exists. Nishida (1966, p. 130) denotes this relationship as the absolute nothing (絶対無).

5. A comparative analysis of the two models

In the next step, let us briefly analyse these two dialectical models by means of a contrastive comparison.

In Mou Zongsan's model of double ontology, the level of the 'attached ontology' corresponds to the empirical subject, while the level of the 'non-attached ontology' parallels to the transcendent subject. In Mou's system, these two subjects are in no contradiction, because it allows the transition from one to the other.

Through self-cultivation, the empirical, cognitive subject can transcend its limitations and move into the realm of the infinite, that is, to the level of the 'non-attached ontology'. In order to function in the phenomenal world and become able to recognise it, the transcendent subject can—through its self-negation—descend to the limited level of the 'attached ontology'. What is produced and continually reinforced through this mutual interaction is progress on the socio-political and scientific levels. Hence, in spite of the fact

that this model does not create any external synthesis in a teleological sense, it is not at all a mere one-dimensional, infinitely pulsating reciprocity with no real effect.

On the structural level, Nishida Kitarō's dialectic is more teleological, for it necessarily ends in absolute nothingness, which is at the same time the origin of all beings. Nishida's tripartite ontology is organised in such a way that the two lower levels (the level of the natural world and the level of the world of consciousness) are associated with the phenomenal, while the level of the intelligible world is associated with the transcendental sphere.

The (self-)perception and awareness of the lowest level of the natural world is made possible by the achievement of its logical place, which is at the level of the world of consciousness. The self-perception of consciousness, however, is made possible only by the achievement of the transcendent level of the intelligible world (Nishida, 1966, p. 71). The movement from one level to the next is stimulated by the respective forms of contradiction between the being (the place) and the world.

In this system, absolute nothingness is not an external synthesis, for it rather refers to the place in which these contradictions dissolve and true reality—to speak with Heidegger—nothings.

Such a comparative analysis thus reveals several similarities and differences between these two models of reasoning:

(1) Because both philosophers belong to the initial period of East Asian modernity, their systems have been created in dialogue with—or with reference to—modern Western philosophical theories. Thus, certain elements of Nishida's system can be compared to some extent with Heidegger's phenomenology,[13] and certain aspects of Mou Zongsan's theories with Kantian epistemology. In the construction of their respective dialectical models, both refer in part to Hegel. But neither Nishida nor Mou can be directly equated with any of these Western philosophers, since, as we have seen, they are based on completely different frames of reference. Hence, these systems, Kant on the one hand, and Heidegger on the other, can only be regarded as contrast-inspiring stimuli.

(2) Both systems also belong to theoretical elaborations and modernisations of Buddhist philosophy, although Nishida's model comes from Zen Buddhism, while Mou's System is based on the theory of the *Huayan* school. In Nishida's neontology, particularly in his logic of the *Basho*, in my opinion, one can also perceive some echoes of Nagarjuna and his logic of double negation.

(3) Basic Buddhist elements are hence something that connects both theories, because on this foundation both philosophers were able to build their twofold ontologies of distinction between phenomena and *noumena*. According to Nishida, the phenomenal sphere includes the natural world and the world of consciousness, while the intelligible world is the sphere of the transcendental *noumena*. In Mou Zongsan's case, this distinction is based on the two states of consciousness (the phenomenal and the noumenal), which go back to the *Tiantai* Buddhist model of the 'one mind opening two doors'.

(4) Even though both philosophers view this transcendent sphere as a moral one, this deontological morality is in Nishida's system overcome and transcended by religious consciousness, by which it flows into absolute nothingness. In Mou's

dialectics, however, it returns (and is reduced) to the level of tangible ontology through the self-negation of the transcendent subject.

(5) Both philosophers also use the concept of intellectual intuition. In his theory, Mou removes Kant's epistemology by granting this transcendental method of knowledge of the thing in itself to man. In Nishida we find the intellectual view only at the level of the intelligible world. The world of consciousness and the natural world are overcome and perceived through active intuition. But in the eventual attainment of the *topos*, that is, of absolute nothingness, intellectual intuition is also overcome,[14] for in the self-identity of the absolute contradictoriness, the self also dissolves itself as the determining universal. In this place of 'mystical intuition', knowledge is no longer gained through cognition and can no longer be conceptually understood or conveyed.

(6) None of these systems produces an external synthesis. Whereas in Nishida's theory, subject and object, or being and the world, dissolve in absolute nothingness, Mou sees the two opposites (the empirical and the transcendent subject) as continuously interacting in a complementary relationship. Both are in continuous transformation and the system as such is constantly producing new entities and qualities.

These similarities and differences become even clearer when we try to posit these two philosophers, and the traditions from which they come, into a direct dialogue with each other. In this sense, it is important, *inter alia*, to clarify some misunderstandings concerning the foundations of their particular philosophical work.

6. From ontology to meontology

When Nishida tried to explain his 'absolute nothingness' and to posit it in contrast to the past East Asian philosophical traditions, he wrote, among other things:

> Even if we call Daoist culture a culture of non-being, it is still imprisoned in non being (*mu* 無), captured in the form of non being. Its present was not a moving one but a simple infinite present (Nishida, 1970, p. 252).[15]

Later in the same text he emphasises that his concept of 'eternal now' (永遠の今) means something completely different from the Daoist 'simple infinite present' (唯 無限の現在), which, in his view, is just a kind of reciprocal pulsation that always stays in the same place. By contrast, his own 'eternal now' functions as a 'moving present' (動く現在), because time itself spreads out of the intimate 'translocation' of reality.

In a slightly different way, Nishida writes the same thing by emphasising that Chinese culture is 'that spirit that searches endlessly (何所までも) for the truth', and that its spirit is 'solidified and fixed in itself' (Dalissier, 2010, p. 144).

Incidentally, this has always also been the main reproach made by Chinese Marxists of China's own traditional dialectics: since it does not lead to new, ever-higher stages of development, it is essentially conservative and anti-progressive. And yet, consciously or unconsciously, it also served as a model within which the concept of permanent revolution could be constructed and substantiated. In contrast to Marxist or Hegelian dialectics, this model of dialectical thinking was anything but teleologically constructed. Precisely the absence of a synthesis meant that this kind of development never tended towards

a final goal, because within its framework opposites would persist in every phase of social development.

However, it is very much open to question whether the Daoist comprehension of the complementary principle can actually be reduced to an uncreative one-dimensional pulsation, especially when we consider that it springs from the infinite creativity principle of the *Yijing* (生生不息), which is also reflected in Laozi's creative cosmology, (see for instance Laozi, n.d., p. 42).[16] In his cosmogony, *Dao* as the ultimate principle creates the Oneness; this unity produces binary oppositions, through which a dialectical triad is born that ultimately produces everything that exists.

The fact that this dynamic and ever-changing dimension of the traditional Chinese model is also creative, i.e. that it can only exist in the constant production of new qualities, entities, and objects, also becomes very clear if we look at the Neo-Confucian schema of cosmogony, the so-called Taiji Diagram or the Diagram of the Ultimate Reality. This schema was composed by Zhou Dunyi in the 11th century.
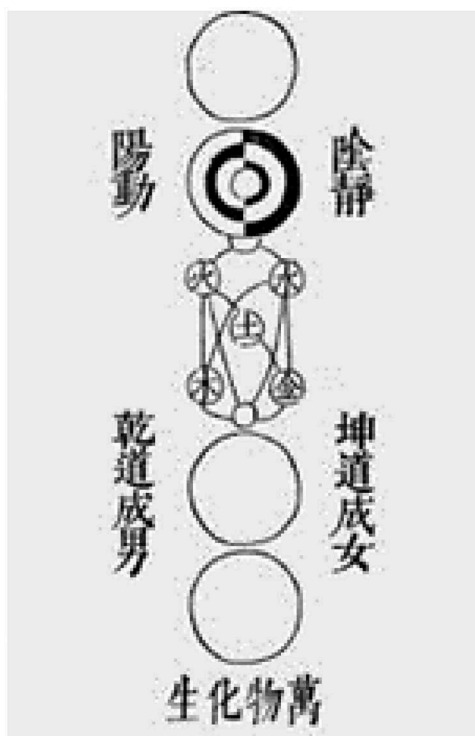
In this diagram, the ultimate reality produces five phases through movement and stillness (or yin and yang). This 'reciprocal pulsation' does not remain on the level of simple static (i.e. one-dimensional) pulsation, for it is a continuously productive force. Then, the dynamic interaction between these five phases divides into two oppositional poles that have been metaphorically denoted as the male and female antipodes, because they create and give life to everything that exists.[17]

So much for the reproach of an eternal reciprocal pulsation, which is—in Nishida's view —always thrown back on itself and could therefore—at the most—merely form a circle. As we have seen, this system of complementarity does not remain in a circle, but rather forms a dynamic spiral that continually leads to qualitatively new levels of existence.

Let us now turn to the second aspect of Nishida's criticism, which is closely related to the first one that has been discussed above. According to this criticism, the Chinese (or Daoist) concept of non-being constitutes a simple opposition to being. Yet the classical Chinese cosmology is a bit more complex than it seems at first sight.

As previously mentioned, the second chapter of Laozi's *Daode jing* asserts the correlative complementarity of opposites. The most basic dichotomy, or the most basic binary category in this cosmology, is the dichotomy of *you* and *wu*, which were commonly translated as being and non-being or nothingness. Due to the dual ontological nature of the classical Chinese discourses, which can be expressed by the previously described concept of immanent transcendence, and especially because of the correlative and dynamic nature of ancient Chinese philosophical discourses, such a translation seems problematic. Therefore, I prefer to translate the two notions composing this binary category with the terms presence and absence.

As we have seen, Nishida believed that classical Chinese cosmology was not only based on, but also limited to, the complementary interaction between absence and presence. However, we must not forget that the binary categories merely represent a method of development of the phenomenal world, or a method of comprehension of this development. The synthesis of the two opposites, which, as noted above, does not form a qualitatively different, separate phase of development, is unspeakable, unnamable, and discursively not detectable. It is *Dao*, or the Way that is at the same time the ultimate principle of any existence. It brings forth all things, guides them and aligns them with the *Li* 理, the all-embracing and coherent structure of the universe. Since it is therefore unnamable, it can only be presented indirectly, as a latent manifestation of the interaction between presence and absence.[18]

However, this method is not to be understood in the sense of a *creatio ex nihilo*, but rather in the sense of a *creatio ex nihilo continium*. This basic scheme was further elaborated in the third century by the metaphysicians of the School of Profound Learning (玄學). Wang Bi, who belonged to the most prominent members of this stream of thought, has explicitly argued that the concept of *Wu* could not be limited to the function of a contrastive oppositional notion of the concept *You*; on a meta-philosophical level, it moreover represented the ontological basis of reality. Wang wrote: 'In spite of the great wideness of heaven and earth, their core is absence' (Lou, 1980, p. 93).[19]

On the other hand, however, he still remained faithful to the principle of complementarity defining all mutually opposing antipodes, and he emphasised that the complementary interaction between any two antipodes (any binary category) is always rooted in the same origin: 'Beautiful and ugly is like love and hate. Good and evil are like right and wrong. Love and hate grew out from the same root, and right and wrong came through the same door' (Lou, 1980, p. 6).[20] This ultimate principle of complementarity is always unnamable, empty, and immovable, for every (form of) presence started form the vacuity (xu 虛), and every (form of) movement began in quietude (jing 靜). Hence, even though everything that exists is functioning in a binary way, it finally always returns to this empty stillness, which is their ultimate authenticity.

Through Wang Bi's commentaries, Laozi's original complementary correlativity of presence and absence is developed into a primacy of absence which becomes the ultimate principle of existence and attains an ontological priority. For the first time in Chinese intellectual history, we encounter an axiological distinction within binary categories that were hitherto functioning in a completely balanced complementary way. In this way, Wang Bi has profoundly transformed traditional models of correlative dialectical thinking and laid a cornerstone for the later development of proto-dualisms as created by the Neo-Confucian philosophers of the Song and Ming dynasties. Wang names this basic principle, which can only be described negatively, the fundamental absence (*benwu* 本無). He identifies it with the pure, original substantial root (*benti* 本體), which is single, all-embracing, all-pervading and always in accord with all cosmic and existential laws. Hence, on this meta-level, it can no longer be translated with the term absence, but rather with nothingness. In this framework, Wang's *benwu* (本無) can be well compared with Nishida's absolute nothingness (*zettai mu* 絶対無).

In Wang Bi's System, the unity or universal wholeness of existence is—contrary to earlier views—not part of existence itself, which is manifest, diverse and nameable. *Wu* or nothingness is the source of all phenomenal existence, but it is located in a transcendent realm, beyond all differences and descriptions. In this sense, Wang Bi's meontology can certainly be compared to that of Nishida. Both systems can also be related to certain Buddhist approaches: the concept of nothingness (無) can be linked to the concept of emptiness (空), which is an important aspect of Buddhism, (particularly of Zen or Chan Buddhism). On the other hand, it is well-known that Zen (Chan) Buddhism in China has emerged as a synthesis of Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist philosophy. In this sense, Nishida's philosophy was undoubtedly, albeit perhaps indirectly, *inter alia* also influenced by the Daoist philosophy of traditional China.

7. Conclusion

In his Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy, Mou Zongsan has described the Daoist concept of *Wu* (無) in the following way:

> *Wu* does not possess the ontological nature. Yet, when its wisdom is thoroughly developed, it can also imply an ontology; that, however, cannot be a Western-style ontology, but pertains to the practical, and can thus be named practical ontology (Mou Zongsan, 1997, p. 93).[21]

Thus, according to Mou, 'nothingness' as such is not an ontological concept, but a practical one, one that ultimately means letting things be as they are. Mou concluded that this 'letting things be as they are' requires great wisdom, for it can only be achieved through a state of emptiness beyond any tangible aspects to which one might be clinging. In this sense, he considered Daoist philosophy that is based on the concept of nothingness as a practical ontology or a practical metaphysics, which are exactly the same terms often used to describe or define Nishida's philosophy or the general orientation of the Kyoto School.

Mou's own dialectics, on the other hand, does not belong into the realm of nothingness. It is still deeply rooted in the Confucian, positively defined view of affirming life. Hence, in his own system, 'great wisdom' is tightly and necessarily connected with this axiological determination, which does not allow a continuous preservation of 'letting things be as they are'. It rather includes a duty of interfering with the course of life in a morally guided agenda of a continuous interaction between the transcendental and the

empirical self, which brings about a sinicised notion of an acting autonomous human subject.

However, a comparison between these two models of 'practical dialectics' is fruitful: although it does not lead to a genuine 'unity of oppositions', it points to the manifold possibilities of creating different models of dialectical thought as such. In this sense, it comprises a shift of perspective, based upon a sublation of previous modes of perception. Such alternations of horizons that go beyond the common views of the laws and paths of reasoning are always a precious tool of philosophical reasoning, because they cannot only point to additional, different methods of perceiving and interpreting our complex reality, but also represent an indispensable precondition of any philosophical innovations or new insights.

Notes

1. See for instance Chakrabarti and Weber (2016, pp. 2–3); Bańka (2016, p. 605); Burik (2009, pp. 3–9); Coquereau (2016, p. 153); Li (1999, pp. 6–9); Chakrabarti and Weber (2016, pp. 533–4); Möller (2019, p. 31ff); Neville (2016, pp. 499–500); Ouyang (2018, p. 243); Weber (2013, p. 3ff, 2013a, p. 596ff, 2014, p. 151, 2018, p. 258ff.); Shen, p. 358, and others.
2. Definition of the term 'fusion' in English by *Oxford Dictionaries*.
3. In order to distance themselves from the many methodological problems of comparative philosophy delineated above, several scholars have begun to apply a more generalized term 'post-comparative philosophy' (see for instance Möller, 2019, p. 31ff; Weber, 2013a, p. 596). Because he also finds the term 'fusion philosophy' somewhat problematic, Ralph Weber recently prefers to denote his vision of such a methodology with the term 'post-comparative global philosophy' (Weber, 2018, p. 7).
4. In Chinese original: *canzhao kuangjia*参照框架.
5. The referential framework of Nishida's philosophy includes most of these characteristics, perhaps with the exception of the last one, for, as we shall see later, his dialectic is grounded in interactions between pairs of mutual contradictions.
6. Even though the three basic laws of traditional formal logic, i.e. the law of identity (A = A), the law of difference or the law of the excluded contradiction (A ≠ 'A) and the law of the excluded middle or *tertium non datur* (A ∨ 'A) cannot maintain validity in a system of processual logic, the elementary principle of Nishida's Basho dialectics, which was described by Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (Tosa, 2014, pp. 9.30'–9.40') as 'A is A because A is non-A' (A = A ∵ A = 'A) could be completely valid and easy to understand in such a framework. However, in this particular case, the validity of the preposition is not conditioned by the processual nature of the framework as such, but rather by a specific mode of unifying contradictions.
7. This relativity, which is embedded in reciprocal relations between the oppositional poles of every binary category, has been expressed particularly clearly in classical Daoism. Laozi, for instance, repeatedly emphasizes that no concept can exist outside the relation to its counter-concept, and therefore there can be no absolute meanings. (See for instance Laozi, n.d., p. 2).
8. In the classical Chinese sources, we can find numerous texts that point to the impossibility of the existence of contradictions in the real world of actuality. The most well-known (and the one which explains the Chinese name of the very concept of contradiction), is perhaps Han Feizi's story about the impossibility of the simultaneous existence of impenetrable shields and all-penetrating spears (Han Feizi, n.d., ch. Nan yi: 4).
9. This form of knowledge is not a concept, neither is it the result of dialectical reasoning. However, this moral self, or self-intuition, which pours out spontaneously from one's inner self, is—through its conscious awareness—also permeating everything else that exists (Mou Zongsan, 1971, p. 200), for 'it is omni-inclusive and the source of everything. It not only determines each individual's moral behavior, but also the existence of every plant and tree'

(他是涵蓋乾坤, 為一切存在之源的. 不但吾人之道的行為由他而來, 即一草一木, 一切存在 ... 因而有其存在., Mou Zongsan, 1971, p. 191).

10. 如果吾人不承認人類這有限存在可有智的直覺,　則依康德所說的這種直覺之意義與作用, 不但全部中國哲學不可能, 既康德本人所講的全部道德哲學亦全成空話. 這非吾人之所能安. 智的直覺之所以可能, 須依中國哲學的傳統建立.

11. However, exactly because of its (over)simplified nature, this translation is too general and unprecise. Although easier to grasp, it might hence lead to misunderstandings. First of all, in his original definition, Nishida explicitly applies the term 'contradiction' (矛盾) and not opposition (対立). As we have seen in the first section, every 'contradiction' is an 'opposition', but the reverse is not true. Hence, translating 矛盾 as 'opposition' is not actually wrong, but in Nishida's system it is important to note that we are dealing with notions that are not only oppositional, but also in mutual contradiction. Analogously, every 'self-identity' is a kind of 'unity', but it is important to point out the specific nature of Nishida's 'unity', for it explicitly refers to a 'discontinuous continuity' (Maraldo, 2019, p. 8) as a totality which holds together differences without sublating them into a higher unity.

12. Nishida explains this process in the following way: 'In order that the conscious Self may transcend itself and enter a world of intelligible being, the Self must transcend its own will. In the uttermost depth of our will there is something which transcends and resolves even the contradiction of the will. This something has its place in the 'intelligible world'' (Nishida, 1966, p. 81).

13. Although these similarities must be treated with caution: 'However, although still largely unrecognized, significant differences between the political and metaphysical stance of Heidegger and his perceived counterparts in East-Asia most certainly exist. One of the most dramatic discontinuities between East-Asian thought and Heidegger is revealed through an investigation of Kitaro Nishida's own vigorous criticism of Heidegger. Ironically, more than one study of Heidegger and East-Asian thought has submitted that Nishida is that representative of East-Asian thought whose philosophy most closely resembles Heideggerian thought' (Rigsby, 2010, p. 511).

14. In this regard, Nishida explicitly states that intellectual intuition 'is related to knowledge through concepts, because it has not yet given up [the element of] intentionality. But when it comes to transcending even that intellectual intuition, and when that which has its place in absolute Nothingness is conceived, no more statement can be made with regard to this; it has completely transcended the standpoint of knowledge, and may perhaps be called "world of mystic intuition", unapproachable by word or thinking' (Nishida, 1966, p. 135).

15. 無に囚らはれて居る、無の形に囚へられて居るものである。その現在は動く現在ではない、唯無限の現在である.

16. 道 生 一 二 二 生 三 三生 萬物. 'The Way creates the Oneness, the Oneness produces the Two, the Two brings forth the Three and the Three brings everything which exists into life.' The passage could be explained as a cosmogonic process, beginning with the ultimate principle (of Nothingness) that creates the binary dichotomies (comprehensible through the method of binary categories). In the next step, these dichotomies form the dialectical Triad, which brings forth everything that exists.

17. In his book *The Substance of Heart-Mind and the Innate Moral Substance* (心體與性體), Mou Zongsan (1969) has addressed the philosophical significance of this schema for the understanding of the dynamics between parts and wholeness and the reasons for its long-lasting impact on the formation of the specific Chinese metaphysics of morality.

18. See for instance Laozi, n.d., p. 40: 天下萬物生於有, 有生於無。(All things under heaven sprang from the presence and that presence sprang from absence).

19. 天地雖廣, 以無為心. Sometimes, Wang describes this absence with a (somehow more concrete) compound *xuwu* 虛無 (void), and at times, he even replaces is by the term *xu* 虛 (emptiness).

20. 美惡, 猶喜怒也□善不善, 猶是非也。喜怒同根, 是非同門.

21. 無沒有存有論的意味, 但當 '無' 之智慧徹底發展出來時, 也可以函有一個存有論, 那就不 是 西方為標準的存有論, 而是屬於實踐 的(practical), 叫實踐的存有論.

Disclosure statement

Funding

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