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ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND

A NEW AGE IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY: THE WORLD DIALOGUE BETWEEN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้ถกเถียงประเด็นต่างๆ ดังต่อไปนี้คือ (1) นับว่าเป็นสิ่งจำเป็นที่จะต้องยืนยันว่ามนุษยชาติทั้งหมดได้พยายามที่จะแก้ไข “ปัญหาหลักๆ ที่เป็นสากล” ที่เกิดขึ้นในทุกวัฒนธรรมอยู่เสมอ (2) การตอบสนองที่มีความเป็นเหตุผลต่อ “ปัญหาหลัก” เหล่านี้แรกสุดมักออกมาในรูปแบบของเรื่องเล่าเชิงตำนานธรรมวิทยา (3) การกำหนดวาทกรรมเชิงปรัชญาเป็นพัฒนาการลำดับถัดมาในควมมีเหตุผลของมนุษย์ ซึ่งก็ได้ปฏิเสธเรื่องเล่าเชิงตำนานธรรมวิทยาเสียทั้งหมด (4) ปรัชญายุโรปสมัยใหม่นั้นมีเงื่อนไขมาจากการครอบงำทางเศรษฐกิจ การเมือง และวัฒนธรรมซึ่งจะต้องมีการตั้งคำถาม (5) ถึงกระนั้นก็คือปรัชญาของทุกภูมิภาคก็ยังมีด้านที่เป็นสากลและพ้องกัน ซึ่งจะตอบสนองการแก้ “ปัญหาหลักๆ” ได้ในระดับนามธรรม (6) การเสวนาระหว่างปรัชญาสำนักต่างๆ แบบใหม่นั้น จำเป็นต้องให้ความเคารพในความแตกต่าง และเปิดใจเรียนรู้จากสิ่งที่ค้นพบที่มีประโยชน์ที่มีอยู่ในประเพณีอื่นๆ (7) โครงการปรัชญาแบบใหม่จะต้องได้รับการพัฒนาให้สามารถข้ามพ้นปรัชญาสมัยใหม่ที่มียุโรปเป็นศูนย์กลาง โดยกำหนดรูปแบบให้เป็นพหุจักรวาลข้ามยุคสมัยใหม่ที่คำนึงถึงขนบธรรมเนียมประเพณีชายขอบอื่นๆ ด้วย

Abstract

This paper argues the following points: 1. It is necessary to affirm that all of humanity has always sought to address certain “core universal problems” that are present in all cultures. 2. The rational responses to these “core prob-

*lems” first acquire the shape of mythical narratives. 3. The formulation of categorical philosophical discourses is a subsequent development in human rationality, which does not however negate all mythical narratives. These discourses arose in all the great urban Neolithic cultures (even if only in initial form). 4. Modern European philosophy confused its economic, political and cultural domination, and the resulting crises in other philosophical traditions, with a Eurocentric universality claim, which must be questioned. 5. In any case there are formal universal aspects in which all regional philosophies can coincide, and which respond to the “core problems” at an abstract level. 6. All of this impels entry into a new Age of inter-philosophical dialogue, respectful of differences and open to learning from the useful discoveries of other traditions. 7. A new philosophical project must be developed that is capable of going beyond Eurocentric philosophical Modernity, by shaping a global **Trans-modern** pluriverse, drawing upon the “discarded” (by the Modernity) own resources of peripheral, subaltern, postcolonial philosophies.*

In this paper I will explore a theme that I believe should occupy us for a significant portion of the 21st century: **our recognition and acceptance of the meaning, value, and history of all regional philosophical traditions on the planet (European, North American, Chinese, Indian, Arab, African, Latin American, etc.).**

This will be the first time in the history of philosophy that these diverse traditions will be open to an authentic and symmetrical dialogue—a dialogue that will enable us to understand many aspects unknown to us, aspects that may be better developed in some traditions than in others. This dialogue will play a key role in unlocking the contents of the daily life of humanity in other cultures, thanks to the enormous machinery of mass media that makes it possible for us to receive news instantaneously of cultures about which we lack first hand knowledge, and will also imply an ethical positioning grounded in the equal recognition of all philosophical communities with equal rights of argumentation. This will make it possible

for us to transcend the Eurocentrism of Modernity, so prevalent today, which impedes creativity and often obscures the great discoveries achieved by other traditions.

1. Universal Core Problems

When I refer to “universal core problems,” I mean those fundamental questions (of an ontological character) that *homo sapiens* posed upon attaining a certain level of maturity. Once their level of cerebral development allowed for consciousness, self-consciousness, linguistic, ethical and social development (that is, responsibility for their own acts), human beings confronted the *totality of the real* in order to manage things in such a way as to achieve the reproduction and development of human life in community. Human *bewilderment* in the face of the possible causes of natural phenomena was further compounded by the unpredictability of their own impulses and behaviors, leading to questions regarding “core problems” such as: What are *real things* in their totality and how do they behave? Such questions encompass phenomena ranging from the astronomical to the simple falling of a stone or the artificial production of fire. They also encompass the mystery of their own human subjectivity, the *ego*, interiority, spontaneity, as well as the nature of freedom and the creation of the *social and ethical world*. In the end, they arrive at the question of how we interpret the *ultimate foundation* of everything that is real, and the universe itself? Which in turn leads to the classic ontological question: “Why *being* and not *nothingness*?” These basic “core problems” have inevitably been faced by all human communities since the remotest period of the Paleolithic age; they are among the many possible variations of the *universal* “whys,” and are present in every culture and tradition.

The content and the way of responding to these “core problems” unleashes, impels, and disperses diverse trajectories of *rational* narratives, if by *rationality* we understand simply that reasons have been provided in support of assertions, and that these assertions are intended to interpret or explain phenomena that have “appeared” at the initial level of each of these “core problems.”

2. The Rational Development of Mythical Narratives

Throughout all of its stages of development, humanity has always and inevitably given linguistic expression to rational responses (understood here to mean those that are proffered with some kind of underlying foundation, regardless of its specific character, at least until it is refuted) to core problems such as those described above. This has occurred as the result of a process involving the “production of myths” (*mytho-poiésis*).

The production of myths was the first rational form of interpretation or explanation of reality (of the world, subjectivity, the ethical practical horizon, and the ultimate reference of reality that is described symbolically). From this perspective myths are symbolic narratives that are not irrational and that do not refer exclusively to singular phenomena. They are symbolic enunciations, and therefore have a “double meaning” that can only be fully elucidated through a hermeneutical process *that uncovers the layers of reasoning* behind them. It is in this sense that they are rational, and that they must be grasped in terms of the extent to which their content has a *universal* significance, given their reference to circumstances that are susceptible to repetition, and constructed upon the basis of *concepts* (cerebral categorizations or cerebral maps that involve millions of neurons and imply the convergence in meaning of multiple and singular empirical phenomena that human beings must confront).

Numerous myths are organized according to their relationship to the *core problems* that I have just highlighted, and have been preserved in the collective memory of communities throughout the world. This was first done through oral tradition, and in written form since 3000 B.C., when they begin to be collected, remembered, and interpreted by communities of sages who had a sense of admiration in the face of reality, in the spirit of Aristotle’s affirmation²: “but he who finds no explanation (in what he sees, and turns instead to admiration) [...] thereby recognizes his ignorance. This is why he who loves myth (*philómythos*) is akin to he who loves wisdom (*philósophos*)”. This is how mythical “traditions” emerge to provide peoples throughout the world with *rational* explanations related to the questions that have always been most pressing for humanity, and which I have defined here as “core problems”. These include peoples as poor and as “simple” in their material culture as the Tupinamba indigenous people

of Brazil, who according to Claude Lévi-Strauss' studies, carried out the responsibilities inherent in their daily lives in ways embedded in the complex web of meaning provided by their vast number of myths.

According to Paul Ricoeur, each culture has an "ethical and mythical core"³, or "vision of the world" (*Weltanschauung*) that provides a framework of interpretation and ethical guidance for the most significant moments in human existence. On the other hand, certain cultures (such as those of China, India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Aztec or Mexica, the Arabs, the Hellenic world, Rome, Russia, etc.) as a result of their political, economic, and military hegemony, were able to consolidate geopolitical dominance. These processes endowed them a degree of universality that included the imposition of their mythical structures over those of subaltern cultures. Such patterns of cultural domination are evident throughout multiple periods of historical development.

As a result of these cultural clashes, certain myths will endure in subsequent stages (even in the age of categorical philosophical discourses and of the science of Modernity itself, up to the present). Myths will never completely disappear as long as some of them continue to *make sense*, as Ernst Bloch argues persuasively in his work *The Principle of Hope*.⁴

3. The New Rational Development of Discourses with *Philosophical Categories*

We have become accustomed, in the context of explanations of the transition from mythos to *lógos*, to understand this process as a leap from the *irrational* to the *rational*, from the concretely empirical to the universal, and from the realm of the senses to the realm of concepts. This is false. They are both rational. Each of the narratives at issues has a certain degree of rationality, but their specific character varies. There is a *progression* in terms of degrees of univocal precision, semantic clarity, simplicity, and in the conclusive force with which their foundations have been laid. But there are also *losses* in multiplicity of meaning when symbols displaced, but which can be hermeneutically rediscovered in diverse moments and places (as is characteristic of mythical rational narratives). For example the Promethean or Adamic⁵ myths continue to have ethical

meaning today.

Thus univocal rational discourse as expressed in *philosophical* categories that are capable of defining conceptual content without recourse to symbols (as in a myth) gains in *precision* but loses in terms of its *resonance* of meaning. All of this nonetheless implies an important civilizational advance, which opens up the possibility of abstraction in modes of analysis. Here, the separation of the semantic content of the phenomenon being observed -the description and precise explanation of empirical reality- enables the observer's *management* to be more efficient in the reproduction and development of human life in community.

In this context, *wisdom* can order the diverse responses to the *core problems* that have been enumerated, and becomes the content of a differentiated social "role" focused upon the clarification, exposition, and development of said wisdom. From the perspective of the sociology of philosophy, communities of philosophers form groups differentiated from those of priests, artists, political actors, etc. The members of these communities of sages take on a ritualized form constituting "schools of life" with a strictly disciplinary character (from the Aztecs *calmécac* to the Athenian *academy* or the sages communities of the city of Memphis in the Egypt of the Third Millennium B.C.), and came to be known as the so-called "lovers of wisdom" (*philo-sóphoi*) among the Greeks. But from a historical perspective the "lovers of myths" were also, strictly speaking, "lovers of wisdom," and this is why those who will later be described as philosophers should be described more aptly as *philo-logists*, if *lógos* is understood to mean a rational discourse that employs philosophical categories and no longer has recourse to mythical symbolic narrative, or only exceptionally and as an example of how philosophical hermeneutics holds sway.

This process of leaving behind the purest form of mythical rational expression and stripping away its symbolic content gradually emerged in all of the great urban cultures of the Neolithic. This process gives certain *terms* or *words* a univocal, definable meaning with conceptual content that is the fruit of *methodical* analytical elaboration and is capable of moving from the whole to the parts as it fixes its specific meaning. Key examples of narratives employing *philosophical categories* began to emerge in India (subsequent to the *Upanishads*), in China (from the *Book*

of *Changes* or I *Ching*), in Persia, Mesopotamia, Egypt (in texts such as those described as the “philosophy of Memphis”), in the Eastern Mediterranean between the Phoenicians and the Greeks, in Mesoamerica (the Maya and Aztecs or Mexican), in the Andean region the *amautas* among the Aymaras and the Quechuas, who gave life to Incan civilization, etc. Among the Aztecs, *Quetzal-coatl* was the symbolic expression of a dual ancestral deity (“Quetzal” referring to the green and red feathers of a beautiful tropical bird as a symbol for divinity, and “coatl” referring to a twin or brother, the “duality”). This is what the *tlamatinime* (“those who know things,” and whom Bernardino de Sahagún called “philosophers”⁶) described as *Omteotl* (from the roots in the Náhuatl language *omé*, which means two, and *teotl*, which refers to divinity), leaving the symbol aside. This denomination highlighted the “dual origin” of the universe (instead of the unitary origin characteristic of *én*, or the *One* in Plato or Plotinus, for example). This indicates the beginning of the transition from symbolic rationality to the rationality of *philosophical conceptual categorization* among the Aztecs, as reflected in the historical figure of the poet and philosopher-king Nezahúalcoyotl (1402-1472).

Some authors such as Raúl Fornet-Betancourt in Latin America⁷ concede that philosophy was practiced in *Amerindia* (before the European invasion in 1492) or in pre-colonial Africa, without much elaboration of what he understands to be philosophy. Paulin Hountondji’s sharp critique of the concept of *ethnophilosophy*, derived from Placide Tempel’s book *Bantu Philosophy*⁸, highlights the need to better define what we mean by philosophy in such contexts, in order among other things to distinguish it from myth.

Nonetheless when we carefully read the first sentences of the *Tao Te-king* (or *Dao de jing*) by the legendary Lao-tze: “The Tao that can be spoken of is not the constant Tao; the name that can be named is not the constant name; the nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth,”¹⁰ we find ourselves confronted with a text that employs *philosophical categories* distant from those of a purely mythical narrative. It is also impossible today to ignore the argumentative density and rationality characteristic of the philosophy of K’ung Fu-Tsu (Confucius) (551-479 B.C.),¹¹ and the levels of philosophical development evident in Mo-Tzu (479-380 B.C.),¹² whose continuous, even excessive patterns of argumentation criticized the

social and moral implications of Confucianism, affirming a universalism with grave political implications, and which was skeptical of rituals and unduly elaborate organizations or “schools.” His contributions are one of the pillars of Chinese *philosophy* that predated the great Confucian synthesis of Meng Tzu (Mencius) (390-305 B.C.).¹³ This *philosophy* spans some 2,500 years, with classics each century, and even during the period of European Modernity thinkers such as Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529), who develops the neo-Confucian tradition that extends all the way up to the present, influencing Mao Tse-tung and playing a role in the emergence of contemporary capitalism in China and Singapore equivalent to that of Calvinism in Europe. There was also Huang Tsung-hsi (1610-1695) a great renovator of political philosophy.

In the same way the philosophies of the Indian subcontinent are organized in terms of the philosophical expression¹⁴ of the core problems. We read in *Chandogya Upanishad*:

“In the beginning, my dear, this world was just Being (*sat*), one only, without a second. Some people, no doubt, say: In the beginning, verily, this world was just Nonbeing (*asat*), one only, without a second; from that Nonbeing Being was produced. But how, indeed, my dear, could it be so? said he. How could Being be produced from Nonbeing? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this world was Being alone.”¹⁵

Is it not a philosophical discourse?

In Hinduism the concept of *Brahman* refers to the totality of the universe (as does that of *Pacha* in Quechua among the Incas of Peru); *atman* refers to subjectivity, *karma* to human action, and *moksha* to the relationship between *atman* and *Brahman*. It is with these “core” concepts as points of departure that a discourse undertaken by means of philosophical categories begins to be constructed in the fifth century B.C. It is then with Sankara (788-820 A.D.) that the philosophy of the subcontinent achieves a classical level, which it has continued to develop up to the present.

Buddhist philosophy, meanwhile, beginning with Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 B.C.), rejects the concepts of *Brahman* and *atman*, given its assumption that the totality of the universe is an eternal process

unfolding in an interconnected manner (*patitya samatpada*). This even more clearly negates the mythical traditions (such as those of the Vedas), contributing instead to the construction of a strictly rational narrative, which is not, as in all philosophies, utterly exempt from mythological moments, such as *ensomatosis*, referring to the successive “re-incorporations of souls.”

Meanwhile, Jainism, whose first exponent was Vardhamana Mahvira (599-527 B.C.), ontologically defends the *Tattvartha Sutra* (“no violence, no possession, no determination”) from the perspective of a universal vitalism, which has great relevance to the ecological crisis we face today.

All of this clearly implies that philosophy was not born solely or originally in Greece, nor can it be taken as the prototype of philosophical discourse. This error arises from taking Greek philosophy as the definition of philosophy itself, rather than discover a clear *criteria of demarcation* between mythical and philosophical categorical discourse. This confuses the part with the whole: a specific case does not capture the universal sweep of the definition needed. This does not deny Greek philosophy its historical place among these philosophies, or its continuity with the philosophies of the Roman Empire, which in turn opened a cultural horizon towards the so-called Latin-Germanic European Middle Ages. These will culminate in the European philosophy that laid the foundations for the Modernity produced by the European invasion of the American continent, and the emergence of colonialism and capitalism. The Industrial Revolution at the end of the 18th century (only two centuries ago) will make Europe the central dominating civilization in the world-system, up to the beginning of the 21st century. This domination has obscured and distorted our understanding of history (due to the combined effects of what I have described as hellenocentrism and Eurocentrism), and impeded the global perspective necessary to grasp an authentic history of philosophy.

As a Latin American I am convinced that the future development of world philosophy will be jeopardized if we do not clarify these issues by means of a contemporary dialogue between non-Western philosophical traditions and those of Europe and North America.

In this context, E. Husserl’s reflection set forth below, and repeated in general by M. Heidegger and throughout Europe and North

America, seems so naïve:

“Thus philosophy [...] is *ratio* in the constant movement of self-elucidation, begun with the first breakthrough of philosophy into mankind [...] The image of the dawn characterizes Greek philosophy in its beginning stage, the first elucidation through the first cognitive conception of *what* is as universe (*des Seienden als Universum*) [...]”¹⁶

In Latin America, David Sobrevilla essentially supports the same approach:

“I believe that there is a general consensus that the philosophical activity of humanity first emerged in Greece and not in the East. In this regard Hegel and Heidegger appear to be correct, instead of Jaspers, who argues for the existence of three great philosophical traditions: those of China, India, and Greece.”¹⁷

The philosophy of the East would be philosophy understood *in a broad sense*, and that of Greece according to much *narrower* criteria. There is a confusion between the origins of *European* philosophy, which may in part lie in Greece, and the origins of *world* philosophy, which has diverse origins, almost as many as there are fundamental traditions of philosophy. In addition it is assumed that this process was linear, following a sequence “from Greek philosophy to Medieval Latin philosophy and from there to their Modern European expressions.” But the true historical trajectory was much more complex. Greek philosophy was cultivated subsequently and principally by Byzantine civilization, and Arab philosophy in turn was the inheritor of Byzantine philosophy, and in particular its Aristotelian tradition. This required the creation of an Arabic philosophical language in the strictest sense.¹⁸

Latin Aristotelian philosophy in Paris in thirteenth century, for example, has its origin in Greek texts and their Arabic commentaries (translated in Toledo, in Spain, by Arab specialists), and these Greek texts were utilized and commented by the “Arab Western philosophers” (in the Caliphate of Cordoba, in Spain), continuing the “Eastern” tradition with origins in Cairo, Bagdad, or Samarkand. This produced a Greek legacy profoundly reconstructed from a Semitic perspective (such as that of Arab

civilization), and then passed on to Latins and Germanics in Europe. It is 'Ibn Rushd (Averroes) who marks the origin of the European philosophical renaissance in the thirteenth century.

All of the world's great cultures have created philosophies as well, with varying styles and characteristics of development, but all have produced (some only initially and others with great depth and precision) *conceptual structural categories* that must be recognized as philosophical.

Philosophical discourse does not destroy myth, although it does negate those who lose the capacity to resist the empirical argumentation inherent in such discourse. For example the myths of Tlaccacel among the Aztecs, which justified human sacrifice and provided good reasons for it¹⁹, completely collapsed once their impossibility was demonstrated, as well as their lack of practical feasibility.

In fact, mythical elements may contaminate even the discourses of great philosophers. For example, Immanuel Kant argues in favor of the "immortality of the soul" in the "pure practical reason dialectics" of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, as a way of resolving the question of the "supreme Good" (since the soul would receive after death the happiness it had earned in its earthly life). But these concepts of the "soul" and of "immortality" demonstrate the persistence of mythical elements of Indian origin in the Greek thought-elements that came to permeate all of the Roman, Medieval Christian, and Modern European world. The supposedly philosophical proofs provided are in these cases tautological and not rationally demonstrative upon the basis of empirical facts. This illustrates the unrecognized (and in this case inappropriate) presence of mythical elements in the *best* philosophies. We might also describe them as examples of unintentional underlying ideologies.

On the other hand, the "Adamic myth" of the Hebrew Semitic tradition, which shows that human freedom is the origin of "evil," and not a deity, as in the Mesopotamian myth of Gilgamesh, is a mythical narrative that can still be interpreted anew in the present, and which resists the rationality of the age of *logos*.²⁰ The same can be said of the epic narrative of the slaves led by Moses who freed themselves from Egypt-narratives recovered by Ernst Bloch in his previously cited work.

4. The Domination of Modern European Philosophy and its *Universality Claim*

Beginning in 1492 Europe conquers the Atlantic, which becomes the new geopolitical center of hegemony in the world, replacing the Mediterranean and extending its sweep all the way to the “Arab sea” (Indian Ocean) and the “China Sea” (the Pacific). This becomes the basis of new colonial empires (almost exclusively centered on the American continent between the 15th and 17th centuries), which in turn make it possible for a capitalist civilization to develop. It is in this context that Medieval Latin-Germanic philosophy becomes the core of *Modern European philosophy*, in a manner inextricably intertwined with its political and economic hegemonical claim. I believe that the specific philosophical origin of this process is Bartolomé de Las Casas’s philosophical critique of the new colonial domination in the Caribbean region in 1514, long before that of Descartes’s *Discourse on Method*, written in Amsterdam in 1637. European philosophy was until then singular and *regional* in character, but could now reposition itself in terms of a claim to take on the trappings of *philosophy itself*. It is valid to characterize the domination of European philosophy as *hegemonic* because it imposed its sway on the philosophical communities that had been colonized or reduced to its periphery. It is this economic, military and political hegemony that makes it possible for *modern European philosophy* to develop in a unique manner, unlike any other in the world during the same historical period. My emphasis here, then, is on exploring possible explanations for this development and its supposedly universality claim.

Modern colonial expansion through the opening of the Atlantic by Portugal to the West of Africa, and then towards the Indian Ocean (which leapt over the “wall” surrounding the Ottoman Empire), and by Spain towards the Caribbean and the American continent, laid siege to the Islamic world from the end of the 1500’s, paralyzing its civilizational and thus, too, its philosophical development. Classic Arab philosophy was not able to survive the crisis in the Caliphate of Baghdad and declined definitively thereafter. The presence of the Mongol Empire similarly destroyed the possibility of new developments in Buddhist and Vedanta philosophies during the sixteenth century. China, meanwhile, began to feel the weight of

having failed to complete the Industrial Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, just as Great Britain²¹ began to experience it fully; by the end of the same century China had already ceased to produce new hegemonic philosophy.

In Latin America the process of the Spanish conquest destroyed all of the most outstanding intellectual and cultural resources of the great Amerindian cultures; subsequently the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of the Baroque period were never able to surpass the achievements of the Scholastics of the sixteenth century Renaissance.

The dominating centrality of Northern Europe as a military, economic, political, and cultural power laid the foundation for the development of its philosophy from the end of the Middle Ages, from the fifteenth century of Nicolas de Cusa (1401-1464) and the Italian Renaissance, with its origins in the presence and influence of the Byzantines expelled by the Ottomans of Constantinople in 1453. This made it possible for its own philosophy to develop and, in the face of the crisis of the other great regional philosophies, elevate its philosophical particularity to a *universality claim*.

Modern European philosophy was therefore positioned in such a way as to appear to be the *universal philosophy*-both in its own eyes and in those of the intellectual communities of the colonial world that lay prostrate at its feet, and philosophically paralyzed. It was situated geographically, economically, and culturally in the *center*, able to manipulate the *knowledge and information* wrested from all of the peripheral cultures within its grasp. These cultures were connected to the center along a link running between the Colonial South and the European metropolitan North, but disconnected from each other, without any South-South relations or alliances possible as yet. These relation will evolve during the Age of European Modernity, cultivating an increasing disdain for their own identities and contributions, which includes forgetting their traditions and confusing the high levels of development produced by the Industrial Revolution in Europe with the supposedly *universal truths in its discourse* - both its content and its methods. This is what makes it possible for Hegel to write:

“Universal history goes from East to West. Europe is absolutely the end of universal history.”²² “The Mediterranean Sea is the axis of universal history.”²³

Similarly, certain European mythic narratives will be confused with the supposedly *universal content* of purely European philosophical rationality. Hegel is also the one who wrote that “the Germanic Spirit is the Spirit of the New World [Modernity], whose end is the realization of the Absolute Truth.”²⁴ He fails to note, however, that said “Spirit” is regional (European Christian and not Taoist, Vedanta, Buddhist or Arab), nor is it global, nor does its *content* reflect the problems characteristic of other cultures. For these reasons, it does not constitute a universal philosophical discourse, but instead reflects the characteristics of a mythic and provincial narrative. What does it mean in terms of a strictly universal philosophical rationality to speak of the “Spirit of Christianity”? Why not then speak of the “Spirit of Taoism” or of Buddhism or Confucianism? That “Spirit” is completely valid as a component of a mythic narrative with meaning for those who live within the horizons of a regional culture (such as Europe), but not to attribute to it a rational philosophical content with an empirically based universal validity, as modern European philosophy still claims for itself.

Philosophical Eurocentrism is, then, in essence this universality claim of a particular philosophy, many aspects of which may still be absorbed by other traditions. We can assume that all cultures have ethnocentrist tendencies, but modern European culture was the first whose ethnocentrism became globalized, with its original regional horizon extended to coincide with that of the emergent world-system itself, as proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein.²⁵ But this universality claim falls of its own weight when philosophers of other philosophical and cultural traditions become conscious of their own philosophical history and its grounded implications.

5. Philosophical Universality and Cultural Particularity

None of what I have argued thus far negates that it is possible for philosophical discourse to take into account the fundamental “core problems” and attempt to develop responses with universal validity, as contributions that can be discussed by other cultures, since they would involve problems that are ultimately human and thus universal in character. K. O. Apel’s²⁶ effort to define the universal conditions of validity necessary for a “argumentative discourse” makes it plain that there must be symmetrical possibilities for each of the participants to engage in the process; otherwise, the conclusions of the discussion will not be valid because participants have not participated under equal conditions. This is an ethical-epistemological formal principle (without any content based in any particular material value judgment of any culture), that can be assessed critically by other cultures. Similarly, the fact that there are historical-material and economic conditions grounded in the affirmation and development of human life, which are universally necessary for human existence (since we are subjects in living bodies as suggested by Karl Marx), appears to be valid for all cultures. The formal abstract universality of certain statements or principles, which can be shaped differently at the material level of each culture, does not negate that they can be “bridges” which can make it possible for there to be dialogue and debate between different philosophical traditions. This meta-philosophy is a product of all humanity, even if it emerges initially in the context of a specific culture, or in some specific tradition or historical period, which might have been able to make greater progress on this issue than others, but from which all the other traditions could learn from within the bounds of their own historical assumptions.

For example, in the tenth century A.D. in Baghdad, mathematics advanced significantly, immediately contributing to a leap in the development of Arab-Aristotelian philosophy and proving useful to other traditions as well. An *absolutely* post-conventional philosophy is impossible (implying no relationship to any concrete culture), but all philosophies, located inevitably in some specific cultural context, are nonetheless capable of engaging in dialogue with others through the prism of shared “core problems” and categorical discourses of a philosophical character, which are universal to the extent that they are human.

6. The New Age of Dialogue between Philosophical Traditions

It has been asserted for too long that this universal function is fulfilled by modern European philosophy. This insistence has obscured many great discoveries made by other philosophical traditions. This is why the great task that lies before us at the beginning of the 21st Century is the initiation of an inter-philosophical dialogue.

First, we must start with a dialogue between North and South, because we will be reminded of the continuing presence of colonialism and its legacies, still with us after five hundred years. This is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes economic and political structures and expressions, as well as cultural and philosophical ones. The philosophical communities of the post-colonial world (with their distinct problems and responses) are still not generally accepted, recognized, nor engaged by their counterparts in metropolitan hegemonic communities.

Second (and no less important) is the need to undertake and deepen permanent South-South dialogue, in order to define the agenda of the most urgent philosophical problems in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, etc., and discuss them together philosophically. The rules for such a dialogue must be patiently developed.

We must lay the pedagogical foundations by educating future generations in multiple philosophical traditions. For example, in the first semester in the history of philosophy in our universities at the undergraduate level, we should begin with the study of the "First Great Philosophers of Humanity"—the thinkers who developed the original categories of philosophical thinking in Egypt (Africa), Mesopotamia (including the prophets of Israel), in Greece, India, China, Meso-America, or the Incas. In the second semester we should continue with study of the "Great Ontologies," including Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, the Greeks (such as Plato, Aristotle, and up to Plotinus), the Romans, etc. A third course should explore later stages of philosophical development in China (beginning with the founding of the Han empire), later examples of Buddhist and Indian philosophy, Byzantine Christian philosophy, Arab philosophy, the Medieval European philosophy, and so on. **This is how a new generation can begin to think philosophically from within a global mindset.** The same approach should be reflected in the courses

specializing in ethics, politics, ontology, anthropology, and even logic (shouldn't we have some notion of Buddhist logic as well?).

Furthermore, we must ask ourselves if other philosophical traditions (beyond those of Europe and North America) have wrestled with questions ignored by our own traditions, even though those traditions might have explored them in different ways, with varying emphases. The differences might provide new perspectives on the particular conditions of the geopolitical environment where they were engaged. There must not be only dialogue between *East* (an ambiguous concept deconstructed by Edward Said) and *West* (equally ambiguous)²⁷, but also with the world Periphery, because Africa, Latin America, and other regions are until now excluded.

We also need a complete reformulation of the history of philosophy in order to be prepared for such a dialogue. *World Philosophy*, the pioneering work by the sociologist Randall Collins²⁸, points to key aspects that must be taken into account. His comparative analysis crosses the geography (space) and history (time) of the great Chinese, Indian, Arab, European, North American, and African philosophers, which he categorizes in generations and in terms of their relative importance, although glaring omissions include his failures to devote a single line to five hundred years of Latin American philosophy, and to the nascent philosophies of the urban cultures prior to the conquest. Despite these weaknesses, he provides rich information for further interpretation and gives the philosopher pause, since the author is a sociologist who provides a great deal of material for philosophical thinking.

7. Inter-philosophical Dialogue towards a *Trans-modern* Pluriverse

After a long crisis resulting from the impact of modern European culture and philosophy, the philosophies of other regions are beginning to recover a sense of their own histories buried beneath the hurricane of Modernity. Take the example of a contemporary Arab philosopher, Mahomed Abed Yabri, at the University of Fez in Morocco, a prestigious university renowned for over a thousand years, and city which in the thirteenth century had more than 300,000 inhabitants, and where Moses

Maimonides, among others, went to study and teach.

At a **first stage**, in A. Yabri's two works, *The Critique of Arab Reason*²⁹ and *The Arab Philosophical Legacy: Alfarabi, Avicenna, Avempace, Averroes, Abenjaldun*,³⁰ he begins with an *evaluative assessment* of the philosophy of his Arab cultural tradition. Along the way, a) he rejects the tradition of interpretation prevalent in this historical period (that of the *salafis* or *fundamentalists*), a reaction against Modernity that lacks a creative reconstruction of the philosophical past; b) he rejects of "Marxist *safism*," which forgets its own tradition; and c) he rejects with equal force the liberal Eurocentric tradition that does not accept the existence of a contemporary "Arab philosophy." Instead the author employs his linguistic skills in Arabic as a native speaker and undertakes original research in the philosophical traditions of the great thinkers of the "Eastern" schools (of Egypt, Baghdad, and towards the East, under the influence of Avicenna) and of the "Western" schools (of the Caliphate of Cordoba, including the Berber regions of Fez) that pivot around the contributions of 'Ibn Rushd.

At a **second stage** in his exploration, A. Yabri undertakes a critique of his own philosophical tradition by employing the resources of Arab philosophy itself, but also drawing from some of the achievements of modern hermeneutics (which he studied in Paris). This combination makes it possible for him to discover new historical elements in his own tradition, for instance, that the Arab "Eastern" tradition had to contend with Persian Gnostic thinking as a principal rival. Thus the *mu'tazilites* created the first Arab philosophy: by opposing Persia and at the same time drawing upon Greco-Byzantine philosophy in order to justify the legitimacy of the Caliphate. Subsequently Al-Farabi and 'Ibn Sina (Avicenna), employing neo-Platonic categories, will produce a philosophical-mystical tradition of illumination. While Andalusian-Maghrebi "Western" philosophy, inspired by the scientific empiricism and strictly Aristotelian thought (with the characteristic slogan: "abandon the argument based on authority and go back to the sources" as urged by the Almohade 'Ibn Tûmert) will produce the great Arab philosopher 'Ibn Rushd, a true philosophical Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), which will be the origin of the Latin-Germanic philosophy in 13th Century, which was at the same time the foundational moment of the modern European philosophy. 'Ibn Rushd

perfectly defines what inter-philosophical dialogue should consist of:

“Undoubtedly we should build upon and take from the contributions resulting from the research of all who have preceded us (the Greeks, the Christians), as sources of assistance in our process of rational study [...] Given that this is so, and since the ancient philosophers already studied with great diligence the rules of reasoning (logic, method), it will be appropriate for us to dedicate our labors to the study of the works of these ancient philosophers, and if everything we find in them is reasonable, we can accept it, *and if not, those things that are not reasonable can serve as a warning and a basis for precaution.*”³¹

At a **third stage**, that of new creation based upon one’s own tradition and nourished by dialogue with other cultures, we should not allow ourselves to be blinded by the apparent splendor of a modern European philosophy that has laid the groundwork for exploring its own problems, but not for exploring the problems particular to the Arab world:

“How can Arab philosophy assimilate the experience of liberalism before the Arab world has experienced that stage, or without having done so?”³²

One more theme must be addressed at **fourth final stage**. The dialogue that can enrich each philosophical tradition must be carried out by critical and **creative philosophers** in each tradition, and not by those who simply repeat the philosophical theses that are the traditional echoes of consensus. An essential element of such a critical stance is for philosophers to assume the responsibility for addressing the ethical and political problems associated with the poverty, domination, and exclusion of large sectors of the population, especially in the Global South (in Africa, Asia, or Latin America). A critical philosophical dialogue presupposes critical philosophers, in the sense of the “critical theory”, which we in Latin America refer to our reality as Philosophy of Liberation

European Modernity has impacted cultures throughout the world through colonialism (except for China, Japan, and a few others, who were spared direct European rule). It exploited their resources, extracted information from their cultures, and discarded that which it could not absorb. When I speak of *Trans-modernity*, I am referring to a global project that

seeks to transcend European or North American Modernity. It is a project that is not post-modern, since post-Modernity is a still-incomplete critique of Modernity by European and North America. Instead, *Trans-modernity* is a task that is, in my case, expressed philosophically, whose point of departure is that which has been *discarded, devalued, and judged use-less* among global cultures, including colonized or peripheral philosophies. This project involves the development of the potential of those cultures and philosophies that have been ignored, upon the basis of their own resources, in constructive dialogue with European and North American Modernity. It is in this way that Arab philosophy, for example, could incorporate the hermeneutics of European philosophy, develop and apply them in order to discover new interpretations of the *Korán* that would make possible a new, much-needed Arab political philosophy, or Arab feminism. It will be the fruit of the Arab philosophical tradition, updated through inter-philosophical dialogue (not only with Europe, but equally with Latin America, India, China, etc.), oriented towards a *pluriversal future global philosophy*. This project is necessarily *trans-modern*, and thus also trans-capitalist.

For a long time, perhaps for centuries, the many diverse philosophical traditions will each continue to follow their own paths, but nonetheless a global analogical project of a **trans-modern pluriverse** (other than universal, and not post-modern) appears on the horizon. Now, “other philosophies” are possible, because “another world is possible” -as is proclaimed by the Zapatista Liberation Movement in Chiapas, Mexico.

Endnotes

¹Paper presented in the XXII World Congress of Philosophy (Seoul, Korea) (August 2, 2008), in the III Plenary Session on “Rethinking History of Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy”.

²*Metaphysics* I, 2; 982b 17-18.

³“Civilisation universelle et cultures nationales”, en *Histoire et Vérité*, Seuil, Paris, 1964, pp.274-288.

⁴Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1959, vol. 1-3.

⁵See Paul Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal*, Aubier, Paris, 1963.

⁶See my book *The Invention of the Americas*, Continuum, New York, 1995, 7.1. *The tlamatini*.

⁷R. Fernet-Betancourt, *Crítica intercultural de la Filosofía Latinoamericana actual*, Trotta, Madrid, 2004.

⁸P. Hountondji, Sur la philosophie africaine. *Critique de l'ethnophilosophie*, Maspero, Paris, 1977.

⁹P. Tempel, *La philosophie Bantue*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1949. See Miguel León-Portilla, *Filosofía Nahuatl*, UNAM, Mexico, 1979.

¹⁰*Sources of Chinese Tradition from earliest Times to 1600*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999, vol. 1, pp.79.

¹¹See *Confucius Analects*, trans. by Edward Slingerland, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 2003.

¹²See *Sources of Chinese Tradition from Earliest Times to 1600*, vol. 1, pp.66 ff.

¹³*Ibid.*, pp.114 ff. See Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies. A Global Theory of Intellectual Change*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass), 2000, pp.137 ff., and 272 ff.

¹⁴See *Sources of Indian Tradition from the Beginning to 1800*, Columbia University Press, New York, vol. 1. Also R. Collins, *Op. cit.*, pp.177 ff. On Japan, *Ibid.*, pp.322 ff.

¹⁵6. 12-14 (*Sources of Indian Tradition*, vol. 1, p.37).

¹⁶*Philosophy as Mankind's Self-Reflection; the Self-Realization of Reason*, in *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1970, pp.338-339 (the 73 of *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften*, Nijhoff, Haag, 1962, *Husserliana* VI, p.273). It is the same text of *The Crisis of European Sciences*, 8, pp.21 ff. (German original, pp.18 ff.). For example, the so call "Pythagoras theorem" was formulated by the Assyrian 1000 B.C. (see G. Semerano, *La favola dell'indoeuropeo*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, 2005).

¹⁷D. Sobrevilla, *Repensando la tradición de Nuestra América*, Banco Central de Reserva del Perú, Lima, 1999, p.74.

¹⁸See for example the *Lexique de la Langue Philosophique D'Ibn Sina (Avicenne)*, edited by A.-M. Goichon, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1938. The 792 different terms analyzed by the editor in 496 large format pages, provide us with an idea of the "precise terminology" of Arab *falasafa* (philosophy). The final entry is: "792. *Yaqini*: certain, known with certitude, relative to a certain knowledge [...]", and thereafter follow 15 lines of explanation with the Arabic expressions, in Arabic script, at the right hand margin.

¹⁹See the subject on Bartolomé de las Casas and the human sacrifices in my book *Política de la Liberación. Una historia mundial y crítica [Politics of Liberation. A Worldly and Critical History]*, Trotta, Madrid, 2007, pp.203 ff.

²⁰See *La symbolique du mal* (supra) by Paul Ricoeur.

²¹K. Pommeranz, *The Great Divergence. China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000.

²²Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte, Zweiter Entwurf* (1830), C, c; in *Sämtliche Werke*, Ed. J. Hoffmeister, F. Meiner, Hamburg, 1955, p.243. English

version *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction: Reason in History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.197.

²³*Ibid.*, p.210; English, p.171.

²⁴Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, in *Werke*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1970, vol. 12, p.413; *The Philosophy of History*, Colonial Press, New York, 1900, p.341.

²⁵I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, Academic Press, New York, 1980-1989, vol. 1-3.

²⁶K.-O. Apel, *Die Transformation der Philosophie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1973, vol. 1-2.

²⁷And what does the West consist of? Is it only Western Europe, and in that case where does Russia fit, which was certainly a part of the culture of the ancient *Eastern Byzantine Empire*? Is its origin in Greece? But this too is problematic because for Greece the rest of Europe was as barbarous as other regions were to the North of Macedonia.

²⁸See the book of R. Collins quoted *supra*.

²⁹Icaria-Antrazyt, Barcelona, 2001.

³⁰Trotta, Madrid, 2001.

³¹A. Yabri, *Crítica de la razón árabe*, pp.157-158.

³²*Ibid.*, p.159.

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