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 The Multidimensionality of Comparative Philosophy
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The Multidimensionality of Comparative Philosophy – Its Methodological Significance and Interdisciplinary Application

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I. The necessity of comparative philosophy as a way of thinking

Comparative philosophy originated in the United States in the 1950s, with conferences and seminars regularly held at the University of Hawaii. In the 1960s, notable Japanese philosophers such as Suzuki Daisetz, Nakamura Hajime, and Saigusa Mitsuyoshi participated, contributing significantly to the field. Over time, Comparative Philosophy spread to various regions, including East Asia, North America, and Europe.¹ Its foundational method is that of *comparative thought*, inspired by comparative literature studies.

The late 1970s saw the emergence of intercultural philosophy in Central Europe. Rooted in Western Phenomenology, this approach includes political philosophy on the basis of African and Islamic studies, socio-phenomenological studies of Latin America, and phenomenological interpretations of East Asian thought within a Heideggerian framework. Today, there are diverse branches within intercultural philosophy and other related fields, such as global philosophy.

One frequent criticism of traditional comparative philosophy is that it either often results in superficial comparisons and selective enumerations of similarities and differences or tends to relativize various schools of thought without philosophically developing their respective ideas. This criticism reflects a common oversight from past decades, leading some to devalue the comparative method altogether.² However, let us delve deeper into the comparative thought process to appreciate its potential.

Let's examine Plato's foundational philosophical exercises in his Academy.³ He introduces the concept of the One, or *to hen* (τὸ ἓν). Note: The One is distinctly different from Plotinus's *to hen* (τὸ ἓν), which represents an all-encompassing transcendent absolute. In Plato's context, the One refers to something, such as [A]. [A] is [A]; an identity is defined. Alongside the One, Plato introduces a second component, the Great and the Small, which he refers to as the "Indefinite Dyad." This can also be expressed in terms of long-short, high-low, etc. These two terms represent differentiation; however, Plato's [Indefinite Dyad] is a set of two in a relationship of coexistence and differentiation. The One

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as identity and the Indefinite Dyad as differentiation intertwine and develop into a philosophical reflection.

Let us consider Laozi's Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching), chapter 2:⁴

"Everyone under heaven defines beauty as beautiful; goodness as good. This is the beginning of the fall of goodness and beauty into evil. [...] Ease and difficulty, length and breadth, in front and behind, bipolar beings are in harmony; they resonate in mutual inclination."

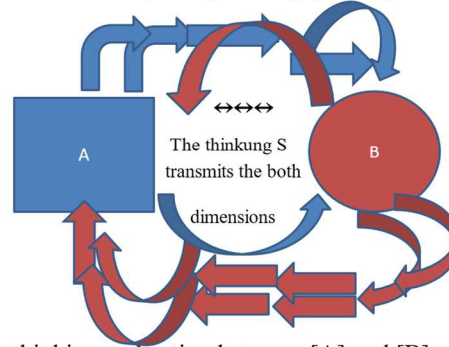
People often define things only formally, using words and categories. Everyone values what is strong, best, and great, while the opposite is considered minor, less valued, and is often forgotten. This approach does not align with the way of truth, the *dao*. The *dao* encompasses bipolar beings; each pair is alive within a relationship. This relationship is harmonious.

In this context, the essence of comparative reflections is revealed: comparison does not aim at discriminating or selecting only what is strong, long, best, or rich. Instead, the other, the opposite, and the contrary coexist in a relationship. Comparative philosophy reflectively and cautiously examines the relationship between different ideas within the same or similar subjects. It identifies common ground (an identifiable one) while acknowledging the differences between each idea (between two or more).⁵

Let us consider the framework of comparative philosophy. Our thinking and acting self exists between different dimensions, between [A] and [B], within the Field of Between. Within this field, our reflection becomes dynamic. It can place itself in dimension [A] and then in [B], facilitating a transmission and mutual interaction between both dimensions. Stimulated and enriched by both dimensions, our self evolves into a multidimensional system of philosophical thinking and acting in life.

The coordination of different dimensions does not occur by having system [A] dominate [B] or by the imposition of one's framework onto the other. Instead, in the Field of Between, the self cooperates with both [A] and [B] and experiences self-transformation through this interaction.

Comparative Philosophy arises for a philosophy of a global world as a *Field of Between*, a field of mutual interaction and communication (Not the one dominates the other: each one tries to put its own position in the field of other, thinking and acting dynamically in the bipolar directions.)



[S] is a thinking and acting between [A] and [B], enables a mutual transmission in a transversal interaction to find a common ground.

II. The problems of engaging in a multicultural philosophy

[A] and [non-A], without standing in the Field of Between of the two philosophies or systems of thought in question, may sometimes instead find themselves in a Field of Isolation: 1) The self isolates the other and encloses itself within its own system. 2) The self juxtaposes part of the other with itself in a fragmented manner. 3) The self tries to incorporate part of the other into its own existing framework. In scenarios 2 and 3, syncretism occurs. This can be a pathway for intercultural interactions that result in several questions, leading to further significant reflections. For example, consider a thinker attempting to interpret the idea of world cycles found in Seneca and Stoic thought via the Hindu conception of cyclical time found in Hindu thought. Initially, this might seem to correspond to a dynamic interaction between the two different philosophies. However, *without a reflective comparison of both systems* to understand the fundamental origins of the “circulation of time” concept in Stoicism and Hindu thought, a syncretic, mixed interpretation arises. In Hindu thought, the circulation of time includes the reincarnation and transmigration which is integral to Indian philosophy. In Stoicism, this is not the case.

A successful transversal reflection in different systems of thought and cultures takes place when the thinker examines the same (or similar) subject by means of comparing the analytical aspect consistently.⁶

Another model connects Heidegger's concepts of Being and Nothingness with the *mu* (無) of Zen Buddhism. In Heidegger's *Being and Time* and his early works, time progresses toward a 'fall into Nothingness' (Ab-grund)⁷, whereby Being infinitely continues as the foundation of all existence. When this structure is coupled with Mahayana Buddhism's conception of time, which emphasizes the vanishing of time from moment to moment in accordance with the principle of *anitya* (the

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impermanence and inconsistency of all things), there is a risk of missing a fundamental philosophical point.

In Buddhism, the inconsistency and impermanence of time and being are principles, not mere passing appearances. In contrast, Heidegger's vanishing of time is an appearance, while being as the foundation of all things is that which exists consistently. Furthermore, *mu* is not equivalent to "nothingness." Literally translated, it is "nothingness," but semantically, it means "an openness without any frame," thus indicating unlimited openness.⁸ This cannot be equated with Heidegger's *Nichts* as a radical nothingness.

A crucial remark is necessary when reflecting on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* from the perspective of comparative philosophy. There is an intercultural philosophical interpretation that reinterprets Hegel's entire work through the Mahayana Buddhist concepts of compassion and the unity of body and mind.⁹ These concepts are however not originally part of Hegel's framework. Only by considering Hegel's term *Anderssein* (*otherness*; perhaps better rendered as "being other") in a conceptual interplay between the spirit of Hegelian philosophy and that of Mahayana Buddhism can one attempt to merge these two worlds, the principles and fundamental aspects of which are entirely different. It is rare for subjects not addressed by Hegel to be interpreted through Mahayana Buddhist views and thoughts. The integration of Hegel's original ideas with Buddhist thought often involves juxtaposing *Anderssein* with the concept of compassion to encompass all thinking into a unified whole.

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A difficulty arises when considering Hegel's original work: the essential spirit of struggle and confronting between thesis and antithesis is a solitary one, a spirit of pure rationality, striving to become an absolute spirit without the involvement of others. In contrast, the spirit of compassion in Mahayana Buddhist remains grounded in the real world, coexisting with others in their suffering. Although a syncretic interpretation is possible on the basis of individual liberty, without a fundamental understanding of each concept and their correlative connections, it is not easily achieved. Especially when ideas from diverse sources and cultural backgrounds do not neatly correspond with one another, it is necessary to address contradictions step by step. Comparative-philosophical thinking can offer queries, hints, and solutions for the nuanced confrontations of certain subjects. For example, by exploring Hegel's dialectics (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) alongside the Buddhist dialectic of harmony, comparative philosophy can foster renewed understanding between these differing worlds in a fruitful way.

III. Comparative philosophy in interdisciplinary exchange with physics: comparative thinking facilitates dynamic interaction

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A) The fundamentals of physics: measurement and observation

In physics, an observer identifies an object for observation. This object is real and exists in space. The question “what is space *per se*, independent of any object?” is meaningless in the context of physics. Physics defines all things and categories that can be quantified as observable objects. Similarly, questioning, “what is an observer in itself?” falls outside the realm of physics. An observer, a human being, interacts with an object by distinguishing and analyzing it.

Physics does not address the following subjects: the act of observation itself, the nature of the observer, or the relationship between the observer and the observed object.

B) The fundamentals of philosophy: considering and reflecting on the essence of things.

A fundamental act of philosophy involves reflecting on our own reflecting self both *per se* and *pro se*.

Heinz von Foerster (1911–2002), an Austrian-born physicist and cyberneticist who founded the Institute for Biological Computer Experiments in the USA, increasingly confronted philosophical questions related to physics as his career progressed. He described his intellectual journey as moving him “from a physicist to a metaphysicist.” To truly understand the act of observing and reflecting on physics *per se*, he argued that a physicist must *must leave* the dimension of an observing physical objects. Most physicists, however, remain “observers of the first order,”¹¹ focusing solely on physical observations.

To transition from a physicist to a metaphysicist, one must adopt a higher dimension of thinking, where one can critically overview and understand the nature of physics itself. Foerster termed this dimension the standpoint of the “observer of the second order.”¹² This logic aligns with the philological meaning of “meta:” moving beyond a current position to a higher one. Through careful reflection, the thinker examines the previous dimension from a critical distance and grasps its essential unity. Like Aristotle, Foerster moved on to metaphysical and ontological dimensions after completing his “Physics.”

Questions Beyond the Scope of Physics:

Let us consider questions that are not addressed by physics: Measurement, the basis of physics—what does it mean to observe a measured object? What is “space”? Is it the “container” of the object? What is an observer?

Philosophy, on the other hand, deals with the nature of observation itself, the significance of observation, and the significance of the observer’s actions. The importance of observing place becomes clear when we consider the relationship between the observed object, the observer, and the

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environment surrounding this observation. I will refer to the correlation of these three categories as the integrative Field. Interdisciplinary philosophy, in cooperation with physics, aims to critically examine this Field. The philosophical perspective intervenes among these three components and facilitates interaction through reflective thinking, creating a conceptual space I call the [Field of Between]. This serves as a *topos* for understanding the actual interactions among all components within this conceptual space.

These interactions among the three points occur on a higher dimension, that of the observer of the 2nd order, at the metaphysical level. In the 20th century, some physicists, who positioned physics as the central science, regarded their cognitive framework as the absolute one within the natural sciences. This perspective is known as physicalism.¹³ As a result, knowledge and cognition “outside the jurisdiction of natural science” were undervalued and often ignored. However, with the advancement of information networking and the emergence of a global community as a single “field,” is it reasonable for each field to become increasingly isolated? Although each operates as a system within its own domain, chaos arises from disordered knowledge within the larger global system. Sensational information lacking depth proliferates worldwide, leading to random combinations of half-baked logic incessantly announcing itself to us via our smartphones.

I would like to present an example of interdisciplinary philosophy and how it is possible to develop scientific knowledge of physics into a new epistemology: The phenomenon of “quantum entanglement” and teleportation has been demonstrated and theorized since the 1980s. A quantum is a physical entity that cannot be further divided. However, when a photon (light quantum) is emitted, it splits into two parts, forming a “double photon” (Pietschmann), and these parts behave in an interrelated manner. According to Anton Zeilinger’s theory, a quantum is “the smallest unit of all elements from which a world and universe can be constructed.” Yet, even this “most minimal unit” can split into *quantum twin brothers*,¹⁴ each exhibiting interrelatedness with itself and others.

In classical physics, it was believed that existing entities, such as the mechanisms of the human body, possess complete and stable systems. However, even the smallest elements constituting these entities are dynamic, capable of splitting and demonstrating interrelation among their parts. Observing this phenomenon, Herbert Pietschmann, a theoretical physicist from Vienna, presented a contrasting view to that of Zeilinger. While Zeilinger viewed teleportation as a mystery in modern physics and referred to the split particles as “twin brothers” with measurable substance, Pietschmann argued that the split quantum in teleportation should be understood as a “double particle,” specifically a pair of double photons—a *unity of two within one*.¹⁵ Their physical movement (spin) is real and measurable, yet they are never fixed to any substantial state as they can vanish within their spacetime.

Pietschmann highlighted the non-local correlated cooperation of split quanta in his interdisciplinary

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thesis, introducing the term [Aporon] as the *logic of aporia*. Concerning the phenomenon of quantum splitting, two significant aporias arise:¹⁶

1. A photon, traditionally considered indivisible, splits into two photons, challenging established knowledge that particles cannot be further divided.
2. The paired photons, photon-1 and photon-2, exchange information between them in a superluminal dimension. This contradicts Einstein's theory of relativity, which posits that nothing can exceed the speed of light. Superluminal information exchange is deemed impossible.

Both aporias are addressed through the interdisciplinary principle of the [Aporon], which demands coping with contradictory phenomena. The crux of this theoretical approach demands a renewal of traditional theories of physics.

Regarding 1), the split particles do not divide into two distinct entities but remain a unified *one-double-particle*, maintaining their correlation.

Regarding 2), both components of the *one-double-particle* exchange interactive information, even at superluminal speeds, *without violating physical laws* because they remain within their dimension, namely the Field of the *one-double-particle*.

The splitting of subatomic particles, previously considered the smallest units of physical reality, challenges the established principle of physical substance and entity. Instead of being discrete entities, a split photon *is a correlated being capable of vanishing*. The two parts of a *one-double-particle* do not exist in isolation. Teleportation experiments demonstrate that split particles open a *field of mutual interaction and transmission*.

From an interdisciplinary philosophical perspective, this represents an objective reality that marks a turning point in philosophical and scientific thinking. Moving away from the principle of consistent substance and invariant entities that has dominated Western philosophy and sciences, we now enter a realm of mutual interaction and communication based on the principle of *correlative relationships* for *co-existential fields*.

IV. What enables comparative-philosophical thought?

Reflecting on the previous section, we observe that all philosophical inquiry begins with the recognition of identity and difference. This recognition stems from comparative thinking between

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these two categories. One positions oneself between the categories of [A: identity] and [non-A: difference], contemplating both. This concept activates what we may term the [Field of Between]: positioning oneself within the dimension of [A] while considering [non-A] and engaging with [non-A] while reflecting on [A].

Through this process, one comprehends both [A *and* non-A], acknowledging their categorical differences and their interrelatedness as complementary opposites. This realization underscores that the opposition of [A *and* non-A], despite their differences, belong to a common ground: the reflective development of thought in pursuit of truth.

V. The contribution of metaphysics to interdisciplinary philosophy

In Huayen-/Kegon Buddhist philosophy, a metaphysical principle states that each part of a particular being reflects the entirety of universal truth, and conversely, that an all-encompassing entity of universal truth reflects every particular being within itself. As such, a particular entity and the universal entity are not distinctly identifiable *per se*; they engage in mutual reflection as things *pro se*—things unto themselves.¹⁷ This concept implies a teleological unity in the essence of all beings: every individual harbors an inherent potential for the complete—entelechia—development of its nature. In this sense, each individual is an indispensable part of the whole. When our perspective lacks insight into ontological truth, we tend to view things solely in terms of material gain, reducing them to objects fit only for exploitation. If our existence is driven solely by the pursuit of power, life becomes a perpetual cycle of violence and war. Violence stands in stark opposition to the coexistence offered by peace; the two are fundamentally incompatible. Nonetheless, one can transform violence into peaceful coexistence with insight and inquiry: What are our lives, and what are they for? Restoring fractured relationships between our adversaries and ourselves to a peaceful coexistence necessitates dwelling in the [Field of Between]. This involves understanding the interplay of identity and difference between violence and peace, between the pursuit of power for exploitation and humble coexistence in a productive life.

Endnotes

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比較哲学の多次元性

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1. Significance of comparative thinking in philosophy, 2. Entity of Comparative Philosophy: [The Field of Between], 3. Interdisciplinary application in physics, 4. Heinz von Foerster: [Observer of the 2nd order], 5. Herbert Pietschmann: [Aporon: coping with contradictions]

比較思想/比較哲学 Comparative Philosophy は、東洋と西洋の思想を結ぶ哲学の一環として、1950年代にアメリカで発祥。ハワイ大学を拠点とする定期的学会には、鈴木大拙、中村 元、三枝充恵をはじめ広く国際間の人材が集い、北米、日本と東アジア、環太平洋地帯に定着した。1990年代以降、中部欧州では東洋思想の一部をハイデッガー等、現象学系西洋哲学の一部に組み入れ解釈する路線、イスラム・アフリカの政治哲学・中南米の社会思想等、種々の分野が諸文化哲学 Intercultural Philosophy として成立した。ITネットワークの拡大と共にグローバル世界の哲学への求めは各国で高まっている。他方、そこには問題も多い。「東西文化の類似性と差異の列挙に終始する比較思想」は既に過去のものとなって久しいが、Global Philosophy といい国際哲学といい、多種多様な世界の思想の一部をランダムに取り上げては折衷思考を行う傾向。そこでは一種〈我田引水〉的で安易な〈世界は一つ・統一哲学〉への傾斜も生じ易い。

私は、「比較という思考法は哲学という学の根幹を支えるものである」と考える。〈哲学〉とは既存の西洋哲学史の枠組みにとどまらず、人間の思考と行動、文化・社会の全てを省察し、得られた認識を各人が世界の一員として実践しゆくことである。その際、思考し行動する自己は、比較考察の対象、[A], [B]の〈間〉の場に介在し、思考・行動のテーマを A-B 間に共通の何らかに定めては、[A]の立場になりかわって A を会得し、[B]の立場になりかわっては B を明察する。このダイナミズムを反復し、A-B 間に介在しつつ、定めたテーマでの自己の思考と行動の体系を創成して行く。私はこのメソッドを〈The Field of 'Between'/間の場・相互干渉の場での創成〉と名付ける。創成の対象は〈哲学〉・〈人生〉・〈思考・行動の在り方〉・はたまた〈ヘーゲル哲学解釈〉でも〈後期西田の場所的論理〉等の専門的テーマでもよい。本論では異分野間、「哲学と物理学」の学際交流に Field of 'Between'のメソッドがどのように応用され生かされるかを、理論物理学のピッチュマンによる量子力学認識論、〈アポロン〉の一例を引いて論究した。