
OPENING PHILOSOPHY TO THE WORLD: DERRIDA AND EDUCATION IN PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT. In this essay, Steven Burik discusses Jacques Derrida's position with regard to the place of education in philosophy within the university system, and then relates these thoughts to comparative philosophy. Philosophers find themselves constantly having to defend philosophy and the importance of teaching philosophy against pressure from the powers that be. Burik contends that the argument Derrida set forth to "protect" philosophy entails a double bind: Derrida emphasized the value and importance of philosophical thinking while at the same time criticizing the limits of philosophy, both self-mandated and externally imposed. Derrida's defense of philosophy was anything but a protection of the status quo, according to Burik. Derrida ultimately argued that the teaching of philosophy and philosophy itself should be inherently open to new developments. Burik relates Derrida's defense of philosophy and attack on mainstream philosophy to comparative philosophy, demonstrating that both argue for an expansion of thinking beyond the narrow Western confines of philosophy as "pure" reason or rationality by showing how alterity always inserts itself, and that both seek to give this alterity a valid place in educational systems.

INTRODUCTION

In light of the recent translations of Jacques Derrida's main work on education and philosophy, *Du droit à la philosophie*, I propose to discuss his thoughts with regard to the place of education in philosophy, in particular within today's university system, and relate these thoughts to comparative philosophy.¹

Derrida has argued that philosophy should definitely be taught in secondary schools and universities, yet nowadays philosophers find themselves constantly having to defend philosophy and the teaching of it against ever-increasing pressures from the powers that be. The value of philosophy is no longer obvious in modern societies, which are increasingly based on the structures of capitalism and a market economy. This modern influence of commerce is increasingly evident in universities, where there has been a decrease in support for and popularity of disciplines or research having no immediate economic value. Against these threats philosophy has had and will have to defend itself time and again. I will show that in Derrida's case this defense is anything but a protection of the status quo. Derrida's "protection" of philosophy entails a double bind. I will first explain Derrida's double position with regard to the teaching of philosophy through examining his views concerning the place of the university as a site of reason and thinking, concepts that he questioned and broadened. While Derrida defended the university as an institution, he attacked its current position. In analyzing his

1. Jacques Derrida, *Du droit à la philosophie* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1990), translated in two parts as *Who's Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy I* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002) and *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy II* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), trans. Jan Plug and others. These works will be cited in the text as *RP I* and *RP II*, respectively, for all subsequent references.

views on this issue, I will show how this part of his thinking is coherent with his wider work. Finally, I will introduce comparative philosophy into the discussion, since I think that it is here that we can find ways of thinking that actively broaden our understanding of philosophy and what an education in philosophy entails.

This “transformation” of our understanding of philosophy does not mean that philosophy as traditionally understood is totally wrong or to be discarded. Although philosophy in principle knows of no limit to its objects of study, Derrida was not a relativist or nihilist, and he implied that not every kind of worldview or way of life automatically has the status of philosophy. While constantly questioning philosophy, deconstruction also affirms it and defends philosophy against “anything that might come along to threaten this integrity, dissolve, dissect, or disperse the identity of the philosophical as such” (*RP II*, 170). I offer this comment to counter the common conception that Derrida’s thinking is just a simple destruction of the metaphysical, logocentric tradition without anything to offer in its place. Instead I will show that his attacks function in multiple ways and result in what I characterize as Derrida’s double bind: while he defended philosophical thinking, he simultaneously attacked mainstream philosophy.

I will thus focus on the openness that philosophy itself and an education in philosophy should exhibit, explaining that this openness must give rise to a greater space for comparative philosophy. But arguing along Derridean lines, this greater space entails a double bind as well. I will then use this idea of openness in philosophy to argue for the need to incorporate different approaches to philosophy into the educational system.

DERRIDA ON EDUCATION IN PHILOSOPHY

Derrida’s works on education and philosophy defend philosophy and its importance while at the same time criticizing both the limits philosophy has imposed on itself as well as the limits imposed by external forces. While many of these works focus specifically on the threats to philosophy and its teaching in France at the time Derrida was writing, they have implications that reach far beyond that particular time and place.

Derrida understood the modern university as a thoroughly Western institution largely based on the nineteenth-century model of the German university, which was itself a restructured version of pre-Enlightenment universities. The modern university has developed into different departments, faculties, and the like, all dealing in their own fashion with their own subjects. As its foundation or *raison d’être*, the modern university has the principle of reason or rationality. This overarching unifier is, ideally, embodied in (the faculty of) philosophy, and so philosophy has a priority status (that is, in the ideal situation, for this position of

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philosophy is now under attack by other disciplines). Yet, as Derrida explained, the principle of reason itself remains unquestioned, raising the issue of what grounds this foundational principle. He argued that "an event of foundation can never be comprehended merely within the logic that it founds. . . . The origin of the principle of reason, which is also implicated in the origin of the university, is not rational" (*RP II*, 109). This conclusion leads to an awareness that the university should acknowledge its position as an *institution* of knowledge, truth, and reason. This also means that *as* an institution the university influences work carried out in its name, and that entails a certain responsibility that I will discuss further later in this essay. This conclusion at the same time means that the particular forms of Knowledge and Reason that have exemplified and identified Western philosophy, and thus Western universities in general, should not be closed off preemptively from other ways of knowing. The university cannot shut itself off from this responsibility and needs to open up its own rigid structures. The university is a place where responsibility means responsiveness to different situations and to different times. Achieving this requires not only more interdisciplinary activities, but also an *intradisciplinary* transformation of the teachings of philosophy (and other disciplines) in response to new objects of study and new or different ideas that come from outside the original university circle.

Responsibility is not primarily toward the state or toward the powers that be. A university needs open discussion and opportunities for research that are not merely "end-oriented," but more or less "fundamental" or "basic." Although Derrida complicated the distinction between basic or fundamental (that is, objective or disinterested or "useless") research on the one hand, and end-oriented (or "useful") research on the other,² he nevertheless argued for the need to restore opportunities to pursue research and knowledge now prohibited or marginalized by forces both inside and outside the university. Undertaking this is not unproblematic; it should entail at the very least an awareness that *all* research and knowledge have implications beyond their own confines and actively take responsibility for this awareness. All research and knowledge are "committed," but we can be responsibly aware of the implications of this possible commitment (*RP II*, 146–150). The decision to accept this responsibility is one that philosophy and the university should make in order to ensure their viability. But this decision, according to Derrida, cannot be comprehended solely by the logic of reason as the fundamental ground of the university.

Derrida argued for a reinterpretation of the purpose of both the university and of philosophy in it. Philosophy is no longer the autonomous discipline it long pretended to be. Derrida argued that philosophy cannot be separated from its institutions, which are the university, schools, disciplines, media and publishing

2. See, for example, *RP II*, 142 ff, where Derrida maintained that "this opposition between the basic and the end-oriented is of real but limited relevance. It is difficult to maintain this opposition with thoroughgoing conceptual as well as practical rigor." Further on, Derrida noted: "One can no longer distinguish between the technological on the one hand and the theoretical, the scientific, and the rational on the other."

industries, and, most importantly, language.³ According to Derrida, since there is no neutral or universal language, any natural language in which philosophy is taught should also be seen as an institution of philosophy. This shows that philosophy is not the universal discipline of pure reason it has always presented itself as, but that *institutions* of philosophy (including, and foremost among these, language) are a major influence on the content or meaning of philosophies, and not just a means to their distribution.

Derrida questioned the structure of the university just as he had the structure of language. Language is indispensable, but it is not neutral and is easily corrupted. Language readily (and maybe even necessarily) becomes an instrument of *a certain way* of thinking instead of a tool for thinking in general. Language does not fulfill its promise of pure medium. In the same way, Derrida argued that the university does not provide “unmediated” teaching. Many factors increase the chance of the university not being able or willing to provide instruction covering the widest possible range of philosophical thinking, because more often than not philosophy in the university limits itself to what mainstream Western philosophers have considered it should be.

Read in this way, Derrida seemed to have been doing some sort of metaphilosophy, yet the important feature of this metaphilosophy is exactly that it is no longer strictly philosophical, or purely rational (which does not mean that it is irrational), in that no higher principle of reason or ground is evoked or insinuated, but an indeterminacy. From this indeterminacy spring the decision to open up and the responsibility for this opening up, which are thus at the same time inside and outside of philosophy. The rationality of Western philosophy is not so much to be replaced by some higher order or principle; rather, it is to be seen as one form of thinking among others.

This is where I think comparative philosophy has an important role to play, since it seeks to establish that the inevitable influences from different cultures should not be seen as a hindrance to philosophy; indeed, such influences should be incorporated in order to realize philosophy’s utmost potential, which is manifested in the richness of diversity that is responsible for different philosophies. This diversity should be guarded and developed. What Derrida saw as the main lack in (the teaching of) philosophy is thus its one-sided approach and the refusal to acknowledge this one-sidedness.

In the same way, the assaults from various other disciplines within the university and from forces outside of the university on diversity in teaching and research in academia — especially (but not only) in the area of philosophy — are also, and not unimportantly so, challenges to comparative philosophy. The

3. Although Derrida acknowledged the fact that philosophy is not to be limited to its institutions, and always has to have the freedom to question these institutions (see *RP II*, 170–171), it is nevertheless practically, historically (especially since Kant), and to a large extent philosophically bound by institutions that regulate its dissemination, such as the university, media, the publishing industry, and so on. And *as language, or writing*, philosophy is institutional as such since the necessary recourse to language disappoints all efforts to do philosophy without mediation (see *RP I*, 28).

possibility for dissent and for diversity of interpretations and topics needs to be guarded and expanded within the university system if comparative philosophy is to make any headway.

To reiterate, the main force of Derrida's work is the call to open up philosophy and education in philosophy to what is usually considered to be outside of it: "We stand opposed to whatever would prohibit philosophy from. . . opening itself up to new objects in a way that knows no limit of principle, from recalling that it was already present there where no one wanted to acknowledge it" (*RP II*, 170). This force of prohibition could take many forms and is not just limited to state power or other legal prohibitions, but ranges from educational aspects (such as lack of support for research), to media and publishing industries, to philosophers themselves who oppose any widening of, or incursion into, the strictly philosophical by something they see as being "outside."

Seen in this institutional light, the crisis of philosophy is necessarily the crisis of the teaching of philosophy, where we can no longer define clearly and perpetuate the idea of philosophy as a purely Western discipline. This situation leads to a double bind, as noted previously: On the one hand, we must protect philosophy against the ongoing onslaught of other disciplines as well as forces outside of the university, for example, by the "State and by a certain liberal logic of the marketplace."⁴ On the other hand, this protection of philosophy is actually an attack on a certain idea of philosophy and on philosophical protectionism. The defenders of the status quo in philosophy and its teaching are criticized for not allowing anything new to "invade" philosophy — that is, for structurally denying and marginalizing anything that does not fit their picture of philosophy or of how, where, and when it should be taught, and thereby denying new or different ways of thinking a proper place within philosophy, as well as denying other disciplines the right to criticize philosophy.

Derrida's criticism entails a different understanding of education in philosophy and of the university system as a whole. It raises the question of the university as a defender of a *certain type* of Western logic, rationality, and reason, as foundation. Against this idea, but not against foundations as such, the university should be a place that is less universalistic, and more open to "planetary thinking," to use Martin Heidegger's expression.⁵ Derrida played with the Heideggerian notion of "thinking" and the idea of a "community of thought" replacing that of "traditional" philosophy.⁶ This "community of thought" entails expanding the notion of thinking beyond the narrow Western confines of philosophy as "pure" reason, but also beyond the confines of technological and economic end-oriented reason. Yet this thinking is not irrational because it challenges Western forms of

4. Jacques Derrida, *Points. . . : Interviews, 1974–1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf and others (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995), 411–412.

5. Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1967), 424, my translation. I take the "universalistic" approach in this context to mean the extrapolation of Western values and systems of education to other parts of the world.

6. Although Derrida's use of the term is not exactly like Heidegger's, the comparison is still useful.

rationality. As the specific Western form of rationality, "reason is only one species of thinking" (*RP II*, 148).

Taking this "thinking" as his background, Derrida called for the university to rebuild itself as a place of "reflection" (*RP II*, 154), which entails a widening in the sense that the university should also reflect on itself and its own presuppositions as an institution. If it is to preserve its viability, then the university should decide to allow research that does not fit its categories, under the assumption that on reflection it will find its own confines too narrow, especially in the field of philosophy. As Derrida said, "*Philosophy has no horizon*, if the horizon is, as its name indicates, a limit, if 'horizon' means a line that encircles or delimits a perspective" (*RP I*, 16, emphasis in original).

SITUATING EDUCATION IN PHILOSOPHY IN THE CONTEXT OF DECONSTRUCTION

Derrida's ideas about teaching philosophy and about how institutions influence both the teaching of philosophy and philosophy itself are coherent with his wider work, which is a challenge to Western philosophy itself. Deconstruction is a challenge to and a critique of certain structures and the way that they impose themselves on our thinking, but at the same time deconstruction is an affirmation of the necessity of thinking and of exposing these structures. If we take Derrida's ideas about the "subject" as an example, we see that it is a matter of de-constructing, not just of undermining or demolishing:

To deconstruct the subject does not mean to deny its existence. There are subjects, "operations" or "effects" (*effets*) of subjectivity. This is an incontrovertible fact. To acknowledge this does not mean, however, that the subject is what it *says* it is. The subject is not some meta-linguistic substance or identity, some pure *cogito* of self-presence; it is always inscribed in language. My work does not, therefore, destroy the subject; it simply tries to resituate it.⁷

Derrida's work is thus not simply negative; it is an affirmation as well. It does not simply destroy something to do away with it or to be replaced by something else. Derrida always tried to show things are not as easy as they are presented to be, or they are not as straightforward as our common sense assumes. Yet this does not amount to a simple denial of certain concepts, principles, and the like; it is more a question of complicating what is taken for granted, pointing to what has been overlooked in establishing identities.

In this way Derrida always saw himself as both inside and outside of philosophy. He remained inside because he often asked the same questions as other philosophers, and because he wanted to expand the notion of philosophy to encompass more ways of thinking. He was outside because he, like Heidegger, identified philosophy with Western metaphysics and ontotheology, and similarly tried to overcome this in a certain way. He also was positioned outside of philosophy as the relentless questioning and thinking taking place under the generic name of deconstruction assumes many forms that are not easily identifiable

7. Derrida quoted in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 125 (emphasis in original).

within the stricter versions of philosophy. Thus he was often ostracized from the community of “real,” or academic, philosophers.

Deconstructions create an awareness of the fact that any ideal objectivity, or transcendental signified, is embedded and thus indebted to the signifier that points to it and to the signifying structure in general. This includes all structures of institutionalization, up to the point where signifier and signified can no longer be separated, which eventually means that the transcendental signified is denied. Translated to education, this means that philosophy and education cannot be separated, “deconstruction. . . has therefore in principle always concerned the apparatus and function of teaching in general, the apparatus and function of philosophy in particular and par excellence” (*RP I*, 73). So what Derrida did is in principle and of necessity work on what philosophy has always considered secondary and of no real importance to its content and meaning, that is, signifying structures in general and those influencing philosophical work in particular. Thus coming back to the topic of education, we can say that language, teaching, and institutions of knowledge (and therefore of power) such as the university, are exactly such signifying structures and Derrida’s intention is in every case to show how they influence and to a great extent even constitute philosophy.

Since the insertion of alterity into the field of philosophy proper is what Derrida espoused, the notion of “otherness,” or alterity, in his work is complex but fundamental.⁸ He maintained that deconstruction “is always deeply concerned with the ‘other’ of language” and that “the critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the ‘other’ and the ‘other of language’.”⁹ The problem with the concept of the “other” seems to be how it can possibly have any effect on the self since if it is the other of language, then it is also the other of all our reference or signifying structures, and is thus inaccessible. As Derrida said, “every other is completely other.”¹⁰ What is “other” always escapes our efforts at appropriation, yet it seems constitutive of our being while remaining ever singular and evasive. It is thus exemplary of the double bind we find in so much of Derrida’s work, the combination of possibility and impossibility.

To come back to the supposedly total and radical alterity of what is considered “other,” Derrida complicated this position. In *Aporias* he argued that Heidegger’s Dasein cannot be understood totally in terms of its capacity for dying (*Sein zum Tode*), its possibility of not being there. For if this death is completely other to Dasein, it can never become constitutive to it. Therefore, death is never totally other from the living Dasein — there is always dying in living. For comparative thinking this is useful since it tells us that what is other is never really so radically

8. See, for example, J. Hillis Miller, “Derrida’s Others,” in *Applying: To Derrida*, ed. John Brannigan, Ruth Robbins, and Julian Wolfreys (London: Macmillan, 1996), 153–170.

9. Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*, 123.

10. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), 22.

other as to preclude the possibility of some sort of communication or encounter. Other and self are always mutually inserted in each other.

What is "other," however, is not something we can summon with our language; it has to come of its own accord, "yet it is necessary to prepare for it; for to allow the coming of the entirely other, passivity, a certain kind of resigned passivity for which everything comes down to the same, is not suitable. Letting the other come is not inertia opening to anything whatever."¹¹ This reminds one immediately of Heidegger's *Gelassenheit*, which is also not a passive attitude; it is an active opening up of your own thought structures that is necessary for other ways of thinking to find an entrance. Derrida argued for a similar attitude, a responsible opening. Deconstructions provide this opening "by bending [the] rules with respect for the rules themselves in order to allow the other to come or to announce its coming in the opening of this dehiscence."¹² The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "dehiscence" as "gaping, opening by divergence of parts" and states that the term is mostly used in connection with plant life.¹³ For Derrida it is the space created by opening up our thought structures, by deconstructing what is supposedly an identity, and this is what makes any intercultural encounter between the self and the other possible.

The status of the other is therefore not something that can be subsumed in Hegelian fashion under the category of the same.¹⁴ In the closing lines of *Psyche: Inventions of the Other*, Derrida said that "the call of the other is a call to come, and that happens only in multiple voices."¹⁵ His point here is that any encounter with what is other can never beforehand be appropriated; it is always an encounter with multiple voices and thus structurally open-ended. Yet it is always there. Of interest for philosophy and education in philosophy is what Geoffrey Bennington has summed up well by saying that in Derrida's work "the point. . . is not to reintegrate remains into philosophy, but. . . to introduce a radical nondialectisable alterity into the heart of the same."¹⁶

Another interesting aspect of the idea of the "other," or alterity, in Derrida in relation to comparative philosophy is that he seemed to link these notions closely to those of duty and responsibility. Its irreducible singularity makes every "other" irreplaceable, and as such, we are responsible for it. Reminiscent of Emmanuel

11. Jacques Derrida, "Psyche: Inventions of the Other," trans. Catherine Porter, in *Reading de Man Reading*, eds. Lindsay Waters and Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 55.

12. *Ibid.*, 59–60.

13. Oxford English Dictionary online, <http://oed.com>.

14. G.W.F. Hegel was especially keen on such appropriations; the whole dialectical system revolves around appropriating differences into an ever larger identity. Chinese thought, to Hegel, was no exception and consequently seen as an early stage in the development of philosophy that, of course, ended with Hegel himself.

15. Derrida, "Psyche," 62.

16. Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 291.

Levinas, Derrida extended the notion of responsiveness to the other toward that of responsibility. We have already seen that this notion of responsibility is a major feature of Derrida's thinking through education. Responsibility is necessarily an experience of and journey through a fundamental aporia.¹⁷ Therefore taking responsibility can never be reduced to following a specific program or logic because then it would not be a decision. That is also why the "thinking" that Derrida spoke about is both inside and outside of philosophy proper: "while it may not be certain that this thinking is philosophical through and through, it certainly implies philosophy and philosophical knowledge. It perhaps is not limited to philosophical knowledge, but it is impossible without that knowledge" (*RP II*, 168). The thinking of the philosophical is no longer strictly philosophical itself. To fully understand this, I think comparative philosophy or thinking could be valuable.

COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY'S PLACE

Although Derrida did not often speak about "other cultures," his work in general questions Western philosophy and conceptuality in the traditional form it has developed over the centuries — that is, the onto-theological, logocentric way of thinking. Similarly, to question the ingrained Western structures of conceptuality is, or should be, one of the merits and tasks of comparative philosophy.

As has to some extent been the misfortune of comparative philosophy, Derrida's work is often not taken seriously within the university system, where a defense of the status quo and thus of the original foundations of the university and philosophy still resist any changes. As a critic of philosophy and literature Derrida may enjoy a certain status in some departments,¹⁸ but outside of these the overall influence of his thinking, especially on the modern university *structure*, is marginal or negligible, and Derrida's ideas of what the university as a place of research and teaching should be(-come) are, within the reception of his wider work, largely overlooked. Similarly, the approach to philosophy that is expounded in comparative philosophy goes largely unnoticed. Comparative philosophy is usually taken as just another subset of philosophy. It is my intention to show that comparative thinking can alternatively be a criticism of the mainstream Western philosophy that still dominates philosophy education.

Derrida's relentless efforts point to the question of *opening* philosophy to the world, and not of *imposing* philosophy on the world. I think again of the usual marginalization of other than Western philosophy within the university system of philosophy departments. But within comparative philosophy as a distinct discipline there is also a tendency to accept authority of interpretation, to let one

17. Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 41.

18. We must remember that much of current postmodernism and deconstruction, although usually connected to Derrida, are not necessarily part of his thinking. Derrida on numerous occasions argued against many of the interpretations his work received in academic circles, be they positive or negative. To some extent, he had to defend himself against both the strict philosophers and the deconstructionists who took off on his words.

interpretation prevail and become more powerful than others, even when textual, philosophical, or historical analyses do not really support this privilege. Chad Hansen has shown that in the necessary exercise that is the reconstruction of much of Chinese philosophy, there has been a “reappropriation” of diverse ways of thinking to Confucian standards.¹⁹ Similarly, the works of Roger Ames and David Hall, among others, have consistently attacked what were or are considered to be the dominant theories of Chinese scholarship in favor of a reinterpretation of Chinese classical thought that would be more aware of the imported Western conceptuality and thinking, and that would seek to avoid this as far as possible.²⁰

So comparative philosophy should (and does) also take a critical look at itself and open itself to dissenting, different views of how to interpret thinking in other cultures, rather than showing the same stifling one-sidedness that Western philosophy and philosophical education still exhibit.

We can see the same problem in another important part of comparative philosophy: translation. Translation of works belonging to profoundly different cultural backgrounds is always a difficult task. However, in philosophical works (even more than in other works), regardless of cultural background, language is not just a tool or medium. With Derrida we have seen that language itself is constitutive of the experience of reality and thinking. Thus the problem of comparative philosophy is how to relate different experiences in different languages through translation. The translation problematics show a major danger, but also the possibility of a major contribution of comparative thinking toward a new understanding of philosophy. Translating can be seen as one of the vital “institutions” of comparative thinking. As such, we could agree with Derrida that this institution is inevitable. The real issue is not *that* we translate, but *how* we translate, and into what sort or kind of language. In the form of ontotheological metaphysics, in whatever language, philosophers have always spoken and written “*in a certain manner, which is called philosophy, this manner of speaking and writing being of the most singular kind*” (*RP I*, 29, emphasis in original). Philosophy has thus come to be identified as a discourse that is highly specialized and specific, and even within this philosophical language there are specializations that do not lend themselves easily to translation: “Within every language, European or not, what we call ‘philosophy’ must be linked regularly and differently, according to eras, places, schools, social and socio-institutional circles, to distinct procedures among which it is often difficult to translate” (*RP I*, 29). So we should not be surprised to find that ways of thinking from profoundly different cultures are not only hard to translate into a Western language, but are impossible to translate into the Western way of thinking or doing philosophy. Only recently has comparative philosophy begun to fully understand this deeper implication of comparing and translating. It is not just a language that is translated; it is a philosophy and

19. Chad Hansen, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1992).

20. For example, see Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing: Making This Life Significant* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003).

worldview *in* it. And what is most important in comparative philosophy is the philosophy behind or rather *in* the translation. Since no translation is innocent, every translation means an interpretation. This interpretation, however, “does not begin. . . with what is commonly called translation. It *begins* as soon as *a certain type of reading* of the ‘original’ text is *instituted*” (*RP II*, 19, emphasis added). For example, we can see that earlier, but also recent, translations of the *Daodejing* have more often than not used language that is tied to, and implicitly confirms in its superiority, a philosophy that is foreign to the way of thinking of the culture from which the work is translated.²¹ We thus come to another double bind, where we acknowledge the necessity of translating, while remaining aware of its dangers and reserved as to its possibilities. In the face of this (im-)possibility and undecidability, we must take responsibility for guarding vigilantly against what Derrida would call a “reappropriation” of non-Western thinking by metaphysical forces of which one, and certainly not the least, is precisely the language we use (*RP II*, 150–151, also 153).

The similarity between Derrida’s concerns and comparative philosophy thus only holds if comparative thinking guards itself against reappropriation of non-Western ways of thinking to onto-theological or logocentric standards, against accommodation into the identifying structures of mainstream philosophy, which would amount to reducing or denying the differences between cultures and ways of thinking. Yet comparative thinking must at the same time guard itself against an overly radical relativism, whereby different cultures are beyond criticism or understanding: “Beware of the abysses and the gorges, but also of the bridges and the barriers. Beware of what opens the university to the outside and the bottomless, but also of what, closing it in on itself, would create only an illusion of closure” (*RP II*, 153). The double bind announces itself again: as we have seen, Derrida not only argued for opening up philosophy, but simultaneously warned against anything that would denounce the integrity and unity of the philosophical, or we should rather speak here now of “thinking.” Any sort of relativism that would challenge the rigor of “thinking” is thus resisted. Not “anything goes,” but at least more should go. While he argued for opening up philosophy, Derrida made definite demands of what is to be called philosophy. His expectations entail a necessary critical competence that he wanted to expand into a new or renewed enlightenment. Not just any worldview will automatically qualify as philosophy, or better yet, as thinking. A couple of passages could shed some light on this problematic double task. First of all, as Derrida said,

not every community will be called philosophical from the moment it practices *skepsis*, *epoche*, doubt, contestation (pacifist or violent, armed with discourse or other powers), irony, questioning, and so forth, regarding its constitutive bond, and thus the properness of what is proper to it. But no community will be called philosophical if it is not capable of re-examining, *in every possible fashion*, its fundamental bond. . . . (*RP I*, 17, emphasis in original)

21. For a criticism of this practice, see, for example, Ames and Hall, *Daodejing, Making This Life Significant*, 11–54.

So having a culture in the sense of a worldview pure and simple does *not* yet count as having a philosophy. We need something more. This “thinking” entails a certain sense of responsibility and responsiveness, and Derrida tried to give us an idea of what these amount to. First, he recognized that this “new” responsibility is a decision, and as such, again, it lies outside the domain of calculation and rationality. The university, as we saw earlier, is founded on a contract itself not reducible to reason. Similarly, the decision not to close itself off, to take responsibility in fields larger than its traditional domains, is to be taken by the university, and amounts to a responsiveness to alterity, or the other — that is, to the “invasive margin[s],” or the so-called outside, which threaten the traditional understanding of philosophy and under which we can of course count comparative philosophy (*RP II*, 95).

Second, this responsiveness means that we acknowledge coming from a certain place, and acknowledge other places. That is, we do not come into the dialogue without any position. Philosophy is first of all, then, “a very rich tradition, texts, a wealth of discourse, of argumentation, of . . . questions, metaphysics, regional ontologies, epistemology in the broadest sense, politics, and so forth” (*RP II*, 161). I would suggest that this concept of philosophy as a critical competence is one that we are all familiar with. It is close to a worldview or a culture, but Derrida said, rightly I think, that “without opposing them, philosophy is different from science, technology, culture” (*RP II*, 162). Philosophy is the discipline that questions these concepts by means of self-reflection. But then, Derrida also said that philosophy is that thinking which is no longer purely philosophical, or it is rather differently philosophical, in that it questions the traditionally philosophical from various standpoints not necessarily philosophical in the earlier sense. Deconstruction is one name of this thinking, which “is perhaps no longer scientific or philosophical, in the sense in which these words can be determined today. It is in fact this indetermination and this very opening that we designate. . . by the word ‘thinking’” (*RP II*, 202–203).

I would suggest that one of the functions of comparative philosophy is a similar thinking, in that in and through its comparisons it questions the standard conceptions, interpretations, and explanations that traditional philosophy offers from a differently philosophical or thoughtful standpoint, meaning from a culturally different paradigm of thinking. Derrida said that systems of thought that are different from those in the West are first of all “not necessarily limited” to the philosophical form of the West; neither are they “reducible to what, from a philosophical standpoint, we name with categories like ‘culture,’ ‘worldview’” (*RP II*, 242–243).

Based on this we could formulate a double bind for ourselves here. While there is definitely room for the differently philosophical of other cultures, not just anything in this area will count as philosophical or thoughtful. The question, which I am not going to answer here, is what will and what will not? Here we could also criticize Derrida. His demands were essentially still connected to some traditional Western values, but at the same time they were instilled with

both a new vigor and a lot of reserve. He argued for ideas such as human rights and democracy while acknowledging the difficulty in doing so from a pluralist standpoint. Derrida did not just want us to respect and acknowledge "differences, idioms, minorities, singularities, but also the universality of formal law, the desire for translation, agreement and univocity, the law of the majority, opposition to racism, nationalism, and xenophobia."²² I think he rightly acknowledged the double bind or injunction and therefore could not and did not offer a formula or program to lead us out of the difficulties, but remained with the indeterminacy and openness.

Coming back to education, comparative philosophy shows different ways of thinking and aims to put them forward within a renewed university system or within a renewed teaching of philosophy. As an example, from certain parts of Eastern philosophy we could learn that thinking, or knowledge, necessarily entails forms of practice and is often aimed at a certain competence or, shall we say, wisdom. This could (quite literally speaking) be incorporated in the university structure. Teaching should be seen as doing: philosophy is action, and teaching as a practice is most definitely *inter-action* with an "other." This communication involved in the learning process is much more than or different from the passing of information, as we can see, for example, in the teaching methods of Zen Buddhism.

Comparative philosophy can be related to another important feature of Derrida's thinking. He argued that it is no longer possible to distinguish between purely constative and purely performative speech acts, especially in his polemic with John Searle.²³ But in *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy II*, Derrida made this awareness central to the teaching of philosophy, connected it to the university structure, and used it as one of his arguments for showing how basic and end-oriented research can no longer be sharply distinguished. Since language is inherently performative, so is research and teaching. This is not only true for empirical disciplines, but also and more importantly for philosophy. The university is not just a place of theory and theoretical knowledge; it can no longer pretend to deal just with disinterested, disconnected, objective work:

every philosophical or, more generally, theoretical language implements, under its apparently "constative" or descriptive appearance and norms, "performative" forces that have in general been ignored, or rather denied, in any case, deprived of all legitimacy in the institutions of "knowledge." (*RP II*, 208)

The awareness of this denial or ignoring should lead to a "reconsideration of all the hierarchical theorems and principles upon which the systems of research and teaching are constructed" (*RP II*, 209). In my opinion this means that Derrida discredited the usual hierarchies that function to keep comparative philosophy or thinking from other cultural backgrounds at bay under the argument that they would not be theoretical or philosophical enough. Derrida's argument says that

22. Derrida, *The Other Heading*, 78.

23. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988).

the university and philosophy should let this “ivory tower” attitude go since it is no longer, and probably never was, tenable.

Again we can draw comparisons with some parts of Eastern thinking on two levels: First, as noted before, traditionally, Eastern educational institutions were places where the performative was acknowledged and given due importance. They were not just places of gathering theoretical knowledge. Learning as well as teaching were seen as processes that transformed not just cognitive skills, but the whole person or persons involved. Second, in Confucianism, Daoism, and Zen Buddhism, we do not readily find the idea that language is a pure transparent medium. Language is guiding discourse, it does things — it is not just descriptive, but *presents* a world. This aspect of language has only recently gained attention in Western philosophy, but it was an integral part of much classical Asian thinking. Ames and Hall, for example, say that

Daoist naming. . . is presentational rather than just representational, normative rather than just descriptive, perlocutionary rather than just locutionary, a doing and a knowing rather than just a saying. . . . Such knowing is dependent upon an awareness of the indeterminate aspects of things. The ongoing shaping of experience requires a degree of imagination and creative projection that does not reference the world as it is, but anticipates what it might become. . . . And having access to the “name” of something is not only a claim to knowing it in a cognitive sense, but more importantly, to knowing how to deal with it. . . . Hence such knowing is a feeling and a doing: it is value-added. It is naming without the kind of fixed reference that allows one to “master” something, a naming that does not arrest or control.²⁴

Apart from the fact that the wording is remarkably close to Derrida’s, I see a striking similarity with Derrida’s way of thinking that is concerned with questioning Western ideas of fixed reference, arguing for provisionality, and arguing for an anticipation of, and thus responsibility for, the future, what is to-come (*l’a-venir*), from an indeterminacy. In the *Zhuangzi* it is said that “words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing?”²⁵ And further on:

We have already become one, so how can I say anything? But I have just *said* that we are one, so how can I not be saying something? The one and what I said about it make two, and two and the original make three. . . . The Way has never known boundaries; speech has no constancy. But because of [the recognition of a] “this,” there came to be boundaries.²⁶

We can see here that both Daoism and Derrida share the idea that while language is without fixed reference, we must nevertheless make use of it, and we must do so while aware of its provisionality and of its performativity — the fact that it does present a certain world. The *Laozi* similarly speaks of the mistrust and provisionality of language in many places. One example is chapter 32, where it is said that “When we start to regulate the world we introduce names.” It is acknowledged that this is an inevitability; however, “once names have been assigned, [w]e

24. Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 45–46.

25. Burton Watson, trans., *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 34.

26. *Ibid.*, 38–39 (emphasis in original).

must also know when to stop. Knowing when to stop is how to avoid danger.²⁷ Using language is inevitable, and it is inevitably arresting the flow and introducing hierarchies. Being aware of this has to do with knowing when to stop relying on this performative fixation; to remain open we must use language carefully and under erasure to stop it from becoming dogmatic.

Derrida (and Heidegger) similarly suggested a very careful use of language that is aware of this performativity and provisionality in its operations. For example, both argued against the way language is used by the metaphysical tradition. The *return* to philosophy that Derrida pleaded for should thus definitely not be understood as a return to the strictly metaphysical, but as a return to the more than philosophical, which should entail a new university enlightenment, a return to basic and fundamental research, and a broadening of scope with regard to responsibility and awareness of its consequence — or, to use a problematic notion, a return to the true spirit of philosophy, which is of course not something that was lost in the past somewhere, but that always remains as a task ahead.

I am not suggesting that comparative philosophy is *the* answer to this perceived crisis (in the teaching) of philosophy, but it is *one* of the possible forms this new thinking and responsibility can take and one of the possible alternative positions from which to question philosophy. But in order to be *able* and *allowed* to do so, it must be institutionalized and given space, as well as remain vigilant against its own presuppositions. In the proposals that Derrida wrote for the formation of such a new institution of thinking, the *College International de Philosophie*, we read that one of the major focuses of this new kind of thinking should be comparative:

Most of all, this international openness must allow, in a more traditionally philosophical field, for the multiplication of original initiatives whose historical necessity is more obvious than ever today. We know that the “philosophical world,” assuming it still has a unity, is not only divided into “schools” and “doctrines” but also, beyond and independently of philosophical contents and positions, divided according to linguistico-national borders that are more difficult to cross than political borders. These traditional differences in “style,” “rhetoric,” “method,” and so on are sometimes more serious than differences in doctrine. Although they cannot be reduced to national languages and traditions, they nonetheless remain part of these. These philosophical areas between which passages are rare, whether in the form of critique or polemics, are a historical — and *philosophical* — challenge to philosophy. (*RP II*, 215, emphasis added)

This suggests that Derrida was aware of the need to give comparative thinking a recognized space. Precisely because of the “incursions,” “invasions,” “disruptions,” translation problems, and the like from outside of philosophy into its field, there is an urgent necessity to acknowledge and come to terms with this already mentioned “alterity of the other.”²⁸ Similarly, Daoism is to a large extent based on notions of nonconventionality, be it in conduct or language,

27. Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 127. Other discussions of language are found on pages 1, 2, 23, 25, 43, 56, 76, 78, and 81.

28. This coming to terms with cannot be understood as a Hegelian dialectical movement, of course, but should entail an acknowledgement of differences.

as a necessary prerequisite for creativity and a full development of the self. Nonconventional ways of thinking and acting should be cherished for the sake of diversity as against one-sidedness, because they better reflect the ongoing process of the world to which man belongs.

Derrida focused his entire career on this necessity to question the logic of self-sameness, of self-identity, and of the dualistic way of thinking in Western metaphysics. The logic of subject/object and other characteristics or distinctions of Western metaphysics have been imposed upon Chinese philosophy and other cultures for a long time, while in Derrida's view it was crucial to question these distinctions and to look for other ways of thinking.

CONCLUSION

Education in philosophy must incorporate comparative philosophy as a major part of the curriculum. Only when offered with and exposed to multiple ways of thinking will someone see the relative value of each different philosophy. Without this education in diversity, it is all too easy to become entrenched in a certain way of thinking, and for most professional philosophers today that still means following the onto-theological ways of Western metaphysics. The university and philosophy must guard against this one-sidedness, and they must remain or become again, to a certain extent, "without condition."²⁹

In a way Derrida's work on education is very appropriate to our times, since it is indeed becoming increasingly difficult to keep outside influences out of or away from our own preferred systems. Derrida pointed to the fact that this form of exclusion is one-sided, untenable, and quite frankly a distortion of that all-important philosophical notion, truth (which is also kept "under erasure"). But as we have seen, within comparative philosophy the same dangers lurk and, following Derrida, we can call for vigilance against one-sidedness here too.

Unless we open philosophy to the world of thinking and start doing so in our educational systems, philosophy will remain an island — and the university will over time become an island — that is out of touch with reality and merely representative of a particular form of rationality, increasingly under pressure.

29. Jacques Derrida, "The Future of the Profession, or, the University Without Condition (Thanks to the 'Humanities,' What Could Take Place Tomorrow)," in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*, ed. Tom Cohen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 24.

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