

On Comparative Philosophy

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

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

When we consider comparative philosophy as a systematic approach where philosophies are compared, we simply compare philosophies beyond national colors. Claiming a comparison between

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Eastern and Western philosophies is problematic because philosophy is fundamentally Western. Obviously, German thoughts and Filipino thoughts are structurally different so that there is really no point in comparing apples from oranges. If the attempt is to appraise the common ground or similarities, then comparison must be focused on particular philosophies.² For example, we compare Freire's notion of the 'new man' with that of Osho's rather than comparing 'Brazilian philosophy' and 'Indian philosophy' because Freire's philosophy is not Brazilian philosophy and Osho's philosophy is not Indian philosophy.

²Below is an example of a tabular comparison.

Philosopher	Karel Kosik - Czech (1926-2003)	Paulo Freire - Brazilian (1921-1997)
Magnum Opus	<i>Dialectics of the Concrete</i> (1963)	<i>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</i> (1968)
Chapter 1	Intellectual and social reproduction; the total, concrete reality .	Justification for a pedagogy of the oppressed and explanation of the reality of oppression.
Chapter 2	Homo oeconomicus versus social banking structures; the growth of rationality, conscious or unconscious views of reality; art as history and culture.	Banking education versus problem-posing education; man as a consciously incomplete being in the process of becoming more humanized.
Chapter 3	The reading of the text and the reading of the world; human beings as Subjects/Objects , in the context of work and self-fulfillment.	Dialogue between people as Subjects , the social practice of freedom, and the stages of consciousness.
Chapter 4	Praxis , history and freedom, the nature of humankind, consciousness and the reality of the world in history.	Dialogics and antialogics: the matrices of praxis ; Being in the world and the nature of oppression, conquest and liberation.

Why is this so? Because ‘philosophy’ is fundamentally Greek. It is the Greeks that described and defined such system of thought.

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

One could ask: *if the western philosophers have problematized ‘being’, what was the focus of the eastern thinkers’ philosophical problematization (if there is such?)* Put it in another way, *are there eastern counterparts of the western’s cosmocentric/ logocentric ancient period, theocentric medieval period, anthropocentric modern period, and linguacentric contemporary period?* The western philosophical epochs may serve as templates in the process of establishing a historical comparison of independent philosophical development.

In addition, we may as well contrast different systems of thought, namely: *philosophy* (of Greek origin), *tetsugaku* (of Japanese origin), *zhexue* (of Chinese origin), *cheolhak* (of Korean origin), *munimuni* (of Filipino origin) to determine the points of convergence without necessarily depending on Western light (if possible). What is certain is that first, these systems of thought are geared toward the formulation of meta-theories (theories of theories);³ second, these systems of thought are scientific. They are scientific because they employ systematic approach. By science, it is herein referred to as

³The political scientist studies politics to come up with political theory or *theory of politics*. The political philosopher studies the political theory to come up with a political metatheory or a *theory of the theory of politics*.

speculative science (where questions are more important than answers and in which the focus is growth of wisdom) and not *positive science* (where answers are more important than questions and in which the focus is growth of knowledge).