

He the One, the One and Holy,
 To his will all creatures bend,
 He the Living, the Eternal,
 The Beginning and the End;

The Avenger at whose anger
 Towering waves are frozen still,
 Stand the planets in their courses
 Fearful to offend his will;

Not bounded he by bounds of space,
 Not encompassed he by time,
 He beyond all comprehension,
 He the Gracious, the Sublime.

Clothed in light sits the Enduring
 On his celestial throne,
 He the Watchful one, the Patient,
 He who waiteth all alone;

In the brightness of his presence
 Angels veil with silver wings,
 Nor Cherubim, nor Seraphim
 Countenance the King of Kings.

The glittering stars, his girdle,
 Bind the raiment of the skies,
 The Conqueror, the Glorious,
 The Omnipotent, the Wise.

HOW MAY WE APPROACH THE SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS OF THE EAST?

By

BERNARD KELLY.

Philosophy—East and West, the book of the East-West Philosophers' Conference held at Hawaii in 1939,⁽¹⁾ adds to the growing evidence of a desire for rapprochement in academic circles between America and the Far East. The scope of the book is philosophical and rational, prescinding, that is, from religious questions as such, and seeking to formulate and to organise the

(1) *Philosophy—East and West*. Edited by Charles A. Moore: (Princeton University Press; Humphrey Milford; 28s. 6d.). Contributions included are from Professors: Chan Wing-Tsit, G. P. Conger, W. E. Hocking, C. A. Moore, F. S. C. Northrop, Shunzō Sakamaki, Daisetz Teitarō Suzuki and Junjirō Takakusu.

common ground of Eastern and Western thought and thus to make more readily accessible to each what one possesses and the other lacks. The project arises from so manifest and natural a tendency—the desire of men to understand one another and so extend their understanding of the world—that any elaborate justification seems uncalled for, and in effect the majority of the Eastern contributors dispense with any such preamble. In the nature of the case the position of the Western philosophers is a more self-conscious one, and the justifications they put forward raise questions more important than the conference itself. It must be added that such a statement intends no disparagement of the book in which the proceedings of the conference are recorded, and is one in which the American contributors themselves would probably agree.

The first question, to which we may defer the answer while using it as a key to unlock others, is this: In what sense can we accept the statement that *the traditions neither of the East nor of the West are wholly true or adequate to a full understanding of man?* It is a proposition in which the Western and, at least, one of the Eastern contributors explicitly concur, and is in line with the objective of a "planetary philosophy", in which the same amount of agreement is evident. And yet, to be planetary is no more philosophical an objective than to be racial or national or proletarian.

What is remarkable in the choice of the word is its deliberate geographical reference which at once makes its modesty absurd and its presumption outrageous. Let it be understood that there are truths of such primitive validity that their contradictory is unthinkable and impossible "even with God." For them we claim with certainty that their application is more universal than the universe itself. That is the natural presumption of the human reason: but not because it is human, not because it is we who think, but because it is an absolute truth in which our thought engages. Yet if we are to presume upon our thought because it is ours, we cannot even speak for our closest friend.

The rationalism which proposes a planetary philosophy as a goal is humanistic in the sense of this distinction. It seeks a field coextensive not with the truth of the thought but with the men who think it. Its ambition is twofold: to bring into one barn the harvest of all that is human and to broaden the base of the humanist *ecclesia* to include all men. Such an ambition, however, involves further assumptions which throw a retrospective light on the first. They are assumptions which almost everyone in this field of comparative philosophy does in fact make. Recapitulated their structure is as follows:

1. No one school or tradition of thought can be considered as absolutely adequate to the requirements of the human intellect.

2. This human intellect is the inclusive sum of all the activity and achievement of the minds of men considered in the development and interplay of their historical development; and the adequacy of ideas of truth at any given time is to be measured by the correlations they actually effect.

3. The third assumption is the most decisively "modern", and is as follows: Apart from the correlations it actually effects among the presuppositions of the particular sciences, and apart from the fruitful fusions of principles and ways of thought it actually brings about as between diverse traditions of the mind, the "truth" of a metaphysical proposition or of a principle of comparative philosophy has no meaning.

One is tempted at first sight to designate the humanist approach as an endless seeking for a truth unattainable because it is wrongly sought. More accurately it is not a seeking after truth at all. For what is sought is not *conformatio mentis ad esse* but *conformatio mentis ad mentes*. Its objective is a position in which the maximum of agreement, of fruitful interplay and order is obtained by the student in correlating material provided by the total mental activity of mankind. Although it is arguable that such a position in truth is simply unattainable until he submits to the independent and absolute discipline of the science of being such submission, far from being virtually implied, is completely revolutionary of the actual order of ends proposed and cannot be invoked as a means to any other end than metaphysical truth itself.

In effect if we consider the actual order of ends proposed together with the light in which the humanist philosopher considers his task, the project of a planetary philosophy represents the ambition of the administrative departments of the academic mind to bring all activity of the human spirit under their ordering. It is not a "treason of the clerks" so much as their impudent philistinism in the exercise of powers usurped long ago.

Metaphysical contemplation alone is capable of ordering the diverse activities of the human mind and metaphysical⁽²⁾ truth alone can co-ordinate upon the structure of existence the truths diversely expressed in the varying traditions of mankind. But metaphysical contemplation implies from the outset an entirely different approach to the two questions we have been considering, of the relation of thought to tradition and of the subjective reference of truth.

However absolute may be the universality of metaphysical truth in its objective reference, and we have underlined that this

(2) I use the word "metaphysical" throughout not to exclude *supernatural* in favour of *natural truth*, since neither traditional English usage nor that of the early Church apply such a *praecisio* from above. I mean such truth as may be defined—allowing the fullest analogical scope to the terms—as *conformatio mentis ad esse*.

universality exceeds the scope of the empirical universe, the question of its subjective reference remains an important one—from the point of view of our own empirical selves a vitally important one, though secondary.

The spiritual chaos of the modern world with its disordered ambitions of the intellect and its unprecedented diffusion—at least at the factual level of mere information—of all the products of the human mind from all quarters of the globe, challenges the metaphysician to *show* the relevance of the science of wisdom, although the medium of such showing is a Babel of confused tongues. You may speak as a metaphysician from your own back yard yet of truths valid beyond the confines of all that is visible. It is not only or precisely your own empirical self who is the thinker of the thought in which the structure is made manifest of intellectual activity as such in its bearing upon the reality and the relationships of existence. It is in the *hic et nunc* of your empirical self—in the accidental determinations of your substantial human personality—that the thought is manifest: not in reference to these that the thought is true.

But every empirical self participates in the passing *hic et nunc* reality of the whole empirical world: the whole changing life of our times in whatever connection of influx and of derivation it has with the life of more stable times preceding it. Every empirical self is situated in the flux of history, of the rise and fall of cultures, of the growth and decadence and dissipation of traditions.

So far as we speak to others we must bear the present subjective reference of the language of thought in which we are to be understood. Thus a condition irrelevant to the truth of the thought is imposed on its utterance, a condition at the present time of universality with regard to traditions as diverse as the Aristotelian and the Buddhist. Of course you can have a private language intelligible to your grandmother and yourself alone, but it is doubtful in the present state of things whether a half-way-house will retain its intelligibility long enough for a considerable work begun now to be understood when it is finished. Thus the Confucian task of purifying the terms of thought implies for our generation a universality of subjective reference which certainly includes the traditions of Europe and the Far East.

Traditions of the mind are very much more than stable conventions in the language of thought. So far as tradition is valid, it is a complex organic medium comprising a whole cultural way of life through which the minds of men both imbibe and embody the primary truths necessary to the life of the human spirit. And a tradition lives precisely so far as its institutions are the media of truth. To attempt an academic distinction of the religious from the philosophical implications of a tradition is thus

liable to lead to falsehood, for the principal characteristic of a traditional philosophy is to be religious. No less disastrous is it to sever either of these from the whole way of life, physical, social and spiritual, which in its integrity, but not otherwise, renders luminous the truths by which the tradition lives. Thus the understanding of a tradition is always from within and from the depths of existential truth from which it draws its nourishment.

To approach traditional truth is to understand it as the adequate light in conformity with which all human activity is luminous. It is not possible to do this save in relation to our own. To the extent that we are ourselves vehicles of the traditional truth, which comes to us from the Father of Lights through the mysteries of the Incarnation, we may, with patience and with reverence for the traces of the Holy Spirit which it belongs to us neither to pronounce upon nor to deny, hold against that light what evidences we can truly grasp of the spiritual life of the East. Whatever brilliance shines from them comes from Him.

It is here, when we approach the intellectual task of working for the truth: when we are concerned, that is, not so much with the discussion of how a problem should be approached as with actually approaching it: that the false position involved in the first assumption of the American philosophers becomes striking. In effect, the gesture of: "let us take it as read that both of our traditions want transcending and that neither has a monopoly of the truth"—phrase it how you will—invites to an agreement not to approach at all to the truths of which tradition is vehicle. Particularly is this true where agreement is sought at a purely philosophical level. Very different are the assumptions made by Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in two recent essays reprinted as a supplement to the *Journal of the American Oriental Society*.⁽³⁾ He says:

"The virtual identity of Indian and Socratic-Platonic philosophy is of far greater significance than the problem as more often discussed in connection with Plotinus. There we are dealing not with 'influences', but—just as in the case of the roots and idioms of the languages, Greek and Sanskrit themselves—with cognate doctrines and myths, many of which are as much Sumerian as they are Greek or Indian. The *Philosophia Perennis* antedates the whole historical period within which 'influences' can be predicated."

Again, "All mythology involves a corresponding philosophy; and if there is only one mythology, as there is only one 'perennial philosophy', then that 'the myth is not my own, I had it from my mother' (Euripides) points to a spiritual unity of the

(3) Supplement to the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* No. 3. April-June, 1944: Contents: Recollection, Indian and Platonic, and On the One and Only Transmigrant, by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.

human race already predetermined long before the discovery of metals."

If the assumption of a fundamental unity of the structure and of the terms of thought native to the civilizations of East and West were founded only on the findings of historical anthropology, which provide the proximate authority for the passages quoted, it would still provide the basis of a collaboration of thought in which neither tradition need stifle its own depths in order to speak its mind. But in effect the perennial philosophy of mankind owes neither its truth nor its universality to the findings of historians. That it exists and is fruitful in the understanding of whatever is universally human Dr. Coomaraswamy is perhaps the principal of all contemporary witnesses.

And it is understanding which is at issue, not the collection and arrangement of facts and specimens for which the modern world has so ardent a passion. "Understanding," Dr. Coomaraswamy points out elsewhere, "requires a recognition of common values. For so long as men cannot think *with* other peoples they have not understood, but only known them; and in this situation it is largely an ignorance of their own intellectual heritage that stands in the way of understanding." (4)

MATERIAL FORESIGHT & WASTEFULNESS

BY

MADAME ISABELLE RIVIERE (1)

(Translated by M. St. T.)

"How can prudent foresight be wastefulness? It doesn't do to talk absurdities!"

It all becomes clear and easy if we once understand that God knows what he is saying! With what simplification should we not be enriched if we would be persuaded that not one of his words is useless, not one of his commandments thrown at hazard and without a profound reason, that their end, since he loves us, is none other than our greatest good, our surest happiness. And then, that he is *always* right.

It is not sufficient, in order to put him in the wrong, that we should understand the necessity of what he ordains. It may be we lack some of the elements that would enable us to judge. God sees continually, and in the light of eternity, the totality of creation. As for ourselves, have we taken into consideration that our hand held before our eyes suffices to hide from them the nar-

(4) "Spiritual Paternity" and the "Puppet-Complex" a study in anthropological methodology reprinted from *Psychiatry: Journal of the Biology and Pathology of Interpersonal Relations*. August, 1945.

(1) Translated from the French of Madame Isabelle Rivière. Extract from the 3rd chapter of the 1st part of *Sur le Devoir d'Imprévoyance*. With the kind permission of the Author and Publisher (Editions du Cerf, 29, Boulevard de la Tour-Maubourg, Paris)