

# The Place of Philosophy between Science and the Humanities

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“[P]hilosophy is a mere idea of a possible science that is given nowhere in concreto but that by various roads we try to approach. ... We try this until we discover the single path ... Until then philosophy cannot be learned; for where is philosophy, who possesses it and by what can it be recognized? We can learn only to philosophize, i.e., to practice reason’s talent of complying with its own universal principles upon certain already available attempts at philosophy ...” (Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, B866)

## The nature of the “crisis of philosophy”

Over the last decade we have heard frequently about the crisis of the humanities, if not all over the world, then at least in Europe and in Korea where I live and work. The cry comes mainly from those who work in the humanities field itself, covering linguistics, art studies, studies of religions, literary studies, history, and philosophy, among other related disciplines. What all these share in common is that they have to do with human expression, albeit through different degrees of concreteness and abstraction of the objects they treat. These humanities are now said to be in crisis. An example of the kind of crisis being faced may be found in the proposal of the College of Letters of the University of Amsterdam in the 1990s: to cut 80 members from among the teaching faculty and research fellows while leaving administrative staff untouched (Weiland 1994: 56–57). This type of measure is often extended to the cutting of annual budgets and the amalgamation of departments. This may be justified by the claim that other departments and colleges, law and business for instance, are in need of greater spending in order to hire new faculty members and staff to meet the demand from society and students for the courses they in their turn teach and the research they undertake.

A possible explanation for these trends could be found in the fact that the social and economic utility of the humanities has in many places been called into question. This is evidenced by the fact that, as regards philosophy in particular, graduates in this discipline now have few job opportunities, research funding is scarce and the number of applicants for philosophy majors has considerably decreased: all these factors may be taken as indicators of the social neglect for and devaluation of the place of philosophy in contemporary society. This diminished regard is very disappointing for intellectuals in countries such as Korea, where men of letters have long enjoyed power, fame,

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and wealth within a society based on traditional Confucian values. The crisis for philosophy and the humanities in general which most advanced societies are experiencing today is due to the economic logic of the capitalist system by which everything is valued purely according to its perceived social and economic utility.

Contemporary universities and the education delivered by these institutions are increasingly governed by what Martin Heidegger called “*das rechnende Denken*” (calculative thinking, Heidegger 1955: 15), a phenomenon observable not only in the United States and Europe but also in Korea. This attitude is based on the assumption that everything can be counted, planned, and controlled. Truth becomes utility, knowledge is equated with information. Knowledge may be introduced into a new circuit and used when it can be translated into mass information, as Jean-François Lyotard pointed out (Lyotard 1979: 13–14). Henceforth, only knowledge that bears an informational value is produced and consumed, and the rest is discarded. In sum, in the post-modern world described by Lyotard, knowledge is produced solely in order to be sold and to generate added value in an economic sense. In this way, knowledge is no longer regarded as having any intrinsic value and is appreciated purely for its exchange value.

Yet it is a mistake to believe that this devaluation of philosophy is something new, a product of the so-called information society. Western learning has been preparing for this kind of change, at least for the last four centuries. Philosophy has itself developed in accommodation with this trend.

In East-Asian countries, the Confucian tradition that was dominant there laid emphasis on the reading and recital of classical texts. But Western tradition prior to the last century was no exception in this regard either. Education in the classical texts was equally central in both worlds. Homer, Tacitus, Cicero, Vergil, and Biblical texts in the West, Kongzi (Confucius), Mengzi (Mencius), or Zhu Xi in the East were read and studied diligently as the way to develop an awareness of what it was to be human. The Greek ideal of *paideia*, the pursuit of a well-rounded cultural education, the Confucian idea of learning (學, *xue*), the Christian ideal of παιδεία τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ (education in justice, 2Tm 3:16), all aimed at cultivating among members of human society the art of proper living, as intended by nature, by Heaven or by God (see Jaeger 1969 and, for an understanding of the Confucian ideal of learning, Yao 2000: 209–223.) Contemporary scholarship, however, seems to be losing this ideal of cultivating our humanity, a loss that has slowly but gradually been becoming apparent since the beginning of the culture of modernity. If there is really a crisis for philosophy and the humanities, I believe this loss is one of its most significant causes.

With respect to the East-Asian world, the sphere within which I personally am working, up until quite recently there was a long tradition in the way learned texts were read and studied. Careful analysis was made of their words and sentences, comparing various ways of reading and evaluating interpretations according to the meanings of words, sentence structures, contexts and the perceived overall intention of the author. The aim of such textual study was, however, not just a correct understanding, but “eating the text” as a kind of intellectual and spiritual food for nourishing and cultivating one’s heart and mind, so as to enable the scholar to follow the way of life indicated in the text, let us say, of Kongzi or Laozi. Reading and understanding texts was more akin to training for a better life than just an intellectual engagement. However, since Western philosophy was introduced to China, Japan, and Korea in the 19th century, the texts of Kongzi and Mengzi, Laozi, and Zhuangzi have been studied in the same way that the texts of Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel are analysed in the West.

What, however, are the consequences of studying the philosophical texts of Kongzi and Zhuangzi in the same way as one studies Plato and Kant? For one thing, the modern scholar is able to derive more and more knowledge about the texts and a systematic understanding of certain doctrines, so obtaining broader historical perspectives of certain authors and certain philosophical

schools. For example, *Daodeking* (道德經, *Tao Te Ching*) was traditionally known as a book written by Laozi, but one recent scholar insists that in fact Laozi did not actually exist (Lao Tzu 1963: xi.) Such an historical-critical method has now been applied to the studies of many East-Asian texts. This way of approaching philosophy is thus quite different from tradition, if indeed the traditional way of thinking and knowing could legitimately be called “philosophy”. I mention this because the term used for “philosophy”, which is the same in Chinese, Korean and Japanese but with different pronunciations (*zhexue* [哲学] in Chinese, *tetsugaku* [てつがく] in Japanese, and *ch'olhak* [철학] in Korean), is in fact a recent invention by the Japanese scholar Nishi Amane (1829–1897).

What does this contrast of approaches mean in practice? Suppose that a university or learned institute wishes to hire a person to teach Laozi and Zhuangzi. Or a person to teach Buddhism. Whom are they likely to hire? Someone who lives the life recommended by Laozi or Zhuangzi or Buddha but with only limited scholarly knowledge of their texts? Or someone who has excellent academic skills and knowledge though who does not put into practice in his or her own life the doctrines about which he or she is conducting research and writing papers? The same analogy may also well hold true for a specialist in Christian theology. Will a person who is a good Christian on all accounts but without a degree in theology be the preferred candidate, or rather a person who has a degree in theology, but without necessarily a deep and sincere faith? The answer is likely to be self-evident: the person trained in modern scholarship, whatever their origin may be, will get the job. Separation of scholarship from concrete life is a fact in academic institutions and becomes a requirement for modern scholars. This is the tragedy that we are facing in contemporary scholarship.

## The human need and expectation for philosophy

Let's go back to the question of the crisis of philosophy. I want to ask whether or not philosophy is facing its difficulty in contemporary society because it is failing to fulfil human needs and expectations. Does philosophy serve human interests? The same question could be posed of the humanities in general, including the studies of literature, history, religion, language, and art. Do the humanities genuinely satisfy human needs? Before seeking an answer to these questions, we should first consider what kinds of needs and interests might be served by the humanities in general and philosophy in particular.

First of all, we may assume that the human condition involves being active. Further, observation suggests that human activities presuppose the existence of interests, motives, and pre-set goals in pursuit of which this activity is initiated. Granted, there may be some unconscious impulses as well. But motives and interests which can be observed and understood are always conscious ones. Conscious interests that determine activities could be classified under at least three categories. First, it may be considered that people try to make use of the surrounding world for the benefit of their will to being (*conatus essendi*). Humans labour in order to get food and build houses as protection from cold weather. This interest could be called “technical”. All human effort of tool-making, from the stone axe to the computer, has been motivated by this technical interest. Propaganda and advertisement could also be classified in this category. Second, there is a purely “epistemic” interest: an interest in knowing things and states of affairs, regardless of their utility and instrumental value. Interest in knowing “without any interest”, as Husserl expresses it, is found among philosophers and scientists and even among children (Husserl 1962: 331). This was called  $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\iota\alpha$  in the Greek tradition, and engaging in philosophy was regarded as the most prominent activity in this category. Third, an interest in meaning could be regarded as distinct from the first

two. It is not easy to identify what this interest in meaning is, but it may be said that it is related to our hopes and fears, our joy and sadness, and the desire for our lives to be validated by a certain system of meaning which encompasses the persons, things, and events around us. This deep aspiration may be called a “desire for meaning” and is related to the questions concerning the reason for our existence, our suffering and the nature of our desires themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Among these categories of human interest, to which is philosophy most closely related? That depends on the kind of questions philosophy is expected to answer. Those who have chosen the path of philosophy on a professional or academic basis should try to remember what questions you had in your mind when you were contemplating a commitment to this discipline. Such questions may have been: Who am I? What should I do? How do I live well? Does God exist? Is there a better and more perfect world than ours? Why is there suffering? What is justice? Does any criterion exist to distinguish right from wrong, truth from falsehood, good from evil? Is there any meaning in life? Is life worth living? Such were many of the questions which prompted many of us as students to enter the halls of philosophy academies. And it is unlikely that the present generation of students is any different in their quest for answers to these questions. It is justifiable and, I trust, still valid, to expect philosophy to propose answers or, at least, “directions to answers”, as Stanley Cavell suggests (1984: 9), for such issues. Given this continuing “desire for meaning”, what then is the situation of academic philosophy today? Does it continue to engage with questions of this kind? My personal impression is that unfortunately it does not. If there is a real contemporary crisis in philosophy, the cause may be found in philosophy’s failure to meet the needs associated with the quest for meaning among people.

Contemporary philosophy, on the whole, does not ask about the meaning of life. Mainstream philosophy no longer engages with the main questions concerning human existence. Granted, the consideration of “meaning” is still a central preoccupation of contemporary branches of philosophy such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism, and analytic philosophy, but if we look at the ways these studies address the notion of “meaning”, they seem far removed from the concerns of everyday life. Some will no doubt claim that such issues are addressed by modern ethics. But in my opinion, the questions concerning human life cannot be limited to ethics. Such questions as: Who are we? What relationship do we have to our bodies? What significance do actions like sleeping, eating, making love, buying and selling goods, and having conversation with others have? Is there any meaning in suffering and death? All these questions tend to be neglected in mainstream schools of contemporary philosophy in the West as well as in the East (though Nozick 1981, 1989, and Nagel 1979 could be mentioned as exceptions).

I believe philosophy needs to recover its true self by re-appropriating these questions as its own, because philosophy in the end involves ultimate reflection on human life and existence and the modes and principles relating to how that life might be lived.

## Philosophy as science

How might philosophy have come to neglect the questions of human life and existence? One possible reason, to which I personally subscribe, is because it has become overly scientific. We often hear scholars say that an ethicist does not *per se* need to act in an ethically correct manner. This supposes that the derivation of principles through theory does not necessarily oblige their application in practice. In the same way a theologian may not be obliged to believe in the God whose nature she or he is investigating. This stance embodies the attitude that the study of ethics and theology can be undertaken, like physics and biology, without personal implication for the scholar for their individual and practical life. The ideal of so-called value-free science (the *Wertfreiheit* of

science) has been accepted for intellectual pursuits such as ethics and theology and eventually also for philosophy. In such an environment, a philosopher may be satisfied merely with solving problems as scientists do. A conference paper may be presented proposing solutions to given problems, but the author is not then obliged to apply them to her or his own life for their validation. Theory and practice are thus often divorced in the contemporary intellectual world, which could be construed as a tragedy for modern scholarship.

How did the trend towards scientifically-oriented philosophical practice come about? Most of those who, in the 20th century, urged philosophy to become more rigorously scientific were, on the one hand, logical positivists such as Moritz Schlick and Rudolf Carnap who dreamed of building a Unified Science through the application of strict empirical verification of knowledge, and, on the other, phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl, who promoted the idea of “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” (Son 1972). This idea nevertheless may be traced back to Kant and to Descartes:

Whether, therefore, we demonstrate our knowledge or our ignorance [in metaphysics], for once we must arrive at something certain concerning the nature of this self-claimed science; for things cannot possibly remain on their present footing. It seems almost laughable that, while every other science makes continuous progress, metaphysics, which desires to be wisdom itself, and which everyone consults as an oracle, perpetually turns on the same spot without coming a step further. (Kant 2002: 53 [IV, 256])

One of the most crucial aims of Kant’s critical work was to enquire whether or not human reason had the legitimate right and power to build metaphysics as a science. Kant tried to secure a scientific status for metaphysics on the basis of the “systematic” character of human reason which is practical in its essence.<sup>2</sup>

Kant thought that his approach had contributed to bringing peace to the realm of philosophy, which had become a kind of intellectual and moral battlefield prior to his time.<sup>3</sup> At an earlier period, Descartes was even more critical than Kant of the disputatiousness of philosophy:

Concerning philosophy I shall say only that, seeing that it has been cultivated for many centuries by the most excellent minds that have ever lived and that, nevertheless, there is still nothing in it about which there is not some dispute, and consequently nothing that is not doubtful ... (Descartes 1998: 9)

Since Descartes, however, philosophy has provided the rational basis for all sciences, including its own methodology, taking as its starting point the acceptance as true of only that which is incontrovertibly clear and distinct, and then proceeding securely by means of rational deduction from what is established as being true to what is unknown up to that point. As is well known, Descartes opened up the philosophy of the individual subject with his deduction of the certainty of existence through the *cogito*, but his more comprehensive concern was, as with Francis Bacon, to enhance human welfare by application of what would later become recognized as scientific knowledge. This is shown in his metaphor of philosophy as a tree (see Descartes 1978: 2–4). Following this metaphor, metaphysics forms the root, physics the trunk, and practical science such as medicine, mechanics and morality the branches, whence we can pluck the fruits which the whole tree has brought to bear (health, material welfare, individual virtues, social prosperity and so on).

Descartes’s ultimate concern was to secure the whole area of human knowledge and to render it beneficial for all humanity. His *Principia Philosophiae* shows this clearly. It not only deals with the principle of human knowledge, but also with those of the material world (body, extension, matter, time, space, the laws of motion), the visible world (phenomena of celestial bodies, movements of the planets, the structure of the universe), the earth itself, sensations, and the relation between brain and mind. For Descartes, philosophy constituted the system of perfect wisdom and knowledge



concerning everything that humans can know, and such knowledge in its turn made possible the enhancement of human welfare. Viewed from Descartes' perspective, philosophy is not only one of the sciences, but *the science par excellence*: the science which provides the foundation of all other sciences and encompasses all of them within one universal system.

What is important for our discussion here, however, is that Descartes made a strict distinction between philosophy and the humanities.<sup>4</sup> Philosophy as a science (*scientia*), based on the principle of certainty, was, from his perspective, opposed to the humanities. The essence of the humanities of his time was that they were all based on letters and written texts. They were literally the *étude des lettres*. History, poetry, rhetoric, theology, and scholastic philosophy, all branches of learning that were based on human writings and transmitted discourse. For Descartes, while useful for some purposes, they did not provide certainty of knowledge. They supplied at best verisimilitude, that is, a mere approximation of truth. Descartes eventually distanced himself from this kind of knowledge and travelled around Europe to learn from what he perceived as *le grand livre du monde*. But in the final instance, he found that "the great book of the world" was also full of opinions and conjectures and varying customs and never provided any absolutely clear and distinct knowledge. As a consequence, Descartes decided to take his own self as an object of study. His rigorous exploration of the self, his analysis of the thinking soul or spirit, resulted in the transformation of philosophy into the corner-stone on which all subsequent science has been built. Philosophy was at the same time liberated from its reliance on "letters", that is, on the authority of writings. Its life was thenceforth sustained by the thinking spirit, free from tradition, prejudice, and authority. This was the birth of Enlightenment reason, which has largely prevailed throughout the subsequent centuries, only coming to be contested within the last century by thinkers such as H.-G. Gadamer, who put forward the alternative concept of hermeneutical reason in his work, *Wahrheit und Methode*.

It is worth emphasizing here the pivotal contrasts between letter and spirit and between opinion and true knowledge. These contrasts find their antecedents in ancient Greek philosophy and in Plato, in particular, who made a sharp distinction between philosophy and rhetoric. In his dialogues *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, through the figure of Socrates, Plato heavily criticizes rhetoric as relying on words and writings. Plato's critique of rhetoric could be summed up in three points. First, he is strongly conscious of the ambiguity inherent in language. Language can provide a sure path for human behaviour, but can also be misleading. Words with strong rhetorical power can move and persuade people, but persuasiveness is not a criterion of truth. Second, the words of the poets resemble for Plato the song of the Sirens that falsely lured Odysseus and his companions. Words are so strong that one needs to use tricks, as Odysseus did, in order to escape from the power of rhetoricians and poets. Third, the words of the rhetoricians could be violent. Plato wanted to get rid of all kinds of violence including violence by means of words and tried to bring humans under the dictate of reason.<sup>5</sup> Because of these three factors, that is, that words can be misleading, can conceal truth, and be violent, Plato turned aside from rhetoricians and poets and their means, written words, and chose live dialogues as the best and most reliable means for learning and sharing truth. In dialogue one can raise questions and try to give answers. The answer calls forth a new question, and a new question is responded to by another answer. Thus dialogue awakens the soul and moves it towards the invisible and insensible world of spirit. Thus, Plato found a criterion for distinguishing between true and false words in the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible worlds: the sensible world is the world as it *appears*, that is, the world of *δόξα*, while the intelligible world is the world as it *is*, that is, the world of *ἐπιστήμη*. From these distinctions between worlds and ways of knowledge, Western metaphysics as the system of true knowledge was born. Philosophy, as opposed to rhetoric, became the paradigm of philosophy as a science, in contradistinction to humanities such as rhetoric, history, and literature. According to Heidegger, the birth of philosophy

as a science, as a comprehensive system of knowledge, already contains in Plato the seeds of the “end of philosophy” (see Heidegger 1969).

## Philosophy as writing

Heidegger’s own philosophy, on the other hand, is one of the examples in the 20th century of the opposite tendency: that is, the attempt to escape from the obsession to be scientific. For Heidegger, philosophy began to be trapped in difficulties when it adopted a scientific methodology. For this reason, Heidegger’s endeavour can be understood as a rescue action to free philosophy from science. The so-called “turn” (*Kehre*) in Heidegger could be understood as a “step back” (*Schritt zurück*) from metaphysics (Ijsseling 1988). To take a step back from metaphysics is to think the essence of metaphysics, which is possible by reading metaphysical texts. This was what Heidegger called “destruction of the hitherto history of ontology”. This work of destruction of the history of ontology was undertaken by the reading of philosophical texts. This implies that philosophy may be conceived as an engagement with language, hence literary work. If philosophy is literary work, then practising philosophy cannot be separated from reading and writing. Heidegger undertook this for himself by reading philosophical texts and endeavouring to disclose what was “unthought” in those texts. This was a “step back”, a way of “destruction” of ontological thinking.

Samuel Ijsseling warns us, in this context, to avoid three things: (1) viewing the work of philosophy purely as a product of man; (2) seeing that work in the light of the conception of truth as adequation, that is to say, thinking that philosophy is a more or less adequate rendition or representation of a given reality outside of philosophy; (3) regarding the work of philosophy as a sign or a network of signs which purports to signify a given reality outside of the work. Whenever one conceives and approaches philosophy in these latter ways, one is already the victim of what Heidegger calls “metaphysical thinking”, Ijsseling added (1982). According to Heidegger (1954: 123), saying is showing, while showing is disclosing what is hidden. Therefore, saying cannot be reduced to signs which are assumed to have a one-to-one correspondence with any reality outside saying. This implies that viewing philosophy as a work of language, thus literary work, means that one should not expect from philosophy either knowledge about things or a technical instrument to manipulate things. What one should principally do with regard to a philosophical text is to read it and to listen to the voice of Being.

It is logical to think that if philosophy is a work, then it is a kind of construction. If it is a construction, it could be an object of destruction, because what is constructed can be eventually destroyed. For Heidegger, destruction (*Destruktion*) is, however, not a denial or condemnation of tradition. Destructing tradition is the work of returning tradition to the origin from which it emerged. Destruction, in this sense, is a search for the “birth certificate” (*Geburtsbrief*) of Being. Heidegger describes “destruction” as follows:

Destruction does not mean demolishing or destroying. Rather, it means dismantling, that is, pulling down, taking apart and setting aside – namely, the merely historical assertions concerning the history of philosophy. Destruction means: opening our ears, freeing ourselves to hear what addresses us in the philosophical tradition as the Being of beings. (Heidegger 1956: 33–34).

Heidegger tried to overcome metaphysics through a process of destruction. His method was hermeneutical. But it is important to point out that it was not his intention to seek out the meaning of a text or the intention of its author. For instance, when Heidegger read Kant, his concern was not to understand Kant “correctly”, but to observe and identify what happened in the event of Being penetrating the philosopher’s thinking, to sense or perceive both the concealment and disclosure of

Being itself therein, or to discern what Being itself says in and through the philosopher's text. Heidegger explicitly says that the end of philosophy as a system of knowledge, as a science, leads to the beginning of thinking, the thinking of Being which had for a long time been forgotten in the Western history of philosophy.

It may be said that Heidegger has contributed immensely to the freeing of philosophy from science. Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty in their own ways have followed in Heidegger's footsteps, thereby freeing philosophy to recover its place in the humanities. The American philosopher Hilary Putnam recognized this when he wrote:

If I agree with Derrida on anything it is on this: that philosophy is writing, and that it must learn now to be writing whose authority is always to be won anew, not inherited or awarded because it is philosophy. Philosophy is, after all, one of the humanities and not a science. (Putnam 1990: 118)

However, a question immediately arises: Is Heidegger's (and Derrida's and Rorty's) outlook the only option in thinking philosophy as writing for the future? Is the so-called "thinking of Being" (*das Denken des Seins*) the only possible way of undertaking philosophy in the age of science and technology? Nobody but a strict Heideggerian would affirm that categorically. Putnam, for one, thinks otherwise:

Philosophy is, after all, one of the humanities and not a science. But that does not exclude anything – not symbolic logic, or equation, or arguments, or essays. We philosophers inherit a field, not authority, and that is enough. It is, after all, a field which fascinates a great many people. If we have not entirely destroyed that fascination by our rigidities or by our posturing, that is something for which we should be truly grateful. (Putnam 1990: 118–119).

The question is then how to identify the task of philosophy, if philosophy can be regarded as one of the humanities, one of the writings? If we look carefully at how philosophers are spending their time, it will be found that they are mostly reading and writing, when not teaching and checking students' assignments. Someone who wrestles with problems and questions of a philosophical kind is engaging with matters that he or she has found either in academic papers or in books. Philosophy cannot be thought except through the reading of texts and the writing of new texts. In this sense, philosophy is closely related to texts, it cannot exist without a network of texts. Text is a kind of material basis for doing philosophy. Where can we find Plato's philosophy except in Plato's works? Where can we find Husserl's philosophy without perusing his books, articles, and letters? Even though Plato, Descartes, and Husserl did not trust written texts, they wrote a considerable number of them. Despite the fact that Plato presented most of his arguments in the form of living dialogues, he nevertheless preserved these in the form of texts. Cicero's saying, *Plato scribens mortuus est*, points out how essentially Plato was involved in writing. Descartes wrote his *Discourse on Method* as if it were a fable (*fabula*). Without writing, he would not have been able to effectively express his experience of a philosophical awakening. Husserl is famous for his saying "Back to the subjects, to the matters" and certainly he saw an inherent danger in dependence on writing if the original intuition is not experienced again (Husserl 1965: 27). In this matter, Husserl almost shared Plato's opinion, yet nevertheless he wrote so much that just one tenth of his written notes has appeared in print until now. Plato, Descartes, and Husserl could not have undertaken philosophy without engaging with writing. It may be a dream for the philosopher to go beyond writing, proceeding directly towards the essence of truth and confronting truth immediately without any intervention of teacher, language, tradition, or even common experience, but it is an undeniable fact that



philosophy can only be practised and transmitted through words, whether initially in spoken form or subsequently in the form of written texts.

## Lessons from Kant

At this point, it may be useful to consider Kant's views on this matter. Almost at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant makes a distinction between two senses of philosophy: objective and subjective philosophy. Objective philosophy is the "system of all philosophical cognition", an archetype of philosophy which "is given nowhere *in concreto*", while subjective philosophy is an ectype, the human endeavour which strives to approach this archetype (Kant 1996: A838/B866). In this sense, we cannot learn philosophy, because there is no philosophy in the objective sense to be learned. According to Kant, philosophy is a mere idea of a possible science, and we can approach it by various paths. He goes on to say:

[W]e try this until we discover the single path ... Until then philosophy cannot be learned; for where is philosophy, who possesses it and by what can it be recognized? We can learn only to philosophize, i.e., to practise reason's talent of complying with its own universal principles upon certain already available attempts at philosophy ... (Kant 1996: A838/B867).

This is the context of Kant's famous dictum: "we can't learn philosophy, but we can learn only to philosophize." Kant is commonly understood to be saying that it is important for a philosopher to learn to think without looking at history. The history of philosophy and philosophical books has, from this point of view, a low estimation. But how then can we learn to think without engaging with books and texts? The next phrase is very rarely read. Kant wrote: "we can learn only to philosophize, i.e., to practise reason's talent for complying with its universal principles ..." Read up to this point, this quotation may seem to suggest that to learn to think means learning to think "with universal principles" and that this means learning to think logically. From this it could be concluded that to learn to philosophize amounts to learning how to argue. Not systems but argument is important in philosophizing. I do not think this reading is wrong, but it is still only a partial interpretation. In order to grasp Kant's point more clearly, it is necessary to read further, one more phrase, very carefully: "to practise reason's talent ... upon certain already available attempts at philosophy". Practising reason's talent is not limited to argument. It is related to "certain already available attempts (*an gewissenen vorhandenen Versuchen*) at philosophy". Where can these "already available attempts at philosophy" be found? One cannot help but answer: we can find them *in the texts* of earlier philosophers. Where can we find Thomas Aquinas's attempt to prove the existence of God except in his *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa contra Gentiles*? Where can we find the elaboration of Cartesian methodical doubt except in Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*? Philosophical texts provide us with "attempts at philosophy" upon which we may practise our reason's talent to raise questions, to argue, and to find counter-arguments. From this we may conclude that in order to undertake philosophy, we need on the one hand to learn to think, that is, to argue, and on the other we need philosophical texts.

My reading of Kant is different from the common understanding. Generally, Kant is understood as saying that we should try to philosophize, that is, to engage in philosophy, without any recourse to the texts of past philosophers. In this reading of Kant, the history of philosophy and the texts transmitted through history are regarded by him as being inessential for learning to philosophize. But my own reading is that Kant is saying that we may work our way towards philosophy in the objective sense (the archetypal philosophy) by practising our talent for reason upon "the given

attempts at philosophy” transmitted through earlier philosophical texts. The textuality of philosophy is recognized by Kant, not dismissed. Without texts, there would be no means and no occasion to practise our talent for reason. From this we may conclude that reading philosophical texts, on the one hand, and thinking and arguing, on the other, are necessary conditions for philosophy. If I may be permitted an analogy relating to body and soul, it could be said that texts are a kind of body for philosophical thinking and arguing, while philosophical thinking is a kind of soul for the textual body. The one cannot meaningfully exist without the other.

Are these dual activities sufficient, however, for doing philosophy? One element is still lacking, I believe, and that is the source of philosophical questions. I do not deny that philosophical texts in themselves are immediately available “sources” for philosophical arguments and counter-arguments, as the above discussion sufficiently demonstrates. Indeed, most of a philosopher’s academic work consists in thinking and reflecting on philosophical texts. We are thus tempted to respond with the answer: “philosophy is in the text” to the question: “where is philosophy?” But is that all? Let’s think a little further. For a text to have meaning, a reader is needed. If there is no reader, no text can function at all. But who is a reader? A reader is a living person who can think, perceive, imagine, eat, sleep, and feel pain and suffering, that is, a living person who asks about how to live. There are many questions concerning life. Now, philosophy has not only been a way of asking questions about life. It is, however, undeniable that philosophy has to do with questions of life, and among them, the most prominent and most difficult and serious question has been that of how one should live in the world in which one finds oneself. In this sense, life itself is the source for philosophical questions. But what has this to do with Kant and Kant’s conception of philosophy?

From our discussion of Kant, we learned of two necessary conditions for undertaking philosophy: on the one hand our thinking talent (the ability to construct arguments and counter-arguments) [...] and on the other, the practice of that talent upon the already available attempts at philosophy (philosophical texts). But the third requirement is human life. This latter is not explicitly laid down in such terms in Kant’s text, but in terms of the special place accorded to a philosopher with regard to reason. According to Kant, a natural scientist or a logician is “simply an artist of reason” (*nur Vernunftkünstler*) who demonstrates and teaches skills which help us to make use of reason and to contribute to the progress of rational and philosophical cognition (Kant 1996: A839/B867). In contrast to these scholars, however, a philosopher is the legislator of reason with regard to the goal and purpose of that reason. This way of conceiving the philosopher’s special role adds a new definition to what philosophy is: a teleology of human reason (*teleologia rationis humanae*, Kant 1996: A839/B867). Philosophy does not merely strive after the perfect system of human knowledge. Essentially and more crucially, philosophy is the effort to live well as a world citizen. This conception of philosophy which involves the ideal of a philosopher as a teacher who instructs scholars of other fields (mathematics, physics, and logic) how to live well and how to relate human knowledge to the essential purpose of becoming a world citizen is called a “world concept” (*conceptus cosmicus*, Kant 1996: A838/B866.) A “world concept” of philosophy may be understood as a cosmopolitan concept of philosophy which views humans as world citizens. The focus is on the person, the human, and the philosopher who thinks has aims and purposes to live in the world as such a human person. To this person, philosophy is not merely a science, a doctrine, a discourse, but primarily a *way of living* to control one’s passion, to rectify one’s mind and heart, and to find peace and live harmoniously with others.

It is no surprise therefore that Kant calls this kind of philosopher a “moralist” (Kant 1996: A840/B868). A moralist is the archetype or the ideal of a human who lives according to the law of reason. In this sense, a philosopher is called “the legislator of reason”, not merely an “artist of reason”. Though Kant is faithful to the modern idea of philosophy as a science, and is an academic

philosopher who tries to construct all human cognition, action and taste on the foundation of *a priori* principles, he still retains the old ideal of philosophy as being concerned with life and the way it should be lived.<sup>6</sup> Besides argumentation and the reading of texts, a concern for human life in the world can thus be said to be the third necessary condition for doing philosophy. I believe this is what can be learned from Kant concerning the identity of philosophy, an identity which has been vacillating between the scientific and the humanistic in the age of science and technology.

## Concluding remarks

What may we expect from philosophy in this globalizing world? Should we still dream that philosophy will be the science of all sciences? Or, should we adhere to the idea of philosophy as one of the humanities? In East Asia, philosophy was regarded in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century as one of the Western sciences like mathematics, physics, and chemistry. This led people to study Kongzi (Confucius), Mengzi (Mencius), and Zhu Xi in the same way that Plato, Descartes, Kant, and other philosophers were studied in the universities of modern Europe. As a consequence, academic rigour and the quality of documentation, understanding, and argumentation have become very much enhanced in East-Asian centres of learning, but the gap between learning and life has at the same time become very great. As a Kant scholar may quote, discuss, and explain Kant's philosophy yet nevertheless live quite differently from Kant and his ethos, so the Zhuangzi scholar has come to do corresponding scholarly work but no longer feels compelled to live in accordance with Zhuangzi and his philosophy. This means that philosophy has tended to become dissociated from actual and personal life. If philosophy remains just a corpus of historical knowledge, what greater use does it have? Wittgenstein proposed one answer that is worth reflecting on: "Working in philosophy is really more a working on oneself. On one's own interpretation. On one's way of seeing things. (And what one can expect of them)" (Wittgenstein 1980: 16e). Philosophy, in this sense, cannot be separated from one's own life. And I suspect that great philosophers of the West and the East meet at this point. Philosophy is not merely a doctrine, a teaching, a theory. It is a way of life, it is life itself. Before the term "philosophy" was known in East Asia, the same endeavour was called *Dao* (道), the Way, and *Daoxue* (道學), Learning of the Way. For an East-Asian scholar who sought and learned the Way, it was impossible to do that with detachment. The search for the Way, and living in accordance with it, demanded full engagement and the devotion of one's whole life. It has become urgent to recover this idea of philosophy: as a life, as a way of life, as a way of asking and answering, as a way of reading and writing, as a way of thinking in dialogue (Peperzak 2006, Hadot 1995).

## Notes

1. For the non-reductive character of these three interests see Burms & de Dijn (1986: 1–12).
2. For a more detailed study on the relationship between Kant's idea of science and the nature of human reason, see Kang (1985).
3. Hans Saner (1967) provided a fresh view on Kant from this perspective.
4. See especially the second part of his *Discourse on Method*.
5. For a detailed analysis of Plato's conception of rhetoric, see IJsseling (1976: 7–17).
6. For the idea of philosophy as a way of life see Hadot (1995, 2002).

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