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The Idea of a Highest Divine Principle—Founding Reason and Spirituality. A Necessary Concept of a Comparative Philosophy?

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Abstract: By reference to the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neo-Platonic philosophical traditions (and then to German Idealism, including Husserl and Heidegger), I will indicate the way in which the concept of reason—on the one side—depends on the horizon of spirituality (by searching for the ultimate ground within us and the striving for the highest good); and inversely—how far the idea of the divine or our spiritual self may be deepened, understood and transmitted by reference to reason and rationality. But whereas philosophical analysis aims at the universal dimensions of spirituality or the divine (as in Plato's idea of the 'highest good', the Aristotelian 'Absolute substance', the 'Oneness of the One' (Plotinus and the Neo-Platonists) or the Hegelian 'Absolute spirit'),—Comparative Theology may preserve the dimension of spirituality or divinity in its individuality and specificity. Comparative Theology mediates between the universality of the philosophical discourse and the uniqueness of our individual experience (symbolized by a sacred person—such as Jesus, Brahman, Buddha or Mohammed) by reflecting and analyzing our religious experiences and practices. Religion may lose its specificity by comparative conceptual analysis within the field of philosophy, but Comparative Theology may enhance the vital dimensions of the very same spiritual experience by placing them in a comparative perspective.

Keywords: European metaphysics, comparative theology; comparative philosophy; spirituality; reason and rationality; Kant's theory of religion; Heidegger's immanent transcendence

1. Introduction

1. Opening the philosophical horizon for a Comparative Theology and Philosophy, our question, from the onset, leads to the heart of Religion and its role within the different civilizations in our times. Religion, as we argue, is irreducibly bound to our human life—as individuals and social beings. Touching the heart of our existence—religion opens the dimension of the ultimate. Thus, does a Comparative Philosophy and Theology was to face the problematic of how to justify the claim for the absolute truth within different world religions? We will argue:

(a) that the idea of an absolute fundament of being and thinking, of the divine as the originating source of the whole, has been developed in all world-religions;

(b) that Comparative Theology has to take into consideration, that the methods and ways to justify the respective truth-claims are different within most religious, theological and philosophical traditions: While Western traditions from their beginning with the Pre-Socratics stressed the need for a theoretically based approach and awareness of the essence of religion—by reflecting the unifying ground for thinking and being,—the Asian way, as it seems, predominantly bound spiritual awareness to the ethical, the moral dimension of our human nature.

2. And while Comparative Theology refers to the insights of the respective religious traditions, their histories and practices,—and thus remains bound to the horizon of specific religious experiences,—Comparative Philosophy analyzes the methods and principles to justify the specific truth-claims within the different World-religions and Theologies. What Comparative Philosophy loses concerning the concreteness of a specific religion, its practices and histories, it may gain with regard to the explication of the presuppositions of the different religions: Asking in a more general or universal way for the possibilities and limits to develop a coherent concept of God, it analyzes e.g., the relation between truth and revelation, the justification of the Oneness of God, the idea of the origin of the cosmos as a whole, the relation between knowledge and belief, knowledge and science, *etc.* Thus it investigates the essence of religion by asking for the grounding principles in all different World-religions. Its relation to Comparative Theology is close and even intertwined, but both fields of scrutiny are oriented into different directions. The strength of Comparative Theology, as developed e.g., by Francis Clooney, is to open the horizon for a comparative analysis by reference to the specific beliefs, practices and history of a specific religion—taking Christianity as the starting point [1]. Thus starting with a shared religious experience, it may enter a common discourse in a more distinguished and contextually integrated way. Instead of merely concentrating on general principles and grounding relations, Comparative Theology does not lose its specific reference to Christianity: In its comparative theological perspective the Christian horizon is opened to reflect different World-religions and to help to develop them mutually. Francis Clooney concentrates on Hindu Religion and Theology in a comparative analysis by integrating the rich Hindu traditions of wisdom and spirituality into Christianity [2]. Both traditions are taken from their strongest sides and may develop each other complementarily. Klaus von Stosch develops Comparative Theology with regard to the late Wittgensteinian ‘language-game-theory’ in order to investigate the common heritage between the Christian and Islamic religion and theology [3]. And while Comparative Theology enables us to improve one’s own religious heritage by (re)-integrating essential dimensions into the framework of a

respective tradition, Comparative Philosophy abstracts from their specific historical or practical dimensions in order to investigate the possibilities and limits of a general or universal comparative analysis. Thus Comparative Philosophy does not reach the same degree of concreteness as opened by Comparative Theology, which enters the sphere of the distinguished traditions more specifically.

The following theses are developed within the horizon of a Comparative Philosophy. We will take the deep affiliation of the spiritual awareness and concept of God within the predominantly monotheistic religions,—in Judaism, Christianity and Islam,—to the Platonic, Aristotelian and Neo-platonic philosophy as a starting point [4]. Here we find a high degree of theoretical analysis and dogmatic distinctiveness partially correlated with a lack of spirituality and a loss of the vital sources of our belief. Thus the dimension of wisdom and spirituality—necessary for a meaningful life—was less in the center of interest than it had been e.g., in most Asian traditions. But we will argue dialectically: What the monotheistic religions gained by their alliance with philosophy, they simultaneously lost regarding the dimension of spiritual experiences and wisdom as a life-orienting source for human beings. The discovery of the philosophical implications of religion (e.g., search for truth, truthfulness, wisdom, the idea of a unifying ground, justice, *etc.*) leading to the idea of an originating ground of being and acting, was developed complementary within the Platonic-Neo-Platonic insight: The idea of an all-encompassing unifying principle as the ultimate horizon of our theoretical investigation. Thus, with regard to this founding principle, the concepts of God in Judaism, Christianity and Islam became deeply intertwined with the Platonic-Neo-platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics till Heidegger.

Both traditions: The Platonic, Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic philosophy and monotheist religions influenced each other mutually. The philosophical dimensions of religion and the religious implications of philosophy revealed the (in-itself) contradictory nature of reason and spirituality. The Platonic and Neo-Platonic Idea of the ‘Oneness of the One’ was substantially affiliated with the justification of three monotheistic religions in a specific way: While the Jewish and Islamic monotheism found its fundamentals within the negative-theologian horizon, explained within the first hypothesis of the Platonic dialogue ‘Parmenides’, thematizing the radical ‘Oneness of the One’ without any predication [5];—the Trinitarian Christian approach stressed the need for an in-itself dynamical God. The unity of God should not be questioned by reference to a principle of differentiation and becoming, but rather be fully understood in its in-itself-dynamic structure. As analyzed by Plotinus and Proclus, theologians found a justification for the in-itself-dynamic principle of a Trinitarian God with regard to the first three hypotheses of this dialogue—whereby the Idea of the Oneness (1st hypothesis) should sublimate and negate itself to being and becoming (2nd hypothesis) and return to its own (3rd hypothesis) by its self-consciousness (the absolute spirit) [6–10].

Thus a comparative philosophical perspective—between European approaches to the relation between religion and philosophy and some Asian traditions—might reveal that within Western civilizations, religion and philosophy shared the demand for a unifying principle of thinking and being, while the ethical and spiritual dimensions prevailed within most Asian traditions.

But we may face a further substantial difference between the respective relations of religion and philosophy in both hemispheres: Within European history religions found their answers long before their questions raised within the sphere of Philosophy: Philosophies from Plato to Heidegger later tried to justify or legitimize the unconditioned Absolute, the idea of a Oneness of the One, within the area of thinking; while we may find an inverse relation between religion and philosophy within some Asian

traditions: The Hindu Advaita Vedanta-school e.g., stressed the idea of a predicate-less ultimate ground leading from theoretical abstraction to belief.

A further striking difference between the hemispheres of the European and Asian Civilizations may be found in contemporary history: While the idea of a unifying principle within the horizon of Christianity and its allied metaphysical traditions is abandoned now within the horizon of a skeptical, relativistic and scientific modern Western philosophy, we face an upsurge of the profound and deep questioning of this topic within modern Asian spiritual philosophy. An amazement and deep disquiet is now pervading Western Philosophy and Theology, which leads to an irritation about one's own access to a value-based concept of humanity; while in modern Asian, Indian, Chinese and Japanese philosophy we still may find a strong tendency to generate distinguished theoretical concepts to found the spiritual basis of morality and a value-oriented approach to our self- and world-understanding. Comparative Philosophy has to take into account this European shift from metaphysics to post-metaphysics. Not only does philosophy lose its founding principle in post-metaphysical times,—the consequences for the justification of religion as the essential basis of human existence should be still more serious: As reduced to our human needs or merely based on a human sentiment religion should no longer be able to develop an understanding of the relations between man and cosmos, immanence and transcendence within the framework of philosophy.

2. Religion within the Horizon of European Philosophy

Three Models within European History

The predominantly theoretical analysis within European thinking—inheriting the monotheistic demand for an explication of the highest ground of thinking and being, (in one of its mainstreams from the Aristotelian inspired Scholastic medieval ages till modern science oriented Philosophy) and the remaining prevalence of a practical, ethical approach to all life affairs within the Asian traditions might be—it seems—the most striking difference between the two traditions.

A Comparative Theology has to face an even more essential difference between the two hemispheres: Within Western thought development the understanding of the divine being changed according to the theoretical framework of understanding: Thus, we will take Philosophy as the framework to approach the similarities and differences regarding the spiritual ground of reason and morality within Western Philosophy. Taking into consideration, that Comparative Theology takes one specific religion as the horizon for a comparison with other spiritual traditions, we argue, that Theology and Philosophy are deeply intertwined by answering the question of how to understand, describe and interpret the idea of an origin of the cosmic whole and the idea of a meaningful path of our lives within the respective tradition. By reference to Christianity and the main philosophical traditions to explicate the substance of Christianity, three epochs may be named. These Epochs may indicate, to which extent the Idea of God is maintained or even abandoned within the area of Philosophy.

1. The classical European concepts from the Pre-Socratics till the Hegelian System—similar to most Asian traditions—stressed the need to consider a unifying highest principle, grounding the created world: Reaching out from the more sensually based concepts of the Pre-Socratics to the intelligible principle such as the Idea of the 'highest good' from Plato [11] to Kant [12]; or the idea

of the absolute spirit from Aristotle [13] to Hegel [14]. The need to ask for an unconditioned absolute as the all-determining principle still seemed to be unquestioned.

2. Since the era of Enlightenment the dimensions of thinking and being, reason and morality, were separated into different spheres or domains: Reason was interpreted as the human capacity of knowledge or thinking and morality as the capacity to act under normative rules or to strive for a good fulfilled life. Both should no longer be united by a common principle, no unifying ground should be valid or unquestioned within the theoretical sphere. Since the deep affinity of all spheres in a cosmic whole, created by a divine being, was lost in post-metaphysical times, religion was either reduced to our needs (Feuerbach [15], Marx [16]) or to our individual religious feelings (Schleiermacher [17], Jacobi [18]).

3. Within a third model of classical German Philosophy from Kant to Heidegger, a unifying ground, a divine principle, was maintained: The task was to explain the compossibility of our free will with the boundaries of our physical nature. Spirituality was interpreted as a part of our human nature striving for the ultimate within the contingency of the ever-changing empirical circumstances. Kant argues as follows: "... if the critique of pure practical reason is to be completed, it must be possible at the same time **to show its identity with speculative reason in a common principle**, for it can ultimately be only one and the same reason which has to be distinguished merely in its application"[19]: "Indeed there is properly no other foundation for (morality, C.B.) than the critical examination of a pure practical reason; just as that for metaphysics is the critical examination of the pure speculative reason" ([19], AB XV). Thus for Kant—as well as the concepts of German Idealism, the distinction between our speculative, theoretical and our practical, moral reason was bound to a **horizon of spirituality** expressing one and the same human capacity, called reason, only distinguished between two **different ways to apply** this capacity in the sphere of knowledge or morality, in a theoretical or practical way ([19], AB XV).

Reason, as they argue, should not be identified with rationality: while rationality is limited to the analyzing functions of our understanding, reason integrates intuition, understanding, judgment, the sphere of ideas and spirituality—as the ultimate capacity of our consciousness. Whereby reason simultaneously is not just regarded as a principle of consciousness, but as the grounding principle of being likewise: Nature has to participate in an intelligible principle, if we want to understand its purposiveness from the smallest microbes to our human nature. Thus only by reference to reason as a principle of thinking and being, nature and spirit could be regarded as just two poles of the same sphere of being and becoming. From Kant to Schelling and Hegel, the idea of the integrative horizon, founding reason and morality, presupposes the idea of God as the unifying ground of all existing beings.

3. The Three Irreducible Ideas of an Unconditioned Principle as Heuristic Scheme for a Comparative Philosophy

Within a Comparative Philosophy the question arises: How should one understand this integrative, all-encompassing horizon—uniting the in-itself-contradicting nature of our human reason—within a coherent philosophical theory? We will try to name those universal principles, underlying all different

World Religions, in order to find a point of comparison, which might serve as a heuristic scheme, helping to understand the similarities and differences between the different World Religions. Only by reference to such a heuristic schema, as we argue, a comparative discourse may be opened and only by reference to such a point of comparison the differences might be illuminated.

From Plato to Hegel, but also within different Asian traditions, a triangular structure of three unconditioned 'quasi-objects' constitute the framework of our investigation:

- The first idea of an unconditioned fundament of being is linked to **the self** as the unconditioned ground within us—leading to an in-itself contradicting concept of a human being: Freedom and necessity are the irreducible dimensions of a person. And since freedom leads to the idea of a super-natural ground within us, a coherent concept of spirituality is based on this in-itself contradicting nature of a person.
- The second concept of the unconditioned ground outside of us is linked to the idea of the phenomenal world, to the **world as a phenomenal whole** and object of our intuition, reason and understanding. Hence the question arises: How freedom may be integrated in a fully determined structure of the given world? Only by presupposing freedom as the unconditioned ground within us, a coherent concept of the phenomenal world is possible, the concept of a contradictory of the cosmos as a whole.
- The third idea of the unconditioned leads us to the idea of an ultimate principle uniting the intelligible and the natural world. This idea is necessary to understand the cosmic whole as the all-encompassing sphere in its internal relation of spirit and nature, of freedom and nature, reason and morality or freedom and necessity.

These three ideas of an unconditioned ground within and outside of us constitute the objects of the self (Psychology), the phenomenal world (Cosmology) and the unity between both (Metaphysics, or, if related to the highest principle of spirituality—to Religion or Theology).

The modern transformation of this triangular structure of the former specific metaphysics ('Metaphysica specialis') divided the idea of a cosmic totality into three separate domains. No longer can we find in post-metaphysical times the former unity between the three spheres: Within the horizon of metaphysics from Plato to Hegel and within most Asian traditions till modern times, the human soul still should be able to mirror the universal law and return to its own—to strive for knowledge and wisdom. This act of reflection constitutes a circular structure of the 'going into the ground' within the horizon of the cosmic whole. 'Re-flection' than may be regarded as a similar circular movement as the act of 're-ligio': Both may be regarded as just two different ways to re-affirm oneself of the all-mighty grounding horizon within and outside of us, within heaven and earth.

And while 're-ligio' is linked to the individual self, the act of 're-flectio' mirrors individuality only in an abstract form—losing the immediacy of our specific life. Thus the very personal dimension of 're-ligio'—as the expression of a universal principle in an individualized form—cannot be substituted by any philosophical or theological reflection. We rather gain in the sphere of religion, what we lose by referring to notions or concepts.

4. The Triangular Structure of our ‘Being-in-the-world’ between Transcendence and Immanence

A Comparative Philosophy may take into consideration, that this triangular structure, as we hold, finds its religious and theological expressions in all world traditions, as the all-encompassing horizon mediating the two spheres just as the two opposite sides of being as a whole. And since the beginning of human investigation this triangular structure took a different shape: It manifests itself as idea of the ultimate horizon and was named—among others—‘Dao’, the ‘highest good’, the concept of ‘Ren’ or the ‘Idea of the absolute substance’. As possible paradigms of an all-integrating, all embedding and embracing principle, they are meant to interpret the compatibility between the poles of nature and spirit, reason and morality, *etc.*

A Comparative Philosophy, asking for the major principles within all different spiritual world traditions, faces the problem of how to define the relation between the integrating horizon and the two opposite dimensions?

1. We presuppose a **radical Immanence of the highest principle** with regard to its all-encompassing function as developed in Panentheism, Daoism or Buddhism.
2. Or else the ultimate horizon is regarded in its **radical Transcendence**—beyond all dichotomies: like in Neo-Platonism, Hinduism and Islam.
3. A third model is a combination of the two: represented by the Christian Trinitarian Exegesis of the threefold existence of god. God should indicate its existence **simultaneously in an immanent and transcendent manner**. He manifests himself as a human being, indicating that he is not an absolutely transcendent being, beyond all knowing and being, but rather represents the essence of being itself. To interpret the Trinitarian approach in this way, bridges are built to Non-European religions: We similarly may interpret the ‘Dao’ within the first book of Laotse’s Dao-de-Jing, as a principle beyond all dichotomies in a radically transcendent manner and simultaneously as a mediating horizon—*i.e.*, in its ultimate immanence [20].

5. Comparative Philosophy in Post-metaphysical Times

5.1. Western Philosophy Shifting to Practical Reason

Within European philosophy and theology a new epoch started after the system-buildings of Hegel and the German Idealism. With Feuerbach, Nietzsche and Marx practical reason became the new founding horizon: During a long period of time Western Philosophy (under the auspices of the Aristotelian scholastics and until Kant and Hegel) attention was given to the following: to the understanding of the categories, principles and rules guiding the concepts of ourselves and to the ideas of the cosmic whole and God as the uniting, all-encompassing principle. With Kant’s critical shift, the application of the categories was restricted to the spatio-temporal world ([12], KrV. B 294). The three major ideas of the former ‘*Metaphysica specialis*’ (the self, the freedom of the will and God) were transformed into regulative ideas as functioning horizons in order to schematize our concepts of the empirical world. But the idea of God as the overarching principle still remained unquestioned. The Post-Hegelian left-wing philosophers, Feuerbach and Marx, deeply criticized the idea of a transcendent

being as a hypostatical construct of the finitude of our existence: According to Marx, Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel accomplished the theoretical task. Theory now has to be transformed into action. Salvation by a divine being should be replaced by historical liberation. Times demand, as Marx states in his 11th thesis on Feuerbach in 1845, action [21]: Thus “the question, whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking” should no longer be “a question of theory but (should be) a practical question [15]”. No longer should our human nature be understood as embedded in a supra-natural sphere.

The following approach will indicate the necessity to suppose the idea of a highest principle in order to understand ourselves in a theoretical and practical way in post-metaphysical times. By analyzing the presuppositions of the spiritual implications of our thinking and being—the inevitability of the assumption of the idea of the divine may be indicated. Thus philosophically the horizon is opened to enter the sphere of transcendence.

5.1.1. Plato’s Allegory of the Cave

Let us imagine ourselves in a situation as the prisoners in a cave, as Plato described at the beginning of the 7th book of his Republic [22]:

Living in an underground den, legs and necks in chains,—unable to move. Relieved and forced to turn around, we will reveal the delusion of our former access to the phenomenal world and the world as a whole. We may conclude from this allegory, that self-knowledge is needed, in order to understand the presupposed cultural, religious, scientific or philosophical concepts, which influence and impregnate our actions—explicitly or not. As Plato argues, without a clear understanding of the major principle of the highest good, which unites knowledge and action or thinking and being, nature and spirit, the political leaders will be unable to organize a morally determined political order according to the idea of a harmony between all spheres.

5.1.2. The Prevalence of Self-reflexion (Confucius, Plato, Kant)

Thus Self-reflexion in the very ancient Platonic sense may serve as the opening path to our mutual understanding:

Self-reflexion according to Kant means: 1. to think through ourselves, 2. to think coherently and 3. trying to think from the point of view of the others [23].

Interrogating and questioning the predominantly reductive approach to the phenomenon of religion by naturalized epistemologies or socially oriented philosophies, a new Comparative Philosophy of religion will open the floor for the necessary enlightening and understanding the premises of our religious nature in a self-critical way. Instead of reducing religion to our practical needs and purposes or interpreting its intentions as merely projections of the finite into the infinity of the divine, we will argue that religion is an irreducible dimension of our human nature. While philosophy touches individuality only in a generalizing attitude, Religion touches the irreducibility of our individuality in its specificity.

5.1.3. Two Extremes Approaching the Integrative Ultimate Principle

However, the question remains within the horizon of a Comparative Philosophy—in post-metaphysical times: how to get access to such an ultimate principle, which may unite all spheres of reality, the natural and the intelligible likewise?

In order to argue in a coherent way, we have to take into consideration, that the idea of a highest divine principle cannot be presupposed in any of our philosophical theories. We rather have to argue for its necessity by analyzing the presuppositions of our highest natural and moral aims: Thus we will consider the following: The idea of an absolute harmony between our highest natural demands for happiness and the highest intelligible demands for morality and justice in all societies seemed to be given in Leibniz's idea of the 'originating monad'. According to Kant—different from Leibniz—the idea of a highest being, presupposed in the idea of a highest ultimate goal is merely an a-priori transcendental object of all we might strive for. Kant names it: the Ideal of pure reason. "As the idea gives the *rule*, so *the ideal* in such a case serves as the *archetype* for the complete determination of the copy; and we have no other standard for our actions than the conduct of this divine man within us, with which we compare and judge ourselves, and so reform ourselves, although we can never attain to the perfection thereby prescribed. Although we cannot concede to these ideals objective reality (existence), they are not therefore to be regarded as figments of the brain; they supply reason with a standard which is indispensable to it, providing it, as they do, with a concept of that which is entirely complete in its kind, and thereby enabling it to estimate and to measure the degree and the defects of the incomplete" ([12], (KrV). AA 04. A 569 B 597). Taking into account, that according to Kant, reason is a creative organism striving for harmony between nature and spirit and thus serving as a constitutive function to create a world under moral rules, it may be regarded as a source of the intelligible world. Kant's central quest of how we may fit into the world can be answered only by reference to the sphere of spirituality. Spirituality as the domain of religion leads to an answer to the question of: "What can we hope? ([12], (KrV) AA 04. A 805 B 833)."

Whereby the highest divine being is not regarded as object of our intentionality, but as its necessary founding principle: Thus we presuppose an ultimate ground within and outside of us, a highest being, in which the contradicting spheres of nature and spirit may find harmony (as similarly presupposed in Daoism and Buddhism)—indifferently in which historical or cultural circumstances we find ourselves. As Kant holds, we would even be unable to understand our human nature without the assumption of the regulative idea of the all-determining highest good as a necessary implication of reason and morality.

5.2. The Opening Horizon of a Common Ground

5.2.1. The Irreducibility of a Concept of Transcendence

This idea of harmony, as Kant holds, presupposes transcendence as the ultimate horizon and spirituality as our attitude towards cosmos and life. According to Kant, spirituality is a guiding force in our human life. But why should spirituality be an implication of reason and morality at all?

Kant argues as follows: If we do what we ought to do, what may we then hope ([12], (KrV). AA 04. A 805 B 833)?

Happiness, as he holds, is the satisfaction of all our desires in an extensive, intensive and protensive way, (...), and “the *practical law*, derived from the motive of *happiness*” ([12], (KrV). AA 04. A 806 B 834) he terms, is a pragmatic rule of prudence).

But the law, which has no other motive than *worthiness of being happy*, is a moral (law of morality). “The former advises us what we have to do if we wish to achieve happiness; the latter dictates to us how we must behave in order to deserve happiness” ([12], (KrV). AA 04. A 806 B 834). The former is based on empirical principles; the latter considers only the “freedom of a rational being in general, and the necessary conditions under which alone this freedom can harmonize with a distribution of happiness” ([12], (KrV). AA 04. A 806 B 834).

Hence, if

1. the contingency of our empirical existence does not guarantee the fulfillment of our highest natural goods and
2. the unconditioned state of morality is incompatible with our sensually bound existence regarding the attainment of happiness,
3. the assumption of an *ideal of a highest good*, entailing the possibility of a harmony among our striving forces, is a necessary ingredient of our free moral actions.

Since the idea of a wanted harmony between our free will and the natural conditions of our existence presupposes a unity between our speculative reason, linked to the question: “What can I know?” and our free moral will to create a world under moral rules, we may ask:

“What, if we act in a moral way, we might hope for? This third question is theoretical and practical at the same time. Inasmuch as we are bound to our sensual nature, we are—simultaneously—free to act in a moral way. But the achievement of happiness—or harmony in a future world,—we might have deserved by the conduct of a moral life, is not attainable by us.” ([12], (KrV). AA 04. A 806 B 834).

Thus our ultimate—theoretical and practical—questions are bound to a third one, which might give an answer to the question of the unifying principle between the two spheres: The question of a justified hope, as Kant held, lead us to the idea of the highest good, uniting our highest natural and moral goods and opens a **sphere of spirituality**—as the necessary link between moral actions and our striving for happiness.

Our sense of transcendence and of spirituality, as Kant argues, is an implication of our in-itself-contradictory nature. Bound to the finitude of the natural world, we will ask, how the in-themselves-contradictory dimensions, the natural and the super-natural—in and outside of us—are united?

A Comparative Theology or Philosophy may provide a helpful distinction in order to understand the specificities of the different traditions. Hereby the striving forces of the whole can be presupposed as either forces of the matter or forces of an intelligent principle; so that we may consider its substratum as a lifeless or a vivid being:

1. The **Idealism** assumes—according to Kant ([23], (KU) AA 04. A 319 B 323.) either (a) a living matter (in a pantheistic or hylozoistic way as in *Deism such as Daoism, Buddhism, or Aristotelianism* or (b) an idea of a living highest being as in *Christianity*.

2. or else we presuppose—in a **materialistic way**—(a) an inanimate matter (as done within the realism of a mechanistic causality in the atomism of Democritus or Leucippus or (b) a lifeless God as in a fatalistic conception.

The question arises: How to avoid the one-sidedness with regard to the highest principle, to the idea of God as the almighty being? How to find access to its ultimate transcendence and understand immanence as being founded by the divine being?

Within the horizon of an intercultural philosophy, Martin Heidegger's analysis of transcendence as the all-embedding horizon with regard to our "Being-in-the-word" [24] gains great importance e.g., for new Chinese Philosophers or the Japanese Kyoto-School [25–27]. Here spirituality is based on the modality of our existence: Existence as a mode of being within ourselves as being beyond ourselves.

Martin Heidegger tried to answer this question by reference to the analysis of our 'Da-sein'—understood as a mode of 'being-in-the-world' ([24], S.113). With Martin Heidegger a horizon of a Comparative Philosophy may be opened, one which paves the way for spirituality and transcendence as the grounding dimension of our existence.

5.2.2. Heidegger: The Ultimate Horizon of Transcendence: A Mode of our Being-in-the-world?

Being-in-the-world in its triangular structure: How to find access to the ultimate horizon, to the sphere of spirituality?

We are—according to Martin Heidegger,—being within ourselves, always beyond ourselves. Self-understanding, as a mode of 'being-in-the-world' and as act of transcending ourselves, grasps the irreducible horizon of the wholeness of being—and integrates both spheres in a non-contradicting way. However, conceptualized or not, being as 'Dasein' never fails to be completely understood. There are degrees of understanding of ourselves as beings-in-the-world: from the unconceptualized approach, the absorption of the "they" or in the "world", till the authentic "potentiality-for-Being-its-Self" or even the ontological and phenomenological understanding of the totality of the structural whole [28].

We may find different steps of enlightening the horizon, in which we find ourselves by birth and by tradition. An ontological and phenomenological investigation of the different ways, in which our 'Dasein' exists and acts according to moral rules, defines the characters of the disclosure of our being-in-the-world.

Our being-in-the-world, however, is already a mode to understand the world.

World itself, if not understood as the infinite sum of objects, indicates the horizon, in which human beings understand themselves. And while the idea of a whole provides the orientation in the world, we nevertheless may fail to find the adequate path to live according to ourselves or to society, or according to nature as the all-embedding framework of our life or even according to the interdependence of the relations between all these spheres.

This moderate Heideggerian way to interpret transcendence or spirituality (or the ultimate horizon) as 1. a mode of 'Being-in-the-world', 2. as striving for the highest good by acting and enlightening ([28], p. 168 ff.) and 3. finally as rationally understanding and founding our 'Being-in-the-world' in an intelligible way ([28], p. 123–177, S. 153 ff.);—may this Philosophy and Theology serve as an opening comparative horizon to Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism?

5.3. Preconceptions for a Comparative Philosophy within the Horizon of Modern Western Traditions

5.3.1. Two Major Obstacles

The idea of an integrating horizon as the source of spirituality (articulated similarly in the principle of the ‘Dao’ or ‘Ren’ or the European idea of the ‘highest good’) is questioned in post-metaphysical ages. Two major tendencies of modern thinking may be named as responsible for dismissing the idea of a highest being or a highest good.

(a) The conceptualistic and nominalistic shift. Within the conceptualistic and nominalistic shift—entering European philosophy by William of Ockham,—the given concepts,—such as the idea of the good, of being or truth—should no longer be understood as possible expressions of essential or distinguishable properties or qualities, but should rather be regarded as merely external names or titles for numerically defined units of our conceptualizations.

(b) The scientific approach. The second dominant domain within post-metaphysical thinking follows a naturalized epistemology of our scientific access in nearly all theoretical disciplines from physics to cognitive sciences. Here the idea of a founding principle is questioned likewise. Hence, searching for an adequate method to approach major Asian topics and concepts by referring to contemporary European philosophy, self-reflection and self-critique is needed: A thorough examination of our concepts is demanded to figure out, whether or not our predominantly prevailing heuristic scheme of a skeptically relativizing or a scientifically naturalizing methodology might at all be prepared for our mutual understanding.

Taking into account these post-metaphysical premises of our contemporary European Philosophy—itineraries will not be easily found to bridge our different traditions in Orient and Occident.

5.3.2. Methodological Questions: The European Fallacy

Entering by translating the respective terms?

The question arises: how to reach an adequate understanding of the idea of the highest good in the different cultures.

Translating the Confucian, Taoist or Buddhist concept of ‘Ren’ by the idea of Humanity, Benevolence or the Highest good or the Dao as ‘Way’, Reason, ‘logos’, both translations might be easily misunderstood as a projection of our Platonic-Kantian understanding of the highest principle of reason and morality.

As Friedrich Schlegel argued in 1797: If we do not want our philological translation to be just a projection of what we want or an indication of our honorable scholarship, and then be astonished in a widely childish manner about the miracle we ourselves have produced, we first have to be aware of the double difficulty we face:

The topic of my contribution, searching for a unifying principle of reason and morality, confronts us with two unbridgeable steps in a vast and empty territory:

- a. One step stems from our post-metaphysical modern theories to our own classical heritage from Plato to Hegel. Our thesis: Only within early European philosophy we find an equivalent concept to the Chinese Ren or Dao.

b. The second step might still be higher—leading into the area of the Chinese approach to their own ultimate principles,—which is hardly sufficiently recognized and profoundly studied in European thinking.

c. Hence in modern times of Occidental skeptical Philosophy the heuristic scheme or systematic equivalent to the Chinese principle of *Ren* or the *Dao* seems to be missing.

5.3.3. The European Fallacy within the Horizon of a Comparative Philosophy

To avoid a possible misunderstanding, we will follow a new route to open our post-metaphysical thinking to the Asian traditions. Just two examples of self-reflection may be named:

First of all we have to take into consideration, that, for an adequate concept of ‘*Ren*’ or ‘*Dao*’, the itineraries into the different traditions of the Asian Philosophy might not lead us—as it is the case within European traditions—to a definition of a possible object or idea, a definite premise or argument or a subject-centered construction, or even a claim for truth in the sense of consensual, coherence or correspondence-oriented truth-theories. We rather may find forms of philosophizing, which cannot be understood by reference to the concepts of objectivity or subjectivity, by abstract definitions or arguments—but may only be found beyond or apart from such dichotomies like the ‘self and the other’, ‘reason and morality’, ‘spirit and nature’. We may rather find them in an area of in-difference, the in-between-space of the extremes: between leave off and do, spirit and nature, *etc.*

Secondly: The Asian classical concepts of time are not oriented towards a progress in permanence as in Western Modernity, but rather take a circular shape; so that the rules and laws of behavior might rather be understood as embedded in cosmos and nature, mirroring micro- and the macrocosmic dimensions. Hence it might appear as if human spirit did not remorse inasmuch from its natural homestead.

5.3.4. Creative Designing, Intellectually Condensing or Conceptually Reflecting Approaches

But yet, this self-critical attitude by referring to Asian thinking might be deceiving; examining carefully the different approaches to the ultimate principles within the respective Asian traditions, we may distinguish at least three different lines of interpreting the classical texts:

a. The almost poetically embedded presentations within the different aphoristic concepts of Confucius, Zhuangzi, Mengzi or Laotse or Buddha.

b. The more intellectually condensed elaborations by different Neoconfucian texts, integrating Daoism and Buddhism into Confucianism. (e.g., Zhu Xi and Wang Yang-ming) or the Indian Hindu schools of the Advaita-Vedanta, the Mimancha or the Nyaya-School.

c. And finally within modern Indian, Chinese or Japanese traditions, which tend to conceptually reflect systematically differentiated approaches.

Within a Comparative Philosophy astonishing parallels might be found with regard to these Asian traditions within Western European Philosophy:

However all three types need to be carefully considered with regard to the specific context of their traditions, in order to avoid a projection of what we want onto the respective framework and to avoid a mere appropriation of the other.

Thus the conceptually oriented as well as the deconstructive approach of Western heuristics have to exercise some caution, when being confronted with allegoric, symbolic or poetic forms, inasmuch as the allegorically oriented presentations cannot be hastily transformed into mere concepts of abstract notions.

These methodological problems are similar in both traditions. Thus they are an intra-cultural and inter-cultural challenge of a Comparative Philosophy likewise.

6. Conclusions

If Religion, as we argued, is irreducibly bound to our human life, touching the heart of our existence, Comparative Philosophy may develop the idea of the divine as the originating source of being as a whole within the different spiritual traditions.

While Comparative Theology, as developed by Francis Clooney, refers to the insights of the respective religious traditions, their histories and practices, it takes the specific religious experiences of Christianity and the Hindu traditions as a starting point to prepare for a mutual learning. Hereby, the spiritual dimension of our human consciousness is not only maintained, it is even enriched by the searching for a mutual understanding. Comparative Philosophy, endangered to either reduce spirituality to the concepts of the divine, or to ignore the spiritual needs of our human lives at all, has to regain the horizon of transcendence in modern times: Since only by reference to the horizon of transcendence our Being-in-the-world may be explained. And only by reference to the area of transcendence we may find the ultimate spiritual horizon to understand the finitude of our existence. Thus philosophy in post-metaphysical times has to reconsider the grounding principle of being and thinking, in order to bridge the gap to theology. Sharing the same horizon, as Hegel already holds, Philosophy, theology and religion are nonetheless oriented in different directions.

But since Comparative Philosophy argues primarily within the framework of the different philosophical post-metaphysical traditions, we face the situation, that modern European Philosophies became independent from any dimensions of religion or spirituality. In our article we tried to indicate that, in order to enter the field of a Comparative Philosophy, we have to take into account, that most non-European traditions still cling to the idea of a highest metaphysical entity or a highest divine being,—as it was prevailing in early European philosophy till the area of Enlightenment and, within the horizon of contemporary Non-European traditions inter alia in Daoism, Buddhism or Hinduism. In order to be prepared for a comparative analysis, philosophy has to open up again towards the respective spiritual traditions in all different world-religions. Here Comparative Theology, as developed by Francis Clooney, plays an important role to transmit, to translate and to transform the respective religious traditions for a common mutual understanding and learning. For only by a deep acquaintance with the respective experiences and practices of the religious traditions, may we shed a light on the specific subject of a religious faith. And only by reference to the specificity and concreteness of religious experience and practice,—explained and translated within the horizon of a Comparative Theology,—philosophy may we find our way back to the horizon of the ultimate principle, to the all-embracing horizon of thinking and being. Only then may Philosophy proceed by asking for the possibilities and limits of a coherent concept of God, the relation between truth and revelation, the

justification of the Oneness of God, *etc.*, and investigate the grounding principles of the different World-religions in a comparative analysis.

We end up by stating, that Comparative Philosophy, reflecting the ultimate, has to take the methods, the object and the themes of Comparative Theology as a starting point to investigate similarities and differences between the different world religions. And vice versa: Comparative Theology may enter the field of Philosophy, in order to analyze the presuppositions and principles of its own theoretical premises.

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