

EASTERN INTUITION AND WESTERN COGNITION: WHERE AND HOW DO THEY MEET?

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Let me if you please begin with a quote from Ramakrishna Puligandla which succinctly sets the ground for international research in Asian and Comparative Philosophy:

To understand a people and its culture is to understand how it sees the world, itself, and other peoples; and unless and until members of each culture approach the philosophies of others with an open mind and study them seriously, there will be neither the understanding of other peoples nor the enlightenment and enrichment of one's own philosophy and culture that can only result from such understanding.¹

In the Eastern culture emphasis is placed on intuition. In the Western culture emphasis is placed on cognition. This does not mean that one excludes the other. Intuition and cognition are possibilities of the human being in both cultures. "As we know," says Yanming An, "from the history of philosophy in both China and the West, a basic concept often functions as an Archimedian point in a philosopher's system."² Puligandla tells us that, "The philosophy of any people is the cream of its culture and the...expression of its styles of thinking, feeling, and living."³

Let us take a look at some Western views: in Western philosophy one is bound by object consciousness. The experiencer experiencing that which is experienced. One is being directed toward something other than oneself. Philosophy is distinguished, says Pierre Thévenaz,⁴ by a certain mode of knowledge of self which throws light on its own foundations. Reflection is a theme of philosophy, a search for subject as subject. It appears that the subject cannot grasp itself except by a returning back on itself which up to then had remained inaccessible. This would be a subject we have transformed into an object in order to apprehend it. If not, the subject remains implicit or unclarified.

Another possibility, says Thévenaz, bears the double meaning of reflection. Here it means to project to a new level and then it is the movement by which the subject, starting from itself, tries to grasp itself by dissociating itself, by doubling back on itself, multiplying itself. This is a centrifugal motion, says Thévenaz, a play of infinite reflections. Or one could utilize a centripetal movement to go from multiplicity towards unity, from a state of dispersion to concentrate at one's center, by reduction.

If consciousness is directed towards an object, which is intentionality, any conception of consciousness giving orientation towards the object will tend to conceive the grasping of the subject by itself as a particular mode of intentionality. This presents a discontinuity between the implicit and explicit grasping of the self.

In the first alternative: this is to say that we have either implicit consciousness of self (as secondary object) or explicit consciousness of the subject transformed into a primary intentional object. This is Brentano's view.⁵ Thévenaz, in speaking of these two alternatives says:

Consciousness of the object and consciousness of the *act* (*Erlebnis*) that intends this object, which in Aristotle and Brentano are one phenomenon, are two in Husserl. Intentionality is now the only dimension of consciousness. ... Thus, either we intend the object or we intend the act become object in its turn; we never have the two together in the same act, because an intentional act can naturally never intend more than one object at a time. Under these conditions only reflexion [reflection] can effect the grasping of consciousness by itself. There is no immediate internal consciousness—not even implicit. ... Consciousness is wholly intentional, it is wholly object.⁶

To accomplish the act and live in it we naturally intend its object not its meaning. In reflection one comes to meaning. This is by reduction which is Edmund Husserl's view, says Thévenaz, "a way of rendering the implicit act explicit by reducing the too explicit object in which consciousness was entirely absorbed to an implicit state."⁷ In this transcendental expansion we never meet the subject as subject, only another consciousness of the world, because consciousness is always consciousness of. Consciousness has no interiority and the reduction moves one toward a disinterested spectator.

Beginning with the first alternative, says Thévenaz, "concerning the explicit or implicit consciousness of self, we have arrived at the very heart of the second alternative concerning the immediate or the infinite regress."⁸ No wonder Thévenaz says, "Phenomenology appears as the philosophy of infinite reflexion [reflection] because it is wholly the intending of a consciousness of self at once necessary and impossible."⁹ It is by doing a reduction that one can concentrate on the concrete phenomenon in all its aspects and intuit its essence.

Two difficulties, for Hans-Georg Gadamer, threaten reduction: the problem of intersubjectivity and that of the life-world.¹⁰ Simply put, the ego is in the life-world with-others:

...The bracketing of all objects in the world by the suspension of the general thesis of reality [could not be suspended] and that meant precisely that uncontrolled prejudices might slip into the constitutional research that claimed to build up every objective validity by starting with transcendental subjectivity. ...For the horizon of the life-world in which life goes on unquestioningly and that is never an object by itself, represents a cardinal problem for any philosopher.¹¹

Further, “It is the world itself that is concretized in such intersubjective experiences: it, and not an ‘objective’ world mathematically describable *a priori*, is *the* world.”¹² No wonder, Gadamer says, “In light of the unsuspendably specific character of the pregiven horizons of the life-world, how is phenomenology as a ‘rigorous science’ possible at all?”¹³

With Husserl there is no reflexive immediacy. Now it is indispensable to disclose a view of immediacy and undivided reflexion [the reflexive]:

In amplifying reflexion [the reflexive], attention renders an adequation of consciousness with itself immediately possible. By being intensified without loss of continuity... This centripetal dynamism concentrates consciousness in itself without it being necessary to empty it of being and of its own being in order to put it in the presence...of itself. Automatically the transcendental question is superseded.¹⁴

This is speaking of reflexion based on attention or effort. It is an amplifying or dilating reflexion, intensification of consciousness. First there is an immediate and explicit relationship to self and second the relationship to objects:

...we would say that phenomenological intentionality ought to locate itself within the reflexive structure of consciousness which, because it is more radical, has a kind of ontological primacy with respect to intentionality. Far from interpreting reflexion by means of intentionality as Husserl, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty do, we must do the opposite: interpret intentionality on the basis of reflexion. Intentionality can very well be revelatory and constitutive of the objective world; it none the less remains that the immediately reflexive consciousness of self is a *constituting power* more original, a fact more primitive, than intentionality.¹⁵

Now let us take a look at some Eastern views: for example, when considering Advaita Vedanta, what is needed, says Puligandla, is to transform the intellectually grasped mediate knowledge into one’s own

immediate experience. Through prolonged and intense meditation one comes to see in a flash of intuition that one is indeed Brahman, the sole reality.¹⁶ Reality cannot be grasped through the senses and intellect but can only be experienced in direct, nonperceptual, nonconceptual intuitive insight.¹⁷ Lower knowledge is a product of the senses. Higher knowledge is to be attained through the intuitive. Puligandla tells us that:

The higher knowledge is neither subjective nor objective and therefore transcends all three categories of lower knowledge, namely, the knower, the known, and the act of knowing.¹⁸

In Buddhism, says Puligandla, ultimate reality is Emptiness, *Sunyata*, in the sense that it is nondual, nameless, formless, unborn, uncreated and ineffable. It can only be apprehended in nonsensual, nonintellectual, direct intuition, *prajna*.¹⁹ *Prajna* “is not instinct and cannot be identified with any biotic force. It is super-rational.”²⁰ *Prajna* is nondual and nonbifurcated:

...as intuition it is contentless—that is, its content is not any particular object but the entire reality. Further *prajna* is unfathomable, immeasurable, and infinite. As such, it is beyond the reach of language, logic, and the senses.²¹

Let us turn now to An who presents some distinctions between intuition and intellect in Henri Bergson’s thought and then presents a view of the Chinese culture:

In looking closely at the various relevant passages in Bergson’s writings, we may find that there is an inconsistency in his statements about intuition and its relation to the concepts of ‘intellect’ and ‘instinct.’ On the one hand, he seems to contend that a sharp and irreconcilable antagonism obtains between intellect and intuition. On the other, he insists that intellect and intuition supplement each other, and that reality in its fullness is revealed only by a combination of the two.²²

“...Bergson emphasizes the similarity between instinct and intuition, but he never in fact equates them.”²³

For the Chinese, An says:

...the dominant principle in Chinese culture is not *lizhi* [intellect] but *zhijue* [intuition], Chinese culture is actually not lower, but rather is higher than its Western counterpart.²⁴

What is intriguing is that An shows that:

...the popularity of Bergson is mainly due to the fact that Chinese intellectuals find in him something similar to what their own traditional already provides.²⁵

Taking a closer look at Bergson we see that, intuition is an undivided continuity.²⁶ This is also the view of intuition for Thévenaz. Bergson goes on to say that:

...one can go from intuition to analysis [thinking], but not from analysis to intuition.²⁷ ...Analysis always works upon the immovable, whereas intuition projects itself into the movable.²⁸

In taking a look at what has been said so far, we see that Husserl denied that the act of knowing was made possible by an intermediary between the subject and the object. For Husserl the object itself, without any medium, was intentionally known by the subject. The primary concern is not the act of consciousness but the object of consciousness. To know the contents of consciousness is to know the object itself.

For Thévenaz we see that the phenomenon of expression cannot be reduced to logos (reason) it is both more fundamental and more general. The human being acts and speaks before it knows. It is by acting and in action that one is enabled to know. Consciousness is by an effort of attention not by a reduction. In the transcendental reduction we never meet the subject as subject but only another consciousness of. It is by concentration and intensification not simply a psychological phenomenon but a centripetal apprehension of self, says Thévenaz:

This centripetal dynamism concentrates consciousness in itself without it being necessary to empty it of being and of its own being in order to put it in the presence...of itself.²⁹

Both Bergson and Thévenaz place the emphasis on intuition. Thévenaz calls the reflexive, intuition. It is an immediate reflexive consciousness of self. It is fundamental, primordial.

In the other cultures presented we can see that the cognitive is mediate knowledge and that the intuitive is immediate. The mediate is indirect through the senses and intellect and the immediate is direct, nonconceptual intuitive insight. Higher knowledge is intuitive. Lower knowledge is cognitive. Lower knowledge is brain-bound intellect. One is freed from the chattering mind by intuition.

Looking into this further, in Buddhism, the path of meditation is the realization that there is nothing to cling to. There is nothing to cling to and no need to cling to anything. It is the cognitive that clings to things. Intuition

does not spring out of the cognitive that gets in the way of meditation trying to cling to things. One quiets the chattering mind letting the intuition, through effort, mindfulness and concentration amplify itself. This is not through a reduction. In Theravada Buddhism, for example, it is assumed that one is born with raw intuitions and that through practice or meditation these raw intuitions are refined. One then attains an insight within intuition and moves to enlightenment.

So, what we have seen so far is that in the West emphasis is placed on object consciousness based on intentionality. In the East emphasis is placed on intuition. Now taking this even further, in the East one can begin by meditating on an object and move to objectless consciousness. The problematic that arises then is in how to integrate these two views, intuition and cognition, irrational and rational, which for the East and West are separate. Rather than an opposition there may be a common basis that is behind and beyond the emphasized differences that is complementary rather than contrary. We would not have to choose between one or the other but both. This is an inclusive view, without the and. This would be an integral view.

Puligandla presents a way of going beyond this opposition:

The Yogi's knowledge is thus through and through intuitive and nonconceptual. One may say that this kind of knowledge is nonrational. It should be noted that 'nonrational' is not the same as 'irrational,' for the latter means opposition to reason and intellect, whereas the former means something that is outside the province of reason and intellect. This simply means that the intuitive knowledge of the Yogi is radically different from conceptual, mediated, intellectual knowledge. It does not mean that Yogic knowledge is necessarily opposed to intellect and reason, but simply that it transcends reason and intellect.³⁰

The cognitive cannot grasp neither itself nor reality. It cannot grasp reality because reality wholly transcends the realm of distinctions.

The inclusive East West approach for this researcher would consider intuition as primordial. Intuition is whole. It is immediate. Cognition is part. It is mediate. Intentionality that is primordial to cognition remains as lower knowledge which is the experiencer experiencing that which is experienced. Higher knowledge is intuition. **Figure 1** describes the relocating of intentionality within the reflexive, which is the intuitive:

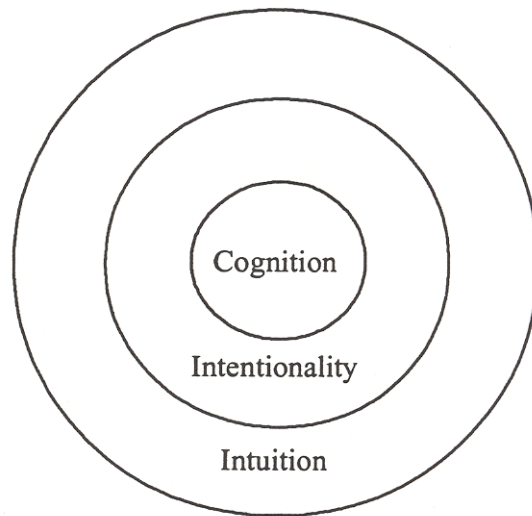


Figure 1

Eastern Intuition and Western Cognition:
Where and How Do They Meet?

If philosophy is distinguished by a certain mode of knowledge, as was said in the beginning of this presentation, which throws light upon itself, it is the reflexive, intuition. Intuition is revealing. It shines by its own luminosity. Cognition reflects its light. This is philosophy, subject as subject, throwing light upon its own foundations.

Notes

- 1) Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 17.
- 2) Yanming An, "Liang Shuming and Henri Bergson on Intuition: Cultural Context and the Evolution of Terms", *Philosophy East and West*, 47, no. 3, July 1997 (World Wide Web, pp. 1-25), p. 3.
- 3) Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- 4) Pierre Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?: and other Essays*, trans. James M. Edie, Charles Courtney and Paul Brockelman, ed., intro. James M. Edie, preface John Wild (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962), pp. 113-132.

- 5) *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- 6) *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- 8) *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 9) *Ibid.*, p. 121.
- 10) Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans., ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 187.
- 11) *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.
- 12) *Ibid.*, p. 191.
- 13) *Ibid.*, p. 192.
- 14) Pierre Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?: and other Essays*, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-129.
- 15) *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- 16) Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
- 17) *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 18) *Ibid.*, p. 224.
- 19) *Ibid.*, p. 72.
- 20) *Ibid.*, fn. 110, p. 290.
- 21) *Ibid.*, fn. 110, pp. 290-291.
- 22) Yanming An, “Liang Shuming and Henri Bergson on Intuition: Cultural Context and the Evolution of Terms”, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- 23) *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 24) *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 25) *Ibid.*, p. 7.

- 26) Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1911), p. 239.
- 27) Henri Bergson, *The Introduction to a New Philosophy*, trans. Sidney Littman (Boston: John W. Luce and Co., 1912), p. 57.
- 28) *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- 29) Pierre Thévenaz, *What is Phenomenology?: and other Essays*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.
- 30) Ramakrishna Puligandla, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, p. 142.