

Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The project of comparative philosophy is an essential part of the project of philosophy itself. Therefore, its purpose is not primarily to show similarities and differences between various traditions, although this may be part of its work. Its major function within the project of philosophy is to enrich the historical horizon philosophers are drawing from in their discussion of philosophical problems. The term "comparative," which I must use in the absence of an alternative, may be misleading. It suggests a third perspective that allows us to look at the traditions we compare from the outside. Our comparative perspective, however, is essentially asymmetric: we always look at the traditions we compare either from within one of them or from a point of view created by the overlapping of two or more, and this second case is far from being an outside perspective. On the methodological side this means that we always start with the understanding of the problematic of philosophy provided by our particular place within the spectrum of traditions. The comparative perspective is opened up by the premise that other traditions respond to the same problematic, although they may conceive, articulate and phrase it in very different ways. Reading texts from these traditions requires that we constantly rephrase our understanding of this problematic in such a way that not only the texts we are already familiar with, but these other texts too can be understood as a response to it.

KEY WORDS

Analects
Anthropology
Axial Age

Chinese Philosophy
Comparative Philosophy
Hermeneutics

jen
Philosophy
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Rorty
Shame

I.

Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy Intertwined

Depending upon the interest and the preferences of the individual scholar, comparative philosophy may be understood and practiced in various ways. One factor that has to be taken into account by any possible approach, however, is the state of philosophy at the time. According to one of the basic insights of hermeneutics, we only are capable of understanding a text if we can relate it to questions we ask or are able to ask ourselves.¹ And it is the contemporary situation of philosophy which represents the way philosophical questions are perceived, understood, asked and treated within the very moment of history we belong to. In the present situation comparative philosophy has ceased to be an optional subject that may be practiced in addition to and apart from problem-oriented philosophy. Both have rather come to be closely intertwined.

A. The End-of-Philosophy Debate and the Comparative Perspective

Western philosophy certainly is at a turning-point. The so-called "end-of-philosophy debate" of course is nothing new; it has been part of the philosophical conversation throughout the ages. Now, however, it has emerged in a new light. No longer is the issue just whether or not philosophy has come to an end. Even those who believe that the problematic of philosophy can not be dropped are convinced, as Thomas McCarthy puts it, "that things philosophical cannot simply go on as they have."² If philosophy has not come to an end, it has to be transformed. This is one of the few opinions widely shared within the community of philosophers.

As a consequence, the question of what to consider "philosophical tradition" can and must be pursued in a more decisive way. Taking a purely historical perspective, the terms "Indian philosophy," "Chinese philosophy" and, in a line with them, "Western philosophy" are widely accepted. Although philosophy departments in the West rarely offer courses in Chinese or Indian philosophy, historians of Western philosophy working in these departments hardly take offence with phrases like "history of Indian philosophy" or "history of Chinese philosophy." Historically the philosophical tradition is understood as including at least the three major traditions mentioned, and it seems to be only due to interest or familiarity that in the West the emphasis of philosophy departments lies on the Western tradition

while the other traditions are left to orientalists.

The case is different for a perspective sometimes called "technical" or "systematic," a perspective not primarily concerned with philosophical problems as a part of history but as problems that matter for us, as questions we are confronted with, raise and try to answer. Philosophizing in this sense, the technical discussion of philosophical problems, is of course always informed by the history of these problems and the history of philosophy as a whole. It relies on it as a source to draw from and as a background. The philosophical tradition seen from this perspective, as a background to draw from or even to break with in philosophizing, I understand as "philosophical tradition" *in the emphatic sense* of the term.

What is considered the scope of this tradition in its "historical" sense is not identical with the scope of the "emphatic" tradition. Philosophizing in the West, up to and including the current end-of-philosophy debate, usually draws only from the Western tradition. As the term "philosophy" nevertheless is used without further qualification, this implies the opinion that the philosophical tradition in the emphatic sense is limited to the Western tradition alone.

The non-European traditions, moreover, are not as far away from the armchairs of Western philosophers as they used to be. Until not so long ago, technical debates within these traditions, a form of philosophizing that draws from them to approach problems Western historians do not hesitate to call "philosophical," took place as if in another galaxy. The background of the few specialists who managed to cross the barrier from the Western side usually was not professional philosophy. Apart from a few exceptions, their translations and reports therefore appealed more to an audience interested in philology, anthropology or history of religions than to philosophers. Most sources available in Western languages indeed are not translated in such a way that philosophers not familiar with the original language could draw from them in technical discussions.

All this has changed or is about to change. As for the Chinese tradition, which is my comparative focus in this paper, there is a growing number of publications by Western scholars explicitly working within and from a philosophical background. More important perhaps, there is a new generation of Chinese scholars and philosophers, educated both in the Chinese and the Western tradition, writing in Chinese and in English and concerned with the project of appropriating, reinterpreting and presenting their tradition, above all Confucianism, "as a responsible resource for our own philosophic

needs.”³ In other words, the debate on Chinese philosophy accessible in English or other Western languages is shifting from a more historical to a more emphatic or technical perspective in the sense specified above. Parallel to the debate drawing from the Western tradition, another debate, drawing from the Chinese tradition, has become a reality in the philosophical marketplace of the West. And, so far as I know, there could even be a third debate, drawing from the Indian tradition.

Western philosophy is occupied with the end-of-philosophy debate, while this parallel debate, using the term “philosophy” as well, is not. This can either mean that these two debates or discourses—“Western” and “Chinese”—use the term to mean entirely different things, or that one of them has a blind spot at the very point where the other feels itself to be especially lucid. A third possibility would be that such a blind spot can be found on both sides. It is no longer possible to ignore this situation. Exactly because Western philosophy is centering on the end-of-philosophy debate it has no other option but to integrate the comparative perspective or to become provincial.

B. Towards a Strategy for Comparative Philosophy

The strategy for integrating this perspective has to be developed from within the current debate of Western philosophy itself. I will try to show that a possible method of arguing against the end-of-philosophy position can be modified in such a way that it can function as such a strategy. To do so, I first want to present an example of the end-of-philosophy position.

One of its main representatives in the Anglo-American world is Richard Rorty.⁴ In his view, what has come to an end is “Philosophy” as opposed to “philosophy” — the latter (with a small “p”) being just, and here he is quoting Sellars, “an attempt to see how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together, in the broadest possible sense of the term.”⁵ The project of Philosophy is described as

asking questions about the nature of certain normative notions (for instance, “truth,” “rationality,” “goodness”) in the hope of better obeying such norms. The idea is to believe more truths or do more good or be more rational by knowing more about Truth or Goodness or Rationality.⁶

In trying to answer these questions, Philosophy tried, as Rorty sees it, to look for “natural starting points,” distinct from and prior to all specific cultural

traditions.⁷ Such starting points have been conceived in various ways. As for the notion of truth, Platonists in the widest sense see it as correspondence to something beyond space and time, positivists as correspondence to facts or empirical data. They differ in their conception of the starting point, but they take it for granted that it is worthwhile and necessary to ask for it, and that is why positivism, however fiercely it may be opposed to Platonism, nevertheless is just a variation of the same project.⁸ This project, so goes the claim of Rorty's neo-pragmatism, "has outlived its usefulness."⁹ The history of its attempts and the criticism of these attempts has shown "that there is no interesting work to be done in this area."¹⁰

In methodological terms, neo-pragmatism sees itself as analogous to the position of secularists who think that questions concerning the Nature or the Will of God do not lead anywhere. They are not saying that God does not exist, nor do they have any heretical theory about God, but "they feel unclear about what it would mean to affirm His existence, and thus about the point of denying it."¹¹ What they think is that we should not use the vocabulary of theology any more. Neo-pragmatism in the same sense does not have any special theory about the nature of Truth, Goodness, Reality and the other problems of Philosophy; it would rather just "change the subject."¹²

Roughly, this position includes three elements. (1) A description of the problematic — I return here to the conventional uncapitalized usage of the term — of philosophy, of what philosophy is all about; (2) the claim that the history of thinking about this problematic did not lead to useful results; (3) the claim that ceasing to think about this problematic will not leave us with any unsettled or unsolved "problem" of real concern, but that indeed, to paraphrase Rorty's words from another context, we do not have to scratch here because it does not itch.¹³ The difficulty of arguing against this and similar positions lies in what already has been mentioned as the new feature of the contemporary end-of-philosophy debate: even those who disagree with the position as a whole will agree to a certain extent with (2). What nevertheless makes them disagree is their discontent with (3). So Habermas against Rorty: "It is just this assumption that 'it doesn't itch' that I find problematic."¹⁴

To develop this discontent into an argument, it is essential not just to argue in spite of (2) but to take (2) explicitly as a premise. Then we have to direct our attention to (1). If (1) describes the problematic of philosophy, and the history of philosophy is the history of the attempts to think about

the problematic as described, then our discontent with (3) can only mean that in spite of (2) we feel that the problems described in (1) are real problems and of enduring concern.

Taking (2) explicitly as a premise, we can argue this way: because the history of philosophy is the history of the problems described in (1) and did not lead to useful results, or better, did not lead to results that can still be used in the present circumstances, we have reason to assume that the problematic of philosophy is not strictly identical with the problems described in (1). We therefore suggest distinguishing methodologically between this problematic and its various possible *phrasings*. All verbalizations are understood as informed by certain historical conditions and therefore may cease to be successful if these conditions change. What Rorty describes in (1) could be a phrasing that cannot be successful any more under the conditions of the present situation.

Returning from here to our discontent with (3) we see that to argue against the end-of-philosophy position does not necessarily mean to stubbornly struggle, in spite of (2), with the questions described in (1). A more promising strategy may first try, taking into account the conditions that make the phrasing given in (1) unsuccessful, to rephrase the problematic of philosophy instead.

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it should be emphasized that the distinction between this problematic and its phrasings is *a methodological and not an ontological* one. It is not intended to separate the problematic from all possible phrasings, it is only intended to prevent its complete identification with any given phrasing. To clarify this distinction a bit further we consider the problematic as a question — it may be called *the question of philosophy* — and its phrasings, as questions or sets of questions, already as beginnings or even frames of possible answers to this question.

Based upon this, an argument against any end-of-philosophy position, or indeed an attempt to think about philosophical problems while taking (2) as a premise, can then proceed in four steps. First step: identify the *given* phrasing of the problematic of philosophy. Second step: try to understand this phrasing as an answer, which means, try to reconstruct a question that allows you to understand it as an answer. This reconstruction has the status of a heuristic hypothesis to be used in the two following steps. Third step: try to identify those aspects of that answer, or frame of an answer, that collide with specific conditions of the present situation.¹⁵ Fourth step: try to modify or transform the given phrasing in such a way that it still can be

understood as framing an answer to the reconstructed question, but does not collide any more with the conditions of the present situation.

C. Comparative Philosophy

The philosophical tradition in the emphatic sense includes, and this is only a first and formal definition, everything that can be understood as concerned with the problematic of philosophy. To really decide its scope, or better, to decide whether a given text, or corpus of texts, or a given tradition of teaching and questioning, does or does not belong to it, we first have to identify the phrasing we explicitly or implicitly use or presuppose in our *own work*, because this will be the phrasing we presuppose in our question as well. If the text, using this phrasing as a criterion, can be understood as a philosophical one, we already have reached the decision we were looking for. However, for texts from non-European traditions it would be very unusual if this were the case, and if it were, we should rather take it as a reason for suspicion concerning our understanding of the text than as a decision on our question. To say it the other way round: using our own criterion, what we have to expect is that non-Western texts of interest turn out not to be concerned with the problematic of philosophy. And of course we cannot take this as a decision on our question either. To reach a decision two more steps are required.

By analogy to the second step above we have to reconstruct a question that allows us to step back and to understand the phrasing identified in the first step as an answer or the frame of an answer. This step proceeds only by analogy to and not in the same way as the one above, because here we are already prospectively guided by the following step, which is the attempt to understand the text under investigation as an answer to the question we are about to reconstruct. If this attempt succeeds, if we really can read the text as an answer to the reconstructed question, then it is safe to say that it does belong to the philosophical tradition in the emphatic sense.

However, step two and three form a hermeneutic circle that has to be passed through more than once. The reason for this is that the first time through, the reconstruction in step two, although already guided by the project of step three and thus by our understanding of the text we are concerned with, nevertheless will still be overwhelmingly informed by the phrasing or phrasings we are used to. We therefore had better expect that on the basis of this first hypothesis the text again will not turn out to be a

“philosophical” one, and again it would be naive to take this as a final decision. With every repetition of the procedure the reconstruction will be more and more informed by our foregoing experience with the text, and the results consequently will have more weight.

The strategy just described can be understood as a tentative — procedural, functional, operational — definition of comparative philosophy. Because of the state of affairs philosophy has reached today, comparative philosophy in this sense cannot be considered any more as something separate or apart from technical philosophy as defined above. Both have become closely intertwined. Three aspects of their intertwining may be emphasized:

- (1) In the present circumstances any discussion of philosophical problems includes the task of rephrasing the problematic of philosophy, which means transcending the given or presupposed phrasing and not taking it for granted any longer. Exactly this, as has just been seen, is essential for comparative philosophy as well.
- (2) When arguing against the end-of-philosophy position, to reconstruct the question that allows us to understand the given phrasing as an answer will sometimes not be so easy. Usually this phrasing will be the one we are used to ourselves and we may have problems putting it into perspective. The analogous step in comparative philosophy is easier, because it has the guidance of the hermeneutic circle it belongs to. From every reconstruction of a question we reach here we of course can immediately shift into the technical project. Instead of trying to read the text we are concerned with as an answer to the question reconstructed, we can try to specify it as a modification of the given phrasing compatible with the conditions of the present situation.
- (3) The scope of the philosophical tradition in the emphatic sense can only be defined on the basis of an accepted phrasing of the problematic of philosophy. As long as this phrasing is at stake, it is an intrinsically open question. However, if a phrasing compatible with the conditions of the present situation should be reached, the project of elaborating it further and developing a philosophy on its basis would have a hermeneutic side. It would include the task, turning back to the reconstructed question that allowed us to design the phrasing we have reached, of determining in as detailed a way as possible which texts can be

understood as an answer to this question as well. What we would get would be the philosophical tradition (Western and/or Eastern) relevant to our project, which means the tradition available for us to draw on and to use as a source of inspiration. Not to do so would be a waste of imaginative resources in the history of mankind, a waste we probably cannot afford.

II.

The Problematic of Philosophy

Philosophy has a beginning. Man became confronted with its problematic at a certain point in history, and we, if at all, become confronted with it at a certain point in our life-history. There was a time when it did not yet exist, and there also was a time when it did not yet exist for us. To understand this problematic, I will try to reconstruct how it emerged. Ontogenetically we have to ask: what kind of need or crucial experience was it that made man, in an attempt to respond, design and ask questions we now call "philosophical"? Phylogenetically we would have to ask: what happens when such questions, at a certain point in the life-history of an individual, cease to be just words or historical data and become productive, a concern, a problem? The second question lies beyond the scope of this paper; I will focus on the first one only.

Questions like how to build a car, to produce more grain or to manipulate genes are not what philosophy is concerned with. Under certain conditions, however, all these activities may become a topic of philosophical discussion. The problem, to use a current example, of whether we *should* manipulate genes at all, and if so, to what extent, is today discussed within "applied ethics." What are we concerned with when asking this and similar questions? With ethics, of course. And what does that mean? What I am looking for is not a textbook definition of ethics, but something more simple and more complicated at the same time.

To ask how to manipulate genes means to be concerned with genes and the technology for manipulating them. To ask if we should do that at all obviously does not have the same subject of concern. In that case we are concerned with what we should and what we should not do, and that finally means to be concerned, in a certain sense, with what we are.¹⁶ However, we are concerned with what we are as well when trying to manipulate human genes, or in medical science generally or in any other science dedicated to the

study of *homo sapiens*. None of these sciences will be able to answer ethical questions and even less to tell us what they are all about, or what we are. If we nevertheless insist that these questions are meaningful and that, when asking them, we are concerned with ourselves, then we have to elaborate what we are in such a way that this form of concern becomes conceivable.

Ethical questions are philosophical questions. And not only these, but all philosophical questions are, in a sense still to be elaborated, concerned with what we are, ethics being a specific mode of this more comprehensive concern.

A. Conceptual Frame

Whatever we may be, in any case we are *in the world*. This I take, following the early Heidegger, as my starting point.¹⁷ The preposition *in* does not refer here to a relation between two objects with regard to their location in space, as it does for example in "the piece of candy is *in* a box." Nor does it mean any kind of relationship towards the world taken up by man, because this would imply that man was, logically speaking, something prior to and independent of this relationship. It is not that first we *are* and then are *in the world*; we rather are, as the Heideggerian term says, *Being-in-the-world*, and this, nothing prior to or apart from it, is what we are and all we are. I take as my conceptual frame the two terms used by Heidegger to further elaborate the meaning of *Being-in*: *understanding (Verstehen)* and *state-of-mind (Befindlichkeit)*. I do not intend, however, a comprehensive discussion of these concepts, and I will not use them exactly in the same way and with the same emphasis as Heidegger does. Nevertheless, I consider my usage to be compatible with the basic intuition of their meaning as presented in *Sein und Zeit*.

One aspect of what we are as *Being-in* is understanding. We are by working out an understanding of the world, our place within it and of ourselves.

Let us take, as a small segment of the world, a river. Depending upon the situation, we look at it as something to cross, to drink from, to use for fishing, to admire or to study. All these and others are possibilities we have or may have when we face a river. They are there because, by being as *Being-in*, we project them. And doing so we become aware of them, we appropriate them as the possibilities we have, as our possibilities. By *projecting and appropriating these possibilities we are working out an under-*

standing of this segment of the world. And because understanding is this, projection and appropriation of possibilities, we do not perceive the world as a storehouse of indifferent objects, but rather as a landscape of possibilities.¹⁸

If this first aspect was all *Being-in* is about, we still would be but disinterested guests in this landscape. And obviously we are not. When we encounter a river, we do have all the possibilities mentioned and even more. But we usually look at it only as something to cross or as something to admire and so on. The river usually matters to us already in a certain definite way, or at least more in one way than in all the others: when I am busy on my way to some place on the other side, I may just look at it as something to cross, and when taking a walk the same evening, as something to admire. We usually are already directed in a certain way. This is the second aspect of our being as *Being-in*. Its main difference from the first one is that it is something given: the way things matter to us when we first encounter them does not depend upon our will or liking, they matter to us as they do, whether we like it or not. This does not mean, by the way, that we necessarily have to act accordingly. We may look at the river as something to admire, although we are on our way to a place on the other side. This is a very important point and I will come back to it later on. Heidegger calls this second aspect *Befindlichkeit*, literally "the state in which one may be found".¹⁹ As there is, to my knowledge, no suitable English equivalent of this term, I prefer to leave it untranslated.

The problematic of philosophy, so I have said, is a specific form of *concern with ourselves*. It emerged at a certain point in history and since then it again and again does emerge in the life-histories of individuals. I try to understand this problematic by reconstructing how it emerged. To do so, the conceptual frame outlined above has to be further concretized towards the dimension of history.

The possibilities we project are not our personal creations. We take them from the repertoire of possibilities offered by the understanding of the world we are living in. And we always work out our understanding within an understanding that is already there, because we are always born into a world which is already "understood."

To look at the river as something to admire, for example, means to do what man has done for thousands of years. Nevertheless, when doing it, I do not just repeat a given pattern. The concrete content of what it actually means in my case, and in the case of any other particular person, to admire

this river, depends upon factors that, in this particular combination, probably never were the same and never will be again. It depends upon the matrix of my receptiveness, both in general and — here the aspect of *Befindlichkeit* comes in — at the very moment I face the river. I may be more responsive to colors than to sounds, or more to certain colors than to others, or to certain colors in combination with certain sounds and so on. Other factors concern the distinctive state of the river. To admire it at dawn is very different from doing so in full sunlight, and having admired it a few hundred years ago, when it was still flowing between green hills, forests and small villages, was completely different from doing so now, when it is making its way through an industrialized, crowded metropolis, loaded with noisy traffic. The possibility, as I appropriate it and become aware of it as a possibility I have, is defined and concretized by all these factors.

Working out my understanding of the world, I draw from the understanding I have been born into, but I do not and cannot just repeat it, even if I try to, because I have to apply it under circumstances that are always new. Application therefore means always modification, change, transformation.

If I encounter a river, busily on my way to a place on the other side, and there is neither a bridge nor a ferry, I try to build a raft. If there are no materials to do so and the river is too wide or too dangerous to swim across, the possibility of crossing it is none that I can appropriate as mine. In a society without rafts, ferries, bridges or any other similar kind of technology, most people probably would not even look at this river as something to cross. On the other hand: sitting in a car or airplane, I may actually cross it without looking at it as something to cross. I may rather, when crossing it, look at it as something to admire. As these examples show, the technology available or accessible in any given situation is a factor that deeply influences the understanding of this situation.

The understanding we have been born into is or may be affected by technology in at least three ways: (1) Technology determines the concretized form in which I appropriate given possibilities as mine. If I have to use a raft, the concrete content of looking at the river as something to cross is very different from doing so while sitting in a car and crossing it on a bridge. (2) Particular patterns functioning within the understanding of the world we have been born into are not used any more because of technological progress or change. People who constantly use airplanes hardly look at rivers as something to cross. (3) Technology produces itself new patterns of understanding. Man may have built the first raft because he wanted to cross a river. While

using it for this purpose, he may have discovered that it can also be used to travel on the river to some place further down. Thus, the pattern of looking at the river as a waterway became a new element in the repertoire.

Part of any understanding of the world is a more or less articulate understanding of the world as a whole. Its main function is to give unity or at least continuity to our understanding of succeeding situations. Important for my overall argument is the claim that not every possible understanding of a given situation is compatible with every understanding of the world as a whole. The ancient Greeks looked at certain rivers as gods. We may try to do so, but we will not succeed in appropriating this possibility, probably because our understanding of the world as a whole excludes it.

Such an understanding of the whole, together with the patterns of understanding compatible with it, I call a *formation of understanding*. However, when working out our understanding of a given situation, we do not proceed from above. We are guided by an understanding of the world as a whole we inhabit, but the way we precisely understand the situation is defined and concretized, as outlined before, by the situation itself. If enough factors result in an understanding which is in conflict with our understanding of the world as a whole, we just have to live with this conflict. Eventually, if the conflict is built up by repetition and attempts at harmonizing fail, the whole formation may begin to disintegrate.

The problematic of philosophy emerged around the middle of the first millennium B.C.. This period, sometimes referred to as the "axial age",²⁰ was a time of immense creativity, and certainly there had to be a need for it. I will first try to identify this need and then to reconstruct the emergence of the problematic of philosophy as a response to it. Three main points will be elaborated: (1) what led to the axial age was the disintegration of a formation of understanding I will call *heroic self-image*, triggered above all by a new level of technological development; (2) this resulted in an "untenable position" in a sense to be elaborated by making use of the term *Befindlichkeit*; what I have in mind is a sort of implosion of significance, of things that matter, towards one purpose: to get beyond this position, thus (3) philosophy emerged as an attempt to respond to this situation.

B. The Heroic Self-Image

In a recent discussion on the "concept of a person"²¹ it has been pointed out that human beings are not just subject to the desires and motives they

have, but are able to evaluate them and to form, as Harry Frankfurt puts it, "second-order desires." This means that we may want to follow or not to follow a certain desire or motive or even to have or not to have it. Man, we can say, *transcends* the desires and motives he has, and from within this *transcendence* he takes and has to take his stand towards them.

Man's ability to take his stand implies two elements: some competence to deliberate and the competence to put the results of deliberation into practice. Both are essential. The first element is the ability to actually form second-order desires. But this is not enough. We may have formed the desire not to drink another glass of brandy and – following the first-order-desire – nevertheless do it.

The competence to deliberate is very difficult to describe on this general level. It should not be identified with reasoning. Reasoning is a form of deliberation, but not the only one. The form of deliberation we use is determined by the formation of understanding we inhabit. One way to characterize a formation of understanding therefore is to identify the form of deliberation it defines.

In book XI of the *Iliad* Odysseus is left alone on the battle-field. Taking his stand towards his fear he deliberates as follows:

. . . what is to happen to me? If I flee frightened of their numbers, that will be a great evil; but if I am taken alone, that is more terrible. . . . But why does my *thumos* say these things to me? For I know that the bad [*kakoi*] leave the battle, but that he who is excellent [*aristeuesi*] in fighting must stand his ground boldly . . . (404-410)²²

Odysseus does not ask what he should do: he knows it. His fear, a mode of *Befindlichkeit*, is not presented as a possible reason for an alternative direction of action, because this direction is not in question. It rather is presented as something that might divert him from what it is appropriate to do and what he would otherwise do without any doubt or hesitation. Consequently, his deliberation does not take the form of weighing alternative reasons for different choices of action. It has the form of a self-reminder. Alasdair McIntyre comments:

Odysseus makes no inferences. What he does is to call to mind what he knows in order to counteract the effect upon his *thumos* of a disturbing passion, fear. What he says to himself stands

to the action he then performs, not as a premise to a conclusion, but as a statement of what is required to a performance of that requirement.²³

To read Homer in my conceptual frame: when Odysseus realizes that he is alone on the battlefield, he projects the possibility of running away and even attempts to appropriate it as his own. Then he becomes aware that he cannot do that. To run away is not a possibility he really has, and that is so because he is and understands himself as a warrior. But couldn't he still argue that it would be better to survive as a bad warrior than to excel in fighting and die? The fact that he does not and cannot argue this way may help us to bring into focus the formation of understanding he inhabits.

It has been said above that not every understanding of the world as a whole is compatible with every possibility of understanding a given situation. Odysseus could only appropriate the possibility of running away if being a warrior were something like a job or a profession to him. In this case he would not understand himself as a warrior, but perhaps as a human being, struggling for survival and doing, for a certain period of time, the job of a warrior. To run away would then just mean to leave his job in order to survive. But Odysseus does not have any understanding of himself apart from that of being a warrior. And this self-understanding does not concern his self alone, it is an understanding of his place within the order of the universe and therefore implies an understanding of the world as a whole as an ordered universe, a cosmos governed by a single and all-embracing order. What is appropriate for him to do is something required by that very order. To run away would be against the order of things. It may happen because of *deviation*, but it is not a possibility that can be chosen, considered and appropriated.

The formation of understanding inhabited by Odysseus is a concretization of what I call *heroic self-image*. To avoid misunderstandings, I want to emphasize that this formation should not be identified only with the concretization inhabited by "heroes" in the literal sense of the term, although this may be the most significant one. The general structure of the *heroic self-image* is defined by three elements:

- (1) The idea of a universal order of things that does not depend upon the will of any human being and therefore is more powerful than even the most powerful among men.

(2) A form of self-understanding, conceived as the understanding of a particular place or role defined by the order of things. To have a particular self-understanding, to be aware of one's place within the order of things, means to inhabit a certain code of what is appropriate to do. This code can be seen as a disclosure of the order of things from the perspective of this particular place or role. It defines what it means to excel in one's respective place and may therefore be called a *code of excellence*.

(3) Excellence as defined by this code is the highest good. Action has to be pursuit of excellence in this sense. Physical well-being, wealth, status, prestige or power, the whole set of goods that may support, preserve, consolidate, enrich or guarantee our mere physical or social existence, are not conceived as objects of direct pursuit. These goods — McIntyre calls them *goods of effectiveness*²⁴ — have only the status of a possible reward for excellence. They can be pursued only indirectly, *via* the pursuit of excellence.

C. Towards the Axial Age

The *heroic self-image* presupposes a certain level of technological development. As long as all members of a society are required for the production of food and other necessities of physical survival, neither the differentiation between excellence and effectiveness nor the idea that goods of effectiveness, including survival, may be only indirectly pursued, is conceivable. Both became possible with the urban revolution, which led to a stratification of society and a diversification of social roles, among them those not directly concerned with the production of necessities for survival. If we understand the axial age, at least in one of its aspects, as a result of the disintegration of this formation of understanding, then, given the importance of technology for our understanding of the world, we have to assume that the disintegration of the *heroic self-image* is not unrelated to the further development of technology after the urban revolution that first made it possible.

Up to the present day, technological progress has always been an improvement of man's ability to exploit nature as well as to make war. To understand the mechanism of disintegration, I therefore return again to the example of the warrior.

A weapon is a means of winning in combat, that is of killing and destroying. Technically speaking, it will be a better weapon the more efficient

ly it allows us to do so. Within the *heroic self-image*, however, the legitimate purpose of a warrior is not just to defeat the enemy, and thus to win fame, wealth and power, but to defeat him according to the code of excellence given by the concrete form of the heroic self-image inhabited. A new weapon will consequently only then be perceived as a better weapon if its use can be integrated by this code, if it improves the chance of winning while still acting according to the given standards.

It can easily be seen that this formation of understanding is able to remain stable only within a comparatively small margin of technological innovation. As soon as innovations that cannot be integrated are substantially more efficient than those that can, it is doomed to disintegrate.

Although in combat the warrior who inhabits the heroic self-image does not pursue winning by any means, he nevertheless does pursue winning and not just to present his skills as in a parade-like activity. Sooner or later he will be confronted with a situation that forces him to decide either to use a substantially more efficient weapon that collides with the code of excellence and to win, or to abstain from using it and to lose. And major technological innovations usually cannot be made to disappear. Once they are there, they tend to spread and to transform the whole environment of action. The pressure to make this decision will therefore be a permanent one, and the alternative itself will finally escalate into the option either to act against the code of excellence or to perish.

As the question whether or not a certain way to act is compatible with a given code is always a matter of interpretation, we may expect a period of transition that interprets the restrictions of the code more and more liberally. A limited use of the new weapon in certain situations may be considered compatible with the pursuit of excellence, and of course the definition of these exceptions will then again be interpreted more and more liberally. So it may be possible for some time to sustain the impression, sincerely believed by individual actors, of being still engaged in the pursuit of excellence, while in fact what is directly pursued are already goods of effectiveness, survival and everything concerned with it.

During such a period of transition, there will be two crucial experiences. Gradually, and in spite of the perhaps persisting belief in the pursuit of excellence in harmony with the given code, the experience of a different kind of excellence takes shape, an excellence concerned with maximizing means to a given end. If success in combat depends decisively upon the efficiency of the weapon, the idea of a form of excellence that maximizes the efficiency of

weapons and, apart from my example, of means in general, is close at hand. What is experienced here is the germ of what later, much later, will be called *purposive rationality*. The second experience concerns the changing environment of action, we may even say, using this term in a very general sense, the changing *life-world*. Although in this period of transition agents may sincerely claim that they will not transgress the code of excellence in their actions, they will realize that others, claiming the same, are doing it. The tendency will be to realize a growing gap within the order of things, that is, the human order as it still is believed to be and the human order as it really is.

An impressive record of the final disintegration of the heroic self-image in ancient Greece is Thucydides' presentation of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides dedicated thirty years of his life to observing, studying and analyzing the events while they were happening or shortly after, and to working out his form of presentation which combines description and reflection in a peculiar way. As he saw it, this war was the first great war in history, and that for the simple reason that a similar display of power had not been possible before. The dimensions of all wars and conflicts of earlier times, so he says, including those of the legendary Trojan War, were notably smaller, because the economic and technological resources available still were too limited.²⁵ Although Thucydides develops a whole methodology for separating historical facts from the fabulous,²⁶ he is not just concerned with the presentation of individual events for their own sake. At the end of a methodological excursus he admits that his narrative may, due to the absence of the fabulous, be less pleasing to the ear; and he continues:

. . . but whoever shall wish to have a clear view *both* [italics R.D.] of the events which have happened and of those which will some day, in all human probability, happen again in the same or a similar way — for these to adjudge my history profitable will be enough for me.²⁷

To know what really has happened allows us to know as well what probably will happen again, because history is to a large extent formed by human nature which stays more or less the same. Thucydides presents key events of the Peloponnesian War as a disclosure of human nature. And what he discovers as the determining factor of man's actions and accordingly as the main law of history is the struggle for and the use of power guided by egoistic desires.²⁸ According to Thucydides, the real and only pursuit of man is,

always has been and probably always will be the pursuit of the *goods of effectiveness* — above all of power, which is the key to most others.

D. Implosion of Significance

The immediate result of the disintegration of the heroic self-image is not a new formation of understanding but nevertheless a form by which to understand the world: appropriate possibilities compatible with a given code of excellence have been fading away, the pursuit of excellence is not the guiding idea of action any more. But this does not mean that no guiding idea was left. Pursuit of excellence, as has been elaborated above, was the indirect pursuit of goods of effectiveness. These objects of indirect pursuit are still there, and by the disintegration of the heroic self-image they are transformed into objects of direct pursuit. Thus, the direct pursuit of goods of effectiveness becomes the guiding idea of action and understanding. In any given situation exactly those possibilities — to a considerable extent determined by the technological means at hand — are projected, that promise to lead to one or some of these goods, and nothing but the question of efficiency is taken to be relevant to decide which of them finally to appropriate.

This form of understanding the world is not yet a formation of understanding in the precise sense of the term, because it does not include an understanding of the world as a whole. If no formation of understanding is inhabited, however, no form of deliberation to form second-order desires is available. Man's competence to deliberate and therefore his competence to take his stand towards the desires and motives he has collapses. When this happens, there are two ways to understand this collapse. We can say that together with the competence to take his stand the *transcendence* he has collapsed too, and we can say that he still is that *transcendence*, although he has lost the competence to act accordingly. Following the first option, the collapse would be a regression towards a prehuman stage. Man would have lost what made him different from other creatures. It is quite certain that the disintegration of the heroic self-image in the period under consideration did not lead to this result, because otherwise the immense creativity of the axial age would not be conceivable. This creativity, on the other hand, becomes conceivable if we follow the second option.

The direct pursuit of goods of effectiveness being the guiding idea of action and understanding, man is acting according to the immediate motives and desires he has. If we nevertheless assume that the *transcendence* he is

has not collapsed, we have to assume as well that man's being this *transcendence* and not being able to act accordingly will create a tension that cannot be reconciled by any success whatsoever in the chosen "effective" pursuit. This tension will build up in time and sooner or later find its expression. Applying my conceptual frame, I suggest looking for this expression within the realm of *Befindlichkeit*. What follows is an attempt at a conceptual reconstruction of this process.

When actions are shaped by immediate motives and desires alone, they will sooner or later be accompanied by the feeling of a void. To elaborate this further, it will be helpful to turn back to my definition of the heroic self-image. The second element of this definition was a particular form of self-understanding: to inhabit this formation of understanding means, among other things, to have this particular understanding of oneself. An essential component of this self-understanding is a particular understanding of the world as a whole. And this, I think, holds true for any form of self-understanding whatsoever, not only for this particular one. To develop an understanding of who we are we have to develop an understanding of the world as a whole. This does not mean, however, that one comes first and the other is second, because we cannot develop an understanding of the world as a whole without developing an understanding of who we are either. I therefore suggest, and this will be sufficient for the purpose of my argument, considering these as two sides of the same coin, or as the same thing looked at, presented and articulated with different emphases.

Then to inhabit a formation of understanding, which means to have an understanding of the world as a whole, is the same as to have a certain self-understanding. Consequently, the form of deliberation we use, defined by the formation of understanding we inhabit, can as well be seen as defined by the self-understanding we have. The way we deliberate and take a stand towards the motives and desires we have is determined by the way we understand ourselves. Our actions, shaped by taking a stand, are in this sense an expression or a disclosure of our self-understanding. That is what binds them together to our life-history and allows us to recognize ourselves in them.

After the collapse of the ability to deliberate, when actions become directly shaped by the immediate motives and desires we have, all this is not the case any more. Our actions tend to fall apart; instead of recognizing ourselves in them we feel a void.

This void has to be filled. Man cannot exist with his actions falling apart. And considering all aspects of this situation as just reconstructed, there is

only one option close at hand: although he does not recognize himself in his actions, man nevertheless can force himself to take them as a disclosure of who he is. The echo of this we find in Thucydides, who took the events of the Peloponnesian War as a disclosure of human nature and consequently saw it as driven by such "effective goods" as love of power.

This option is no solution. Actions shaped by the immediate motives and desires alone do not bear any imprints of the *transcendence* man is. But the void and the whole problem do exist, and just because he is this *transcendence*. If man forces himself to take his actions as a disclosure of who he is, he will begin to understand himself as a prehuman creature. If he really was such a creature, however, he would not feel the need to develop any self-understanding at all. *The very fact of the need he tries to respond to discloses that his actions do not disclose who he is.* Taking this option, therefore, the only one at hand, the void will not be filled. It will be transformed into horror. Man will be horrified by what he believes himself to be.

Horror is nothing we can inhabit. It is not possible to live with horror as, say, with a chronic disease. When we are horrified, everything other than getting beyond this horror loses its significance. Any possible significance is soaked up and compressed into this one purpose. What we experience in this mode of *Befindlichkeit* is the implosion of significance.

E. The Problematic of Philosophy

The only available response to the problem created by the disintegration of the heroic self-image did not solve this problem. It rather produced a further escalation. This very escalation, however, opened up a new and more promising option: instead of taking his actions, shaped by immediate motives and desires alone, as a disclosure of who he is, man can now take the horror he feels when so acting as such a disclosure.

If man really was what his actions, in the specified sense, make him appear to be, he would not be horrified when realizing it. This is the formative intuition of this new option. So far, this is only an understanding of what man is not, a self-understanding in the negative mode. As for the question, then, how to elaborate this into a self-understanding in positive terms, it will in any case have to go hand in hand with a transformation of man's actions. Otherwise he will never be able to recognize himself in them and the void will remain. Methodologically speaking, the project of elaborating a self-understanding can therefore be conceived as the attempt

to rebuild the competence to shape actions in such a way that man can take them as a disclosure of who he is without being horrified by himself. A crucial constituent of this competence is the competence to deliberate. To rebuild it man has to develop an understanding of the world as a whole in the comprehensive sense emphasized above.

If we consider this as a first and sketchy outline of the problematic of philosophy, the question is what the term "develop" means here. What are the rules that govern this kind of activity and what the criteria to evaluate its results? An understanding of the world as a whole cannot be true or false, right or wrong, good or bad, because all these and similar distinctions presuppose already a certain understanding of the world as a whole in order to have a definite meaning. The distinctions and criteria we are looking for cannot just be taken from somewhere. We can only find them by further elaborating the problematic itself.

Action is essentially interaction. Whatever we pursue, in the overwhelming majority of cases we will only reach it by cooperation with others. When action is guided by the direct pursuit of goods of effectiveness alone, it tends to primarily focus on the pursuit of power, because power can, at least for a certain period of time, stabilize and even guarantee cooperation. The project of philosophy has to take into account that action as interaction is not possible if cooperation depends upon the whims of the moment. But of course it cannot rely on stabilizing this cooperation by power. The question of how to do it otherwise is one of the problems philosophy has to solve. And there is no other possibility here than to conceive as the source of the stability of cooperation the very understanding of the world as a whole, or — with another emphasis — the self-understanding, that is to be developed: the project of philosophy is to understand man and the world as a whole in such a way that this understanding can function as a source of stabilization of cooperation among men. Any understanding that cannot fulfill this function is inadequate, because it would leave no other choice than to turn back to the pursuit of power.

As this function could be fulfilled by anything men can make themselves believe in, from the sublimest myth to the crudest ideology, this criterion alone is not sufficient to specify what philosophy is concerned with. The difference between fiction and philosophy, and I believe there is one, is *not yet visible*. The criterion that allows us to make this distinction will lead us more directly to the meaning of the term in question, the term "develop."

Any understanding of the world and of man himself is developed by

man. This holds true for myth, ideology, fiction and philosophical understanding alike. The crucial point is whether or not this fact is part of the understanding that is or has been developed. This is not the case with myth, not with ideologies and not with fiction.²⁹ Here we have, at least in most cases, an author, claiming or supposed to be somehow privileged in vision or insight. The understanding that is presented, however, does not elaborate the implications of this human authorship. Philosophy takes exactly this as an essential task. It tries to develop an understanding of the world as a whole and a self-understanding of man which includes an elaboration of the experience, undergone when passing through the implosion of significance, that man is the very creature that develops and has to develop such an understanding. Thus, the understanding that is to be developed has to tell us as well what it means to work out such an understanding. To say it in the form of a methodological criterion: the method by which we develop any philosophical understanding of man and the world as a whole has to include a further elaboration of the term "develop" as used in this context.

III

A Hermeneutic Sketch

The reconstruction of the problematic of philosophy presented in the last section is a hypothesis in a double sense. It is a hermeneutic hypothesis that has to be corroborated and further refined by application. It has to be seen whether texts indeed can be understood in the light of this hypothesis and whether such a reading leads to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding. At the same time, it is a systematic hypothesis that may be used in the end-of-philosophy debate to defend the relevance of the project of philosophy. Any end-of-philosophy position operating with *too narrow* a phrasing of the problematic of philosophy can be refuted on this basis. Applications of the hypothesis in this second function, however, will be the more convincing, the more successful it has been proved to be in its hermeneutic function. Without an extensive hermeneutic corroboration it will lack the backing necessary for its systematic usage.

According to what has been said in section I, it is not advisable in the present situation to confine this hermeneutic application to texts from the Western tradition alone. To extend it to other traditions of course will make the whole project much more complicated. Any success in this comparative zone, however, would not just be a step toward corroborating the hypothesis,

it would also transform segments of the legacy of other traditions into segments of the philosophical tradition in the emphatic sense, the tradition we draw from in philosophizing.

It is far beyond the scope of this paper to even complete the first step of this project. What I can do is to show in a hermeneutic sketch that it is worth trying. I want to read two texts from different traditions in the light of my hypothesis: the dialogue between Socrates and Calicles in Plato's *Gorgias* and some passages from the Confucian *Analects* primarily concerned with the terms Jen [仁] and Li [禮].

A. Socrates against Calicles: The Strategy of Shame

A focus of recent scholarship on Plato is the question why he used the form of the dialogue and how these dialogues should be read.³⁰ If my hypothesis is correct and the problematic of philosophy indeed has its roots in the realm of *Befindlichkeit*, then it would be quite evident that the treatise is not the only, and perhaps not even the most efficient medium to defend and justify the project of philosophy. The following remarks are greatly indebted to Richard McKim's paper "Shame and Truth in Plato's *Gorgias*".³¹ What I try to do is to retell his main point, as far as the dispute between Socrates and Calicles is concerned, in the light of my hypothesis.

Calicles defends a position of unrestricted hedonism. He identifies the good with pleasure and the good life as the immediate gratification of desires. This end can be pursued by all means. "By nature" (*physis*), so he says, it is "just" that the strong use their power to maximize their indulgence at the expense of the weak. Temperance is only a virtue "by convention" (*nomos*), invented by the weak. By nature it is a vice, because it deprives the strong of what is good: maximum indulgence. Shame, in the same sense, is seen as an unnatural feeling, created by conventional morality to make the strong suppress their natural appetites.

Translated into my conceptual frame, Calicles defends the very form of action brought about by the disintegration of the heroic self-image, a form of life shaped by immediate desires and motives alone. And his opponent is not primarily Socrates, but the feeling of shame endured by those who engage in this form of life.

Shame is a mode of *Befindlichkeit*: not the same as horror, but very close to what we experience when we are horrified by ourselves. Like horror, shame is an untenable position. It is not possible to inhabit shame, to per-

manently live with it. A more elaborate description of what man finds (what happens in the realm of *Befindlichkeit*) when he takes his actions as a disclosure of who he is would have to differentiate between various possibilities, horror and shame being two of them. All these modes could then be conceived as different concretizations of what I have called "*implosion of significance*."

What Callicles is concerned with, then, is an attempt to respond to the same problem-situation, the same problematic as the project of philosophy also responds to, but to do it in a very different way. He tries to get beyond the implosion of significance, experienced as shame, without reshaping the form of action that induces this experience. His main conceptual instrument to achieve this is the antithesis between *nomos* and *phusis*, between what is conventional and what is natural: when we take our actions as a disclosure of who we are we feel ashamed, because our emotional response to what we realize we are is deformed by a conventional image of what we should be. We are like a lion who has been made to believe that he is a sheep and therefore is ashamed when he feels and sees himself acting like a lion. To get rid of his shame, he only has to look at himself with the eyes of what he is, with those of a lion. To get beyond the implosion of significance, we only have to eliminate all conventional self-images and to look at ourselves with the eyes of what our actions disclose us to be.

Compared with the project of philosophy, this position offers a shortcut. Whether or not it is acceptable depends solely upon the question whether it works, whether the given interpretation of shame really makes it disappear. This can neither be proved nor refuted by a logical argument alone. Another medium is necessary for this purpose: the Platonic dialogue is such a medium. The dispute between Socrates and Callicles is a dialogue on two levels, first between the interlocutors within the text and second between the text and the reader.

Socrates wants to prove that shame, far from being induced by mere conventions, is a natural feeling in the sense that it is common to all men. Right at the outset of the dispute he calls Callicles his "touchstone of truth"³², exactly because he claims to be free from conventional morality. If it can be shown that even Callicles, contrary to his beliefs, does feel shame, this would be a very strong argument for the Socratic position. Socrates draws various (in his opinion) shameful consequences from the axiom of Callicles' hedonism and encourages him to be completely frank in his answer to the question whether he can accept them. The first two of these conse-

quences, that a life of *scratching itches* would have to be considered happy,³³ and as well the life of a catamite,³⁴ Callicles grudgingly accepts. The third one, that even a coward would have to be seen as happy, because running away from danger gives him pleasure, and perhaps even more than facing it gives pleasure to the brave,³⁵ finally is too shameful for him to accept. He admits that he also believes, and has believed all along, that some pleasures are bad.³⁶

The reader can hypothetically identify himself with the position of Callicles and see whether the suggested shortcut works for himself. To make him realize that it does not is the main goal of this text. He then will be prepared to understand the urgency of Plato's constructive attempts in the last part of this and in later dialogues. He will have understood the problematic of philosophy.

B. The Definition of *jen* [仁] in *Analects* 12:1

The term *Jen* [仁], as is well known, is one of the crucial concepts of the Confucian *Analects*. One of the many passages that try to elaborate its meaning is *Anal.* 12:1. Especially the first half of this text has caused much concern among commentators.

顏淵問仁。子曰，克己復禮爲仁，一日克己復禮爲仁，
一日克己復禮，天下歸仁焉，爲仁由己，而由人乎哉。

Yen Yüan asked about perfect virtue [仁]. The Master said, 'To subdue one's self and return to propriety [禮], is perfect virtue. If a man can for one day subdue himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will ascribe perfect virtue to him. Is the practice of perfect virtue from a man himself, or is it from others?' (Transl. Legge)

Any reading of this passage should meet at least the following goals: (1) it should offer an interpretation of Confucius' definition of *jen* [仁] at the beginning of his answer; (2) this interpretation should be such that it allows us to understand as well the phrase at the end, which is usually seen as a rhetorical question.

Formally speaking, Confucius' definition is a combination of the two elements *k'o-chi* [克己] and *fu-li* [復禮]. The question is, how this combination can be conceived. Most translations of the first term, including

the one presented above, understand it in some way or other as a form of self-conquest. *k'o-chi* [克己] is, to quote just a few examples apart from Legge's version, rendered as "to overcome the self" (Lau), "to master oneself" (Chan), "sich selbst überwinden" (R. Wilhelm), "sich selbst zu bezwingen" (E. Schwarz). These translations with all their connotations suggest an understanding of *k'o-chi* [克己] as a preceding step which makes *fu-li* [復禮] possible: man has to overcome his desires and egoistic motives in order to make himself free for a life according to the norms of *li* [禮]. Some more recent commentators consider this interpretation of the whole phrase as misleading. Tu Wei-ming writes:

The Confucian idea does not mean that one should engage in a bitter struggle with one's own corporeal desires. It suggests instead that one should fulfill them in an ethical context. The concept of *k'o-chi* is in fact closely linked to the concept of self-cultivation (*hsiu-shen*). Indeed, they are practically identical.³⁷

Hall/Ames follow this opinion and add:

In this respect, "to discipline oneself" and "to practice ritual action" amount to the same thing.³⁸

According to this reading, the two elements of the definition do not describe different steps, one following the other, but rather two aspects of one process.

I agree with the basic intuition of this second reading. What I want to propose is a further elaboration which integrates an understanding of the last phrase of the text, the "rhetorical question." To integrate and even emphasize this phrase is important for the understanding of the whole text, because Confucius proceeds here to a deeper level of investigation. What he says before this phrase can be read as an answer to the question how *jen* [仁] can be attained, what has to be done in order to become *jen* [仁]. So far, the question why man should engage in this endeavor at all, why it should be meaningful for him to pursue this and no other end, is still open.

This is not a trivial question. To pursue *jen* [仁], and even to talk about this pursuit, is only meaningful — and we assume it is — because there is a *need* for it. And it has to be a need that does not come from the outside, as a result of the confrontation with others, but a need that arises out of the self, a need that arises because the self is what it is.

The last phrase of Confucius' answer is concerned with this point. The

need in question is only indicated, not identified here. It is identified elsewhere in the *Analects*, most explicitly, as far as I can see, in 17:21.

C. *pu an* [不安] and the Problematic of Philosophy

The surface topic of this text is the customary mourning period for parents, which was supposed to be three years.³⁹ Tsai Wo suggests that one full year is long enough. Then follows this dialogue:

子曰，食夫稻，衣夫錦，於女安乎。曰，安。
女安，則爲之，……

The Master said, 'If you were, after a year, to eat good rice, and wear embroidered clothes, would you feel at ease?' 'I should,' replied Wo.

The Master said, 'If you can feel at ease, do it.' (Tr. Legge)

What is interesting here is that Confucius does not refer at all to the reasons provided by Tsai Wo to support his suggestion. During the period of mourning for parents all ordinary activities had to be interrupted. An interruption of three years, so goes his first reason, was too long and could destroy the stability of daily affairs. His second reason points, as Legge calls it, to "the seasons of heaven".⁴⁰ After a full year everything is completed and begins anew, and that is why after such a period mourning could stop. Confucius does not, as we might expect, enter into a discussion of these reasons. He does not refute them on the level of a logical argument. His question shifts the concern of the conversation instead to a completely different level.

Within my conceptual frame, this level is the realm of *Befindlichkeit*. For Confucius the criterion by which to evaluate Tsai Wo's suggestion lies here. The customary period of mourning responds to a need in this realm, and if this need indeed does not exist, as seems to be the case with Tsai Wo, one year may be enough.

I don't think it sufficient, however, to read this text only as a text on a particular problem of customary mourning practices. Its main topic is rather the strategy of Confucius' answer than this particular question itself. In its basic idea this strategy is strikingly similar to the strategy used by Socrates against Callicles. Socrates does not try to refute Callicles by a logical argument; he too shifts the concern of the debate towards the realm of *Befind-*

lichkeit. The *Analects* of course do not have the form of a Platonic dialogue. The quoted text continues:

…君子之居喪，食旨不甘，聞樂不樂，居處不安，
故不爲也，今女安，則爲之。

But a superior man, during the whole period of mourning, does not enjoy pleasant food which he may eat, nor derive pleasure from music which he may hear. He also does not feel at ease, if he is comfortably lodged. Therefore he does not do what you propose. But now you feel at ease and may do it.

Confucius was a teacher. His answers very often are calculated to have a certain effect on the interlocutor who is asking him. What may have been the effect he had in mind here? The answer puts so much emphasis on the point that a superior man [君子], as opposed to Tsai Wo, would not feel at ease [不安] in the particular situation, that the latter has only two options. He can either explicitly recognize and accept the fact that he is not a superior man, or he can reconsider his answer and ask himself whether he really would feel at ease in this situation. Socrates again and again forces Callicles to reconsider his claim of not feeling any shame whatsoever until he breaks down and admits that he indeed does. Confucius does not put so much pressure on Tsai Wo, but he at least, so we may assume, makes him realize these options.

“Not to feel at ease [不安],” to finally apply the frame of my hermeneutic hypothesis, is – in addition to horror and shame – another concretization of the implosion of significance. It is, as they are, an untenable position. When our actions after the death of our parents are shaped by the pursuit of pleasure as before, we do not feel at ease. Turning to *li* [禮] or “propriety” – in this case the customary period of mourning – helps us to get beyond this. “Turning to *li*,” the *fu-li* [復禮] of *Anal* 12:1, always means not to shape actions by the pursuit of pleasure alone. In its deeper meaning, *Anal* 17:21 can be read as an answer to the question why we should turn to *li* [禮] at all and not rather follow our desires. We should do so because this helps us to get beyond a form of life that makes us not able to feel at ease [不安].

From here we can go back now to the last phrase of Confucius’ answer in *Anal* 12:1. The need that makes it meaningful to pursue *jen* [仁] and which arises from within the self is the need to get beyond the implosion of

significance, concretized here as "not feeling at ease" or *pu an* [不安]. And this finally allows us to understand better Confucius definition of *jen* [仁].

k'o-chi [克己] and *fu-li* [復禮] — on this point I agree with Tu Weiming and other more recent commentators — are not two separate steps. Against the background of what has been said in section II of this paper, it is evident that *k'o-chi* is not possible before or independent of *fu-li*. The whole problem after the disintegration of the heroic self-image was this: no form of deliberation to shape actions otherwise than by immediate desires and motives was available. Man has to act. He cannot just stop acting and therefore always has to shape his actions in some way. As long as his competence to deliberate is not again established, he may well try to overcome his desires, but his actions will nevertheless, just because there is absolutely no alternative, continue to be shaped by them.

k'o-chi, as a mere negation, cannot become real. However, there is a need to make it real, which is experienced as *pu an* [不安]. Perhaps the *k'o-chi* of self-subduing or self-overcoming is also a *self-understanding* grounded or projected on the realization of the *pu an* dis-ease and inner *void* of the self.

The Confucian response to the need of *pu an* is *fu-li*. *k'o-chi* is to become real as *fu-li*, man is to get beyond the implosion of significance by shaping his actions according to *li* [禮]. *k'o-chi fu-li* [克己復禮], in this sense, is the Confucian response to the problematic of philosophy.

Notes

I wish to thank my colleague Frank Stevenson for his insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper. Our discussions were enormously helpful to me.

1. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, Paul Siebeck, 1960).
2. In: Kenneth Baynes, James Bohmann, and Thomas McCarthy (ed.), *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* 1987, p. 2.
3. So Robert C. Neville in his foreword in: Tu Wei-Ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 3.
4. Cf. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979). The following analysis is largely based on his introduction to: Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays 1972-1980* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
5. Richard Rorty (1982), p. xiv.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. xxxvii.

8. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
9. *Ibid.* p. xiv.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity," in: Richard J. Bernstein (ed.), *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), p. 164.
14. Jürgen Habermas, "Questions and Counterquestions," in: Richard J. Bernstein (1985), p. 194.
15. It may seem that step two is not necessary for step three. But indeed it is. Step three presupposes that we have understood the given phrasing explicitly as framing an answer, which is the result of step two.
16. The much discussed question whether values can be derived from facts is left open here. The meaning of the question what we should do, however, can certainly not be isolated from the question who we are. See, among others: Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag), esp. chapt. iv.
17. See: Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, esp. part one, division one.
18. To look at what we encounter in a purely epistemological mode as objects of investigation is one of the – projected and appropriated – possibilities we may have, but only one among others. See *Sein und Zeit*, par. 13.
19. See p. 172, footn. 2. in Macquarrie / Robinson's English translation of *Sein und Zeit*.
20. The term was introduced by Karl Jaspers in: *Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte* (München: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1949).
21. See: Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 68. no. 1, January 1971; Gary Watson, "Free Agency," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 72, no. 8, April 1975; Charles Taylor, "What Is Human Agency?" *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, Cambridge, 1985.
22. Translation taken from: Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 15.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
25. Cf. *Thucydides* I, 1-19.
26. See: Wolfgang Schadewaldt, *Die Anfänge der Geschichtsschreibung bei den Griechen: Herodot. Thukydides* Tübinger Vorlesungen Band 2. Unter Mitwirkung von Maria Schadewaldt herausgegeben von Ingeborg Schudoma (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), p. 275-293.
27. *Thucydides*, I, 23, translation Charles Forster Smith, Loeb Classical Library.
28. See: Schadewaldt (1982), p. 290 and 295.
29. "Metafiction" is a special case. As it hardly takes as its purpose the function just mentioned before, however, the boundary line between philosophy and fiction nevertheless stays unblurred.
30. Cf. the papers collected in: Charles L. Griswols, Jr. (ed.), *Platonic Writings. Platonic Readings* (New York/London: Routledge, 1988).
31. *Ibid.*, p. 34-48.
32. *Gorg.* 487e1-3.
33. *Gorg.* 494d.
34. *Gorg.* 494e.

35. *Gorg.* 497d-499b.
36. *Gorg.* 499b4-8.
37. Tu Wei-ming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought* (Berkeley, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), p. 6.
38. David Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 124.
39. Cf. Legge in his notes to 17:21, referring to *Li Chi* [禮記] book 35: "Nominally extending to three years, that period comprehended properly but 25 months, and at most 27 months."
40. *Ibid.*