

Theory and History of Ontology (www.ontology.co) by Raul Corazzon | e-mail: rc@ontology.co

Comparative Philosophy: Non-Western Logic and Ontology

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Preliminary note

The purpose of these pages is to give both the beginner and the more experienced reader a brief guide to the literature on ontology and logic available in non-Western traditions.

This is an important and original, but often neglected, subject and I will made an attempt to list the more important studies of African, Buddhist, Chinese, Indian and Arabic traditions that are available in English.

In its initial form the page will contain a selection of readings, with brief annotations on the content (for the most important books, also the index will be included); subsequently these will be expanded to include more specific Essays on selected problems and the most relevant studies in French, Italian and German.

This is a very hard job and will require a long amount of time to be completed; suggestions and criticisms will be particularly welcome. In the sections for beginners, preference will be given to those books more readily available. In other sections some books could be out of print; if your Library does not possess the volume, it may be possible to obtain it via interlibrary loan. Every effort will be made to provide details that facilitate Bibliographical research.

The task of Comparative Philosophy

"Comparative philosophy is a field of inquiry that has been little explored. It could not have come into existence before intellectually significant contacts among the philosophical traditions. China had such a contact with India during the early centuries of the Christian era, mainly through Buddhism; but India remained unaffected. Between Greece and India the encounter was sporadic and short-lived; neither made a deliberate attempt to study the other. But the world situation has now changed. The East and the West have come once for all into intimate contact on a vast scale. Each feels the necessity for mutual understanding and even for assimilating whatever in the other is true and useful. This need to understand is no longer a matter of mere intellectual curiosity but of survival. The eastern and western minds need to be integrated. It has been asserted and is still being maintained today that each has a different kind of soul. But if the two are to be integrated, we have to assume a deeper soul comprehending the manifest souls of both. This common soul must always have been, without either component being conscious of its presence. The encompassing soul has to be discovered and understood; and in its terms the separate souls have to be reappraised. There have been works useful for the study of comparative philosophy, such as source books, treatises on philosophical beginnings, separate histories, evaluations of cultures, and some syntheses. However, they have not presented the philosophical traditions with a unified perspective from which they can be studied comparatively. Comparative philosophy must have a philosophical aim. Only when the aim is clarified can the work be given a definite shape. The aim has to illuminate the perspective; then the traditions thrown into perspective take on a definite meaning and significance. The aim of comparative philosophy is the elucidation of the nature of man and his environment in order that a comprehensive philosophy of life and a plan for thought and action may be obtained. It is with this end in view that the present the Indians who are acquainted with both western and Indian philosophies have little knowledge of the Chinese. Similarly, many Chinese know very little of the western and the Indian except Buddhism. Moreover, each has many wrong notions about the other philosophies and cannot get the feel of them. There is therefore a need for a book in which all three traditions are given in outline. From this book the reader can learn the general trends and central ideas of each.

In comparing and evaluating, the reader should be allowed to draw his own conclusions. He need not accept those given by authors, not even by the present writer. But he can draw his own conclusions only if the traditions are presented according to a single plan, and if he is given some insight into them. He should know fairly well what he is to compare before he does compare. There are many standard works on the separate histories of the philosophical traditions. But often they are so detailed that it is difficult to understand the main trends and interests. One cannot easily rise above the minutiae in order to view all the traditions together. There are also briefer histories of philosophy. But they have not been written from any single point of view, not even according to any single plan, with the result that one becomes confused when attempting to get a comparative view. The reader belonging to any one tradition should get an understandable impression of the others. This purpose can be achieved only if all the traditions can be presented according to a generally common plan and common concepts. This volume undertakes to do this in a modest fashion by introducing the western, Indian, and Chinese readers to each others' philosophies.

A few books have been written about the world's philosophies, but often without an adequate grasp or exposition of their natures. The result is that the reader finds the unfamiliar traditions strange and outlandish, and is unable to form an opinion about them. Some of the authors treat several different philosophies sympathetically. Yet sympathy, though essential, is not enough, unless it leads to deeper understanding. That is why their interpretations are often curious, and not very helpful. If reason is the same everywhere and many of life's problems are shared, this strangeness ought to be minimized. Any presentation of all philosophies together should lessen this strangeness and increase understandability.

One great hurdle in preparing a work on comparative philosophy is the difficulty of learning all the languages involved. The project could have taken the form of a symposium by a number of specialists.

Nevertheless, even when a uniform plan is outlined, it is hard to obtain uniformity of treatment, since the minds of individual investigators operate along different lines.

How long, then, are we to wait till a master of all languages and philosophies offers the world a work on comparative philosophy? Some one has to start the task, and the author, along with a few others before him, has ventured to begin, even though aware of the perils.

He accepts dependence on translations as inevitable for any treatment of comparative philosophy. One who attempts to master several languages as well as the philosophies written in them risks shallowness.

The language barrier is likely to confront every writer on comparative philosophy who wishes to base his work entirely on original sources, but any defect that may result from the difficulty will rectify itself in course of time, as thinkers of different traditions, interested in comparative philosophy, cooperate with one another through mutual criticism." (Preface, pp. V-VII)

From: P. T. Raju, *Introduction to Comparative Philosophy*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1962.