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Are certain knowledge frameworks more congenial to the aims of cross-cultural philosophy?

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*Symposium: Are Certain Knowledge Frameworks More Congenial to the Aims of Cross-Cultural Philosophy?**

In her essay, “Global Knowledge Frameworks and the Tasks of Cross-Cultural Philosophy,” Leigh Jenco proposes that certain knowledge frameworks may, in virtue of their accessibility to erstwhile outsiders, be more congenial to the aims of cross-cultural philosophy. Her co-symposiasts use Jenco’s essay to further the discussion on different aspects of this claim. Steve Fuller contests whether postcolonialism is the right lens through which cross-cultural encounters should be studied. David H. Kim suggests that an inclusive multifactorial account of frameworks relevant to cross-cultural philosophy may be more apt for the aims of this sub-discipline. Thaddeus Metz seeks to provide reason to doubt Jenco’s self-transformative conception, and also advance another, pluralist conception of knowledge. Miljana Milojevic reinterprets Jenco’s knowledge frameworks as different conceptualizations of knowledge used in attempts to justify the neglect of non-Western traditions.

Key words: African philosophy; cross-cultural inquiry; fallibilism; knowledge-frameworks; multiculturalism; non-western philosophy; postcolonialism; objectivism; self-transformation

Global Knowledge Frameworks and the Tasks of Cross-Cultural Philosophy

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In this short essay, I want to suggest that there may be certain knowledge frameworks that are relatively more congenial to the aims of cross-cultural philosophy. By that I mean specifically that certain frameworks may present knowledge as more accessible to its erstwhile outsiders than do other kinds of knowledge frameworks. This openness, in turn, has implications for how and whether knowledge might be “provincialized”—that is, recognized as one possibility among other rival alternatives, rather than as the only form of true knowledge.¹ I see provincialization as crucially important, if not sufficient, for cross-cultural philosophy because only this premise makes it possible to acknowledge the value, and not only mere existence, of foreign bodies of thought. Indeed, it might be said that only with provincialization might one come to see unfamiliar bodies of thought as philosophy at all (rather than as, say, strange rituals or concepts with no relation to the higher forms of reflection we associate with philosophy).² But this very commitment to provincialization also requires that we turn the gaze back upon cross-cultural philosophy itself, and reverse the question: is cross-cultural philosophy congenial to all globally extant knowledge frameworks? My discussion below suggests that it can be so only if we admit that the practice of “cross-cultural philosophy” itself may need to change in order to take account

of various modes of global knowledge. And at least one of the frameworks I outline below, I think, offers us a way to do that.

I outline four basic knowledge frameworks that I associate, quite crudely, with various globally-situated traditions of thought. (I must note that in this short essay, I provide nothing like the kind of historical evidence sufficient to tie these basic approaches to the specific examples that inspire my formulation of them, but I do indicate some of the sources across space and time in which they may be located: these include not only modern academic knowledge forms but also communal practices, oral traditions, and literary corpuses that may or may not be typically associated with “philosophy.”) The first framework derives from esoteric traditions that limit the scope of who may have knowledge of what. The second framework, associated with the Enlightenment, argues that knowledge is universal and unitary, and thereby in principle available to anyone. The third derives from 19th and 20th century European philosophy about culture, which claims that knowledge remains embedded in particular historical background conditions and so remains diverse and particular. The fourth derives from basic Chinese presuppositions which see differently-situated knowledge as acquirable by outsiders given a specific commitment to self-transformation.

The first two kinds of knowledge frameworks are discussed frequently in postcolonial scholarship, which (among other things) attempts to elucidate how imperial formations of knowledge production elide, transform, or interact with indigenous forms of knowledge.³ For a particularly relevant illustration of these frameworks, we might turn to Sanjay Seth’s discussion of British educational policy in colonial India, in which he makes the following observation:

Modern knowledge, for all its diversity, is unitary, which is why its transmission can be organized according to degree of difficulty—primary, secondary and tertiary, but in principle accessible to all. By contrast, in India, knowledge was always in the plural, always took the form of so many knowledges and practices: esoteric and restricted knowledges accessible only to some social groups, ‘practical’ and more widely available knowledges, variations according to caste and region and religion, and none of all this organized as an ‘educational system.’ Collectively this yielded a riotous variety of knowledge practices, from unstructured and occasional ones to more structured ‘institutions’ such as *maktabs* and *madrassas* and *tols* and *pyal* ‘schools,’ and *patshalas* and others (Seth 2007: 678).

Seth notes multiple kinds of knowledge frameworks in this passage, but I would like to emphasize two: first, the view that some kinds of knowledge are accessible only to certain social groups; and second, the view that knowledge, being unitary, is transmittable to all.

The first, the esoteric framework, is associated with a range of global traditions ranging from Brahmanical exegesis to Islamic jurisprudence.⁴ The idea here is that only certain individuals or groups might access or advance a certain form of knowledge due to their special qualification or standing—such as their caste, social status, level of moral cultivation, etc. Esoteric knowledge frameworks may present obvious problems for cross-cultural philosophy because their very nature—whether in the form of texts, orally transmitted material, rituals, or forms of participatory practice—limits their circulation beyond a small coterie of suitably qualified individuals. If the claim is made that only Muslims, for example, have

the authority or right to interpret the Quran, or Christians the New Testament, then such texts would be off limits to a significant number of professional philosophers. As such, the ideas those texts contain, and the practices they shape, would be difficult to bring within broader rubrics of comparison that would require at least some minimal familiarity with the substantive content of the knowledge they advance. Significantly, however, esoteric frameworks do not necessarily preclude all cross-cultural engagement: existing insiders may avail themselves of cross-cultural engagement, or outsiders in some cases may become insiders through long-term dedicated practice.⁵ Further still, there may be profound internal disagreement within such frameworks about who counts as an insider, what counts as knowledge, and whether there might be a need to police such sharp boundaries at all.⁶

Regardless, engaging such esoteric frameworks would require a substantial shift in how cross-cultural philosophers pursue their work, if they are to respect “insider” prohibitions. Because of the dedication involved in acquiring suitable qualifications before knowledge can be acquired or imparted, in at least some cases philosophers would need to abandon the largely academic pursuit of abstract knowledge, and come to see knowledge more as anthropologists do: as embodied in particular communities in which the philosopher must acquire membership—if, that is, membership is even acquirable at all, and not endowed through birthright or other forms of qualification beyond the control of one individual. This is why the ambitious claim that philosophers can and should somehow “alternate between an internal immersion in the lived experience of texts or ideas and an external stance of commentary and exegesis” (Godrej 2011: 23) would falter in the face of such esoteric frameworks of knowledge: first, in mandating an “external stance” it fails to recognize the terms under which “internal” esoteric knowledge can claim status as knowledge per se; that is, esoteric knowledge can be equally generative of reflection and “exegesis” as established academic disciplines—even if it requires more or different kinds of engagement than typical academic knowledge. Second, such a claim also fails to recognize the conditions placed by knowers on the transmission of their knowledge to others, the lifelong commitment often required to acquire such knowledge in the first place, and the transformations such commitment may induce in the knower herself.

As Seth notes in the context of colonial India, such esoteric forms of knowledge presented “a different relation between knowledge and knower” than did the British colonial education system, which turned on a version of the universalist Enlightenment view that saw knowledge as premised on a Kantian subjectivity in which “only that which is independently acquired and sustained by personal conviction,” rather than by something like revelation or deference to authority, “counts as knowledge” (Seth 2007: 676). This second, “Enlightenment” framework seems to offer a corrective to the esoteric view. In seeing knowledge as available to all, the Enlightenment framework seems to ensure emancipation of those who have been prevented—by ignorance, social status, political domination, or customary oppression—from gaining and using knowledge for learning about their world.⁷ However, this framework has been criticized for placing constraints, not on who may have capacities to obtain such knowledge, but on what counts as knowledge itself. In the history of European colonial expansion and justification, the premise of Enlightenment reason has been used famously to simultaneously condemn empire while also requiring colonized people to develop their rational faculties suitably before they would be fit for self-rule.⁸ In this framework, the various forms of knowledge described by Seth in the passage above, in which what we know is mediated and constituted by a huge range of social, religious, and political authorities, or which is

derived from faith or revelation, would not qualify as knowledge worthy of the name. On this framework, or indeed any framework which claims its knowledge as singular, unified and uniquely true, provincialization is by definition impossible. Cross-cultural philosophy would be reduced to comparing local variations of a given set of universal principles or forms of knowledge already known to the investigator.

For these reasons, scholars wishing to acknowledge the broad forms that knowledge might take among humans as meaning-making beings have turned to yet a third framework, which we might call the embedded one. This framework sees knowledge not as disembodied but as deeply embedded in the social practices that give it meaning: knowledge is thus not “about an independent object, but one that is partly constituted by self-understanding” (Taylor 1985a: 98). This method has clear connections to the modes of biblical exegesis advanced by German hermeneuticists such as Hans-Georg Gadamer.⁹ Like Gadamer, many adherents of this view turn to dialogue as a means of elucidating, for differently-situated others, the value and meaning of knowledge from other contexts. As James Tully has explained in a recent contribution to this *Journal*, the

mutual understanding and judgment that can be achieved in dialogues of reciprocal elucidation is neither a comprehensive view nor a consensus. It consists in bringing to light background forms and ways of thought and being from various traditions and becoming able to view and discuss them comparatively from different limited perspectives. They become meaningful for the participants. This is what Gadamer calls the ‘fusion of horizons’ and Bohm describes as exposing and sharing of tacit meanings in common in dialogue. The diverse forms and ways of thought and being are no longer isolated and foreign. They are *meaningful* precisely because the participants have elucidated the webs of similarities and dissimilarities (family resemblances) that connect them in their diversity (Tully 2016: 67).

Although Tully’s explanation seems to promote the embedded framework, and the dialogic method, as distinctively suited to cross-cultural philosophy, his description here ironically betrays its own limitations. Dialogue makes foreign ways of life “meaningful to the participants” not through a transfer of knowledge among participants, but only through the extended exposure to some emergent common meaning—what Charles Taylor, in an earlier masterful elaboration of the dialogic method, called a “language of perspicuous contrast,” in which “we formulate both their way of life and ours as alternative possibilities in relation to human constraints at work in both” (Taylor 1985c: 125). Although itself potentially transformative and generative of knowledge, this “third space” ultimately enhances our self-reflexivity through the elucidation of similarities and differences of our way of life with that of others; by definition it does not enable us to understand or be transformed by the knowledge known by the other. On this basis, in fact, postcolonial and other theorists have argued for an extremely constrained capacity for cross-cultural learning: our own embeddedness in background conditions makes it impossible for us to grasp the knowledge of differently-embedded others in the same way we presumably grasp our “own” knowledge. In extreme cases of “subalternity,” the profound marginalization of other ways of life even makes it impossible for the knowledge they produce to become part of our own modern worldview on equal terms: “The antihistorical, antimodern subject, therefore, cannot speak as ‘theory’ within the

knowledge procedures of the university even when these knowledge procedures acknowledge and ‘document’ its existence” (Chakrabarty 2000: 41).

It is not my intention here to criticize the dialogic method for its limitations, which I have done extensively elsewhere. My point is rather to show the extent to which such a dialogic method, and the “embedded” framework of knowledge it hopes to serve, both presume that forms of knowledge to some extent cannot be shared among participants to a dialogue in the same way that (presumably) they can be shared among those who already participate in one’s “background forms of life and ways of thought” (to use Tully’s phrase). Although the dialogic method is often promoted as a means of breaking down binary oppositions between “them” and “us,” its very function within cross-cultural philosophy presumes that such a division exists. This mirrors in some way the constraints of the first framework, in which those who are not already in possession of certain knowledge (“outsiders”) cannot come to possess it as fully as those who already have it (“insiders.”)

There may be an alternative to this view, however, if we recognize that the background conditions which give rise to embedded knowledge are themselves tractable to collective and individual attempts to transform them. In other work, I have identified this fourth, “self-transformative” framework with the efforts of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Chinese intellectuals to produce what they called “Western learning” (*Xi xue*).¹⁰ To intellectuals such as Yan Fu (1985), it was both possible and desirable to acquire Western knowledge, through replication and participation in those “Western” forms of life that supported such knowledge and made it meaningful. For Yan and his colleagues, this replication of the social practices that produced certain kinds of knowledge was not the work of one individual, but rather happened collectively over many generations, through the construction of durable institutions, transformation of values over time, and alterations in the languages and forms of inquiry. This framework has deep precedents in certain Chinese perspectives on the acquisition of civilizational identity as identical to the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge: acquiring knowledge of Chinese practices, rituals and texts essentially makes one “Chinese.”¹¹ Similar presuppositions about the nature of knowledge production and acquisition also seem to have been at work also in the early modern Sanskrit cosmopolis, as described by Sheldon Pollock (2000: 591).

Although such a framework has historically supported forms of cultural chauvinism,¹² it also offers attractive features that combines the strengths of the other frameworks: it views knowledge as socially embedded, yet capable of circulating beyond its original contexts of production; it sets conditions upon the acquisition of knowledge, yet sees those conditions as malleable over time and across human efforts. For these reasons, this framework out of all of them may be the most congenial to the practice of cross-cultural philosophy, because it provides a method by which knowledge might be transmitted without at the same time claiming that knowledge is unitary. That is, it offers guidance as to the object and method of acquiring knowledge, making comparison and thus provincialization possible. But this can only be the case if we open philosophy itself—including the material and social conditions which sustain it—to transformation on the basis of other differently-situated practices. The self-transformative framework does not necessarily offer guidance as to what forms of knowledge we should pursue or on what basis we should transform ourselves; but it leaves open the exciting possibility that the acquisition of such knowledge is possible—on the condition that we be willing to (sometimes radically) change ourselves, as well as our view of knowledge, in the process.

By saying that such an approach is most congenial to the aims of cross-cultural philosophy, I am staking out an identity for that form of philosophy as a dynamic, open-ended, and most importantly self-transformative *process* rather than, say, a body of work or even approach to knowledge. This self-transformative process is constituted, not by the elaboration of a “third space of contrast” produced by the dialogic method, but by the consideration that we can learn and be transformed by differently-situated knowledge. In other words, I am also trying to turn the question about the “aims” of that philosophy on its head: on what basis, in whose community, and for what purpose do we determine the aims of a given body of thought? And what do we do if, as may be possible, philosophy is simply not capacious enough a term or practice to contain all of the world’s approaches to knowledge? Once we transform ourselves, might we then have different forms of knowledge at our disposal, but also a different identity as “knowers,” in a community very different from the (presumably modern and academic) one in which we began?

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- * I would like to thank Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach and Amy Donahue for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this essay. Any errors that remain are, of course, my own.
- 1 I take this idea of provincialization from Chakrabarty (2000).
- 2 Here I follow Roxanne Euben (2006: 10) to take “unfamiliar” in a relative sense, “not an instant property or possession” but rather a polarity that transforms in the course of the journey itself.
- 3 E.g., Cohn (1996).
- 4 For an overview of global traditions of canonical exegesis, and the qualifications they place upon interpreters, see Henderson (1991).
- 5 An example of the latter is Kristofer Schipper, whose ethnographic work among Taoist masters in Tainan led to his ordination as one himself. See Schipper (1993).
- 6 Mohammed Fadel (1997), for example, surveys such a debate over Quranic interpretation.
- 7 The classic statement of this view is of course Kant (1983).
- 8 e.g., Mill (1991).
- 9 Gadamer (1989); Taylor (1985b).
- 10 Jenco (2015).
- 11 Ping-ti Ho (1998).
- 12 Crossley (1990).

Is There More to Cross-Cultural Philosophy Than Fear of Culture Change? Response to Jenco

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The principal merit of Jenco's piece is its literal-mindedness. She takes quite literally the idea that a "cross-cultural philosophy" presupposes the separate but equal existence of cultures, across which one might travel mentally and physically. Moreover, the cross-cultural philosopher always engages in this project coming from one of these cultures, which then frames that person's understanding of the other cultures that he or she "visits." I have considerable sympathy with this approach, which I have pursued in terms of time travel between members of what is ostensibly the same historical lineage, whereby presumed progenitors visit their presumed descendants and vice versa to contest a common normative resource, namely, epistemic authority.¹ The twist in Jenco's argument comes as a critique of the "dialogical" approach to such visits, whereby the most that one expects to achieve is a meaningful understanding of the differences between one's own and the other's culture. Jenco believes that this sets the bar for successful cross-cultural philosophy too low. Instead she believes that we should aspire to be changed by the cultures we visit, so that the philosopher shifts from simply being embedded in one culture to embodying cross-culturalism in his or her being.

Expressed at this level of abstraction, I couldn't agree more. Yet, curiously Jenco's model here is a version of what international relations theorists call "defensive modernization," a cultural self-immunization strategy—Jenco somewhat romantically calls it "self-transformation"—whereby from the nineteenth century onward, Chinese intellectuals became sufficiently adept at Western ways that the nation managed its own transition to modernity without succumbing to Western forces in the manner of others who became the subjects of imperial expansion.² At the same time, more so than Japan and often in direct opposition to Japan's more open embrace of Western culture, the most ancient and distinctive elements of Chinese culture remained palpably in the process. Native philosophies such as Confucianism and Taoism have been quite potent checks on the reach of more alien cultural trends, including the Chinese variant of Marxism. Indeed, the phrase "Chinese culture" would not be so resonant today as implying *inter alia* "Non-western," were it not for the success of this strategy.

To be sure, the Chinese mode of defensive modernization has included quite a lot of creative variation, not least by the two intellectuals from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on whom Jenco herself has worked, Yan Fu and Zhang Shizhao. But this leads me immediately to question whether Jenco does justice to the "esoteric" tradition of cross-cultural philosophy, which she identifies in large measure only to dismiss. After all, it is clear even from her own account of the exchange that these two intellectuals shared about the finer points of Rousseau interpretation in 1914–15, only a few years after China's republican revolution, that they were using Rousseau's text as a pretext for discussing contemporary Chinese political issues, not least the people's capacity for self-rule.³

What Yan and Zhang were doing was very much in the spirit of the esoteric appropriation of alien texts. They were using Rousseau in this case—but they used other Western texts on other

occasions—as a platform for discussing matters that had previously lacked voice in Chinese culture, perhaps because they believed that their open discussion would irrevocably destabilize the social order. What I would call the “Extended West” (i.e. the Abrahamic tradition, including Islam) has tended to treat such platform texts as occupying a “sacred” domain reserved to theologians and jurists for authoritative interpretation, which amounts to a kind of ventriloquism whereby the undiscussable can be discussed by proxy. Here it is worth recalling that most of the language in which the Bible was written was alien to the Roman culture which in fourth century AD made Christianity the official medium for channeling authority. For their part, Muslims can be credited with having turned Greek philosophy and science into the foundation of Western civilization by reintroducing them to the Roman world in Arabic translation with a transcendent authority that those Greek texts had lacked in their Mediterranean homeland.⁴

In the secular era, we call such platform texts “metaphysics” or “mythology,” depending on how much we identify with them: I do metaphysics but you, my opponent, practice mythology. (Leo Strauss acutely realized this point as a literal lesson from history for today’s aspiring rulers. An intellectually flat-footed yet “academically correct” version of the same point was made in Ernst Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms⁵.) In either case, a text imported from the outside is turned into a virtual field of engagement—what literary critics call “allegory”—in which insiders can map and transact their differences, safe from the effects of doing this in the insiders’ native medium. Think of esotericism as a low-tech anticipation of “Second Life,” but with a long-term intention of looping back into the conduct of life in the actual world.

My point here is that while it is of course true, as Jenco says, that esotericism promotes a double or even multiple truth doctrine, the epistemologically interesting cross-cultural point is that an alien text, whose superiority to native texts may or may not be explicitly granted, becomes the pretext for natives to transact their differences on matters that native discursive formations prohibit or impede. Moreover, if the esotericists see any of these differences as a potential source of empowerment even to those not privy to their hermeneutical games, there will be an incentive to educate people in these alien texts. What I have in mind here is the revolutionary role that calls to teach the Bible played starting with the Protestant Reformation, which was repeated in a more focused but no less powerful way by the drives to teach the Marxist corpus at the end of the nineteenth and throughout most of the twentieth century.⁶

However, conspicuous by its absence from Jenco’s general argument—and the conceptual matrix from which it emerges—is the prospect that the cross-cultural philosopher may actually try to persuade another culture to replace its own ideas and practices with those of the philosopher. In effect, *proselytism* of the sort that has characterized missionary work in the histories of Christianity and Islam—and their modern secular offspring, science—seems to be ruled out. What I mean by “proselytism” is a combination of claims that constitute a “universalist” mind-set:

- One’s own ideas and practices are good not only for oneself but also for everyone who has yet to possess them.
- The benefit that accrues to any individual who adopts those ideas and practices increases as more people adopt them, with the full benefit received once everyone adopts them.

- The above two claims are usually advanced as *both* articles of faith and testable hypotheses. In other words, the cross-cultural philosopher in proselytizing mode is always undergoing a “trial by faith.” We prove the value of our own beliefs by proving them to others.

Jenco’s omission of proselytism may have to do with the role of missionary work in constructing the platform on which capitalist imperialism was launched, which Marxists inspired by Lenin then repurposed as Soviet imperialism, the politically deconstructed version of which—as mediated by world-systems theory—survives in the sense of “globalism” that permeates the “post-colonialism” from which Jenco now launches her own argument. And maybe this chain of causation—or perhaps recycling—explains proselytism’s conspicuous absence from Jenco’s argument. It would amount to a “return of the repressed,” for reasons that will be made clear below.

The closest that Jenco comes to acknowledging proselytism as a form of cross-cultural philosophy is in her discussion of the “Enlightenment” option, which she rightly characterizes as a second-order move by the philosopher to find a common framework in which one’s own and the other’s culture can be transacted in a manner that is fair to both sides. She is also right that many of the Enlightenment thinkers condemned imperialism at the same time they advised the subjects of imperialism to adopt the imperialist’s ways. However, this is less paradoxical than it seems. In fact, these Enlightenment thinkers believed in proselytism—and expected to receive proselytism in return. And it would be from the ensuing give-and-take of competing proselytisms that a universal translation scheme or “language of thought” would result. This was the spirit in which Leibniz and other early modern philosophers approached the potential contribution of Chinese ideograms to the construction of this universal language. However, most of these encounters ended up happening only in the Enlightenment thinkers’ minds. Indeed, much to the puzzlement of Christian missionaries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their Chinese hosts were not nearly as keen to convert them as the Westerners were to convert the Chinese.⁷ I shall return to this point shortly.

History has also presented a more bottom-up approach to constructing a framework in which multiple cultures can transact their perspectives. It follows the pattern of a pidgin, a trading language, which evolves into a creole and ultimately a grammatically closed language, something exportable in its own right.⁸ That was exactly how Arabic became the first cross-culturally valid language that explicitly aimed to communicate a universal message in both spiritual and secular terms.⁹ The process should be familiar to smartphone users who are provided with a platform—in this case the Arabic-based Qur’an—that is also used to support a number of useful apps, namely, the Arabic translation of major Greek works that would have otherwise required a mastery of Greek. The “platform + apps” approach was subsequently tried by the Christian missionaries, who argued that Christianity’s metaphysical world-view could be of substantial material benefit to the Chinese.

But of course, proselytism has faced many obstacles along the way, the main one being that the target audiences do not understand or accept the proselytizer’s terms of engagement—which, in the first instance, is about exchange relations. One assumption shared by proselytizers and capitalists, which made imperialism possible, is that trade is inherently good, as it enriches both parties. This mentality took a particular form in the early modern period. If people have made the effort to come a long distance, often suffering many hardships along the way, then the host culture is obliged to respect that fact by engaging

with what the visitors find of value through some act of incorporation.¹⁰ But of course, a much more moderate response is possible, one which avoids the need for exchange. It simply involves providing hospitality to the visitors until they decide to return home. In that case, the host allows a space for the visitors to express themselves but without any expectation that the host will be changed by the experience, other than perhaps be entertained or intrigued. This is closer to the default Chinese position, and also helps to explain their defensive modernization stance in more recent times, including its recourse to esotericism.

Underlying this more diplomatic response to proselytism is a privileging of *difference* over *change* as the regulative ideal for the cultural handling of foreign agents. This bias carries over into contemporary postcolonialism, with which Jenco wishes to align herself. It tends to prefer relatively strict forms of multicultural accommodation, including a certain measure of self-segregation and nostalgic revivalism—as opposed to the maintenance of a dominant regime that fosters the hybridization of cultural identities which may in the long term dissipate whatever resistance those cultures originally posed to the dominant regime. I prefer things the other way around.

But even Jenco must admit that postcolonialism is a strange if not hypocritical vehicle for dealing with these matters. After all, postcolonialism was inspired by Edward Said's problematization of "Orientalism" as a way in which Western humanists came to terms with Islam, starting in the Enlightenment. Said rightly cast the "othering" of Islam—which launched the modern West-East dichotomy—as largely motivated by what the West feared as its own (decadent) fate if it did not shore up its own sense of mission, purpose and values. The poignancy of this fear came from the fact that Westerners always knew that these so-called "Orientals" were their cultural siblings, two products of the same universalist beliefs and global aspirations which went their separate ways over the centuries. To be sure, "postcolonialism" is now used in a very broad way to cover cultures that have little if any historical affiliation with Europe, such as China and so-called "indigenous" cultures. Yet, postcolonialism's universalist theoretical ambitions, high humanist style of expression, and celebrity academic status makes, say, Dipesh Chakrabarty's¹¹ attempt to "provincialize Europe" a worthy holder of a place that was previously occupied by the Western Orientalists who provincialized, say, Egypt, Turkey or Iran—and whom Said had spent his academic career railing against.

¹ Fuller (2015: chap. 6).

² On the varieties of "defensive modernization" practiced by Russia, Turkey, Egypt, China and Japan, see Ralston (1990).

³ Jenco (2010: 54-6).

⁴ Montgomery (2000: chaps. 3–4).

⁵ On Strauss' differences from Cassirer, see his review of the latter's final work: Strauss (1947: 125–27). On Strauss' method, see Melzer (2014).

⁶ The best sociological account of this modus operandi is Wuthnow (1989).

⁷ Ryan (1991).

⁸ Fuller, and Collier (2004: chap. 2).

⁹ Montgomery (2000: chap. 3).

¹⁰ Gong (1984).

¹¹ Chakrabarty (2000).

Toward More Harmonized Methodologies in Comparative Philosophy: A Reply to Leigh Jenco*

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Over the last several years, Leigh Jenco has been advancing the discussion of comparative methodology and of twentieth century Chinese and comparative political theory in particular.¹ I have learned from her previous scholarship, so I value this opportunity to reflect upon her essay, a compelling think piece, on whether certain epistemic frameworks facilitate comparative philosophy better than others. After quickly reconstructing her account, I suggest that in spite of her criticisms of the dialogical approach to comparative philosophy, her guiding concerns seem nonetheless to require a vital role for dialogical inquiry. If this is right, then the distance shrinks between what she calls the “culturally embedded” perspective and the one that she favors, the “self-transformation” account, and the insights of each can be more helpfully conceptualized in terms of an inclusive multifactorial account rather than the differentiating taxonomy that she offers.

Before turning to her account, I offer a few words about comparative philosophy that may accommodate many kinds of relevant projects. Comparative philosophy aims *at the very least* to bridge *prima facie* disparate traditions of philosophy, that is, traditions of philosophy that appear to each other to have some notable measure of difference in virtue of arising out of or being constituted by different lifeworlds or ways of life of peoples. These worlds or ways include such conceptually generative factors as cultures, languages, textual canons, non-textual learning practices, worldviews, or the kinds of valuationally-configured tasks or problematics that gather and organize philosophical ideas. In the end, it may be discovered that certain traditions are not as disparate as initially conceived, and on the other end of the spectrum, one *might* conclude that certain traditions are so alien to each other as to be incommensurable.² Also, assuming commensurability, comparative philosophy’s minimal aim of conceptual bridgework is typically folded within a deeper aim, like finding framings or solutions to problems in one’s originary tradition (e.g. is there a Buddhist solution to Western puzzles about essentialism?). Moreover, in commending its value as a type of philosophy, much of comparative philosophy tends to highlight the insights afforded by moderate to strong cultural or civilizational alterity, which is taken to be expressed in another people’s language, culture, canons, and the like. We often see this emphasis on alterity and insight in East-West philosophical comparison.³ Arguably, comparative philosophy’s value can also be seen in insights derived from political-structural differences in the way of life of peoples. This sort of focus characterizes a good portion of Western-Latin American philosophical comparison, where there is a pattern of discourse that references profoundly impactful colonial, racial, and gendered hierarchies in the lifeworlds and therefrom the philosophies of those who are differentially positioned in the relations of domination.⁴

There is surely more that can be said about comparative philosophy’s nature and the patterns of its practice, but the foregoing seems to touch upon many of its basic features and includes a very wide range of comparative philosophical projects. The question of congenial epistemologies for comparative

philosophy seems to arise out of concerns not only about the conceptual challenges of this type of philosophy but also deep conditioning structures of philosophical practice and the institutions of philosophy in the Western world. The issue here is that comparative philosophy strives at a minimum to bridge prima facie disparate traditions of knowledge, but the gap between traditions, even when they are not incommensurable, may pose significant problems of epistemic access and interpretive accuracy. In addition, and more fundamentally, the cultural gap between traditions and distorted understandings of alternative bodies of thought may lead one to suppose that an apparently distant tradition does not even qualify as a bearer of knowledge (or of enough significant knowledge) and thus even qualify as a body of thought worth investigating in the first place. So, it is an important task to figure out which epistemic perspectives aid us in the border-crossing knowledge-expanding venture of comparative philosophy. Jenco's essay concisely maps four positions on this issue—the esoteric, the (Enlightenment) universalist, the culturally embedded, and the (Chinese) self-transformative—and she advocates the last of these. She explains them in this order, but I will discuss them in a different sequence.

The universalist outlook, as articulated in the European Enlightenment, can be taken as a basic and beginning foil for the discussion. Famously, this outlook contends that knowledge is objective, unitary, in principle had by any thinker, and manifested, but not anchored, in culture. Think, for example, of naturalistic accounts of the metaphysics of the world and the Kantian account of ethical norms. *Comparative* philosophy, then, turns out to be a study of different local or cultural manifestations of an underlying, standpoint-independent, unitary body of knowledge.⁵ One major, by now classic, concern raised is that the alleged universalism is actually a highly particular, local, or standpoint-dependent viewpoint that is masquerading as universal. The globally dominant form of this particularist subterfuge is Eurocentric “universalism.” Jenco joins Dipesh Chakrabarty and other postcolonial thinkers in the broadly construed project of “provincializing Europe.” But another important concern is that Enlightenment universalism radically diminishes the enterprise of comparative philosophy. It turns comparative philosophy into a study of mere manifestations of knowledge rather than an investigation into the deep and varied sources of it and the conceptual bridges needed to traverse the gaps between these sources, which include on Jenco's account extra-textual engagements. Jenco rejects universalism and moves quickly past this familiar material.

What Jenco calls “the culturally embedded” account is typically brought into the discussion as a contrast to Enlightenment universalism. Drawing from 19th and 20th century European traditions and championed more recently by such figures as Charles Taylor and Fred Dallmayr, the account regards knowledge to be fundamentally based in the complex set of meanings generated by historically contingent social matrices—in a word, culture. Correlatively, these systems of knowledge should be evaluated according to criteria that are internal to their local habitats of meanings, highlighting immanent critique over transcultural evaluation. As Jenco notes, the culturally embedded account is often coupled with a recommendation of a dialogical approach to doing comparative philosophy. Although she largely accepts the cultural embeddedness thesis (so long as it does not assert cultural incommensurability), she has serious reservations about the dialogical approach, which I will discuss later. For now, suffice it to say that the culturally embedded account on her treatment becomes a culturalist-dialogical perspective and that she rejects this expanded perspective primarily because it unwittingly becomes self-reflexive and intra-tradition-oriented rather than encouraging the expansive and boundary-crossing potential of

comparative philosophy.

Importantly, she discusses two further models that are rarely considered in mainstream Anglophone philosophy. The third approach, the esoteric, makes membership in an epistemic community a condition of knowledge. Conditions of membership may include a variety of kinds of social positions, from highly sedimented ones, like caste, to relatively more agentively determined ones, like the achievement of a high level of moral self-cultivation. There may be disputes within the community about what the community itself is about and what an outsider must do to gain entry (insofar as entry is deemed acceptable by the community). The important point here is that the epistemic outsider must defer to the authority of the epistemic community into which he or she seeks admittance. Since the esoteric approach tends to centralize gaps, hurdles, or closure rather than movement or boundary crossing, which should be accommodated by a general account of comparative philosophy, it is considered only briefly before being set aside. But its emphasis on epistemic deference is positively acknowledged by Jenco.

The final and favored approach is what she calls “the self-transformative.” Drawing from 19th and 20th century Chinese thinkers, Jenco contends there is an epistemic approach in which one submits oneself to a regimen of self-transformation, including substantial non-textual or non-intellectualistic rituals, in order to be properly receptive in both ethical and hermeneutical ways to the ideas of another tradition. For example, in previous work, she has elaborated on how the Ming dynasty neo-Confucian scholar Wang Yangming advocated a practice in which the six Classics of early China are treated not merely as repositories of knowledge but as modes of engagement, existential ones we might even say, by which transformative exploration and cultivation of the heartmind (*xin*) can transpire with positive hermeneutic effects later down the road. By commending a regimen of ethical affiliation, textual memorization, and meditation, he followed and embellished upon the insights of his predecessor Lu Jiuyuan, who famously claimed that “I do not annotate the Classics; the Classics annotate me.”⁶ Jenco has also discussed in earlier work how the late 19th century thinker Kang Youwei also highlighted extra-textual elements in the work of ethical affiliation and cultivation in his New Text philological studies of the Classics.⁷ With these paradigms in mind, she presents a perspective that highlights not only “different forms of knowledge” but also a “different identity as ‘knowers’” (Jenco 2017a). The new identity may be not only a transformed mind or self in some deep sense, but also induction into a community to whose ethico-epistemic way of life one has deferred. In sum, Jenco’s favored outlook, the self-transformation model, rejects universalism, is consistent with the cultural embeddedness thesis, rejects the self-reflexive nature of the dialogical approach, and envisions a more open and movement-conducive perspective than what is offered by the esoteric.

My main concern with this intriguing discussion of congenial epistemologies is that in offering an insightful critique of the culturalist-dialogical model, Jenco has overstated its problems and thus needs to reformulate the implications these problems present for comparative philosophy. She largely endorses the culturalist perspective, but she advances two main criticisms against the dialogical approach that tends to accompany the culturally embedded model. First, in a criticism of James Tully’s work, she contends that the dialogical approach assumes that the knowledge gained from cross-cultural dialogue involves either 1) prior but tacitly shared knowledge that open discussion renders explicit and articulate or 2) an emergent shared knowledge, a “fusion of horizons,” that is constituted in the course of open discussion. Although either may indeed be a gain in knowledge, on her view, the bar is set too low: neither squarely commits to

a kind of vulnerability before the claims of significantly alternative knowledge and thus both exemplify an epistemic conservatism in which there is relatively little movement from the knower's originary tradition. We might add that this is particularly problematic when the institutional infrastructure of the Western academy is largely Eurocentric, raising the live skeptical worry that one might not even know that one has been weakly positioned in gaining substantial access to alternative knowledge and perhaps even conversion to it. As she puts it, the dialogical approach "ultimately enhances our self-reflexivity through the elucidation of similarities and differences of our way of life with that of others; by definition it does not enable us to understand or be transformed by the knowledge known by the other" (Jenco 2017a). Second, the dialogical approach seems to be predicated upon a strong dichotomy between an "us" and "them," which ironically contrasts with the unifying ambitions for which this account is modeled on inclusive dialogue.

Very quickly, regarding her second criticism, it is unclear to me that the dialogical approach in general, as opposed to certain instances of it, necessarily and problematically dichotomizes people into "us" and "them" or self and "Other." As I understand this position, the underscoring of a distinction between self and other is part of a generic phenomenological conceptual machinery and is not intended to imply alienated social relations. In fact, phenomenology, which is strongly linked to the hermeneutic tradition (think Gadamer) appealed to by dialogical theorists like Fred Dallmayr, emphasizes intersubjectivity or social connection as a defining feature of the self.⁸ But, certainly, phenomenological and hermeneutical concepts—like self, other, alterity, and horizon—can be used distortedly—say, in an Orientalist fashion—with alienating consequences. Therefore, insofar as a dialogical account emphasizes distance between self and other, we might think of it as expressing its aspirations, namely its having the theoretical flexibility to accommodate strong cultural or civilizational alterity rather than asserting a necessary estrangement between people.

Switching to her first critique, I think Jenco offers a subtle and valuable point about the dialogical model: dialogue and collaboration are actually compatible with minimal movement across philosophical borders, and problematic epistemic stasis may be the hidden norm when there is a kind of gravitational pull toward a Western center. And more generally, I appreciate her strong emphasis on epistemic deference and the importance of non-rationalistic ritual endeavor as a methodology for comparative philosophy. It has been helpful for me to think about these insights as a unity. However, I do think dialogical inquiry plays a more significant role in the self-transformation model than she acknowledges.

I recognize that her account accommodates dialogue. After all, once the self-transformation project has begun, there will always be complex textual-conceptual challenges for which an inquiry modeled after open dialogue can be helpful. For example, there are debates about how *qi*, roughly speaking the psychophysical matter that composes the world, is transformed in a subject's heartmind (*xin*) and embodied nature, and these are difficult hermeneutical and conceptual matters.⁹ A conversation between Confucian, phenomenological, and scientific theories could be illuminating for specialists in each of these areas.

However, a looming question in Jenco's discussion that goes unaddressed is how and why a subject *initiates* a commitment to self-transformation. Even if one does not have a full sense of the tradition one is committing to, doesn't one need for an informed decision at least a basic sense of the potentially disparate tradition one is about to defer to and be transformed by? And to gain a basic

understanding would seem to require comparative thinking, and such thinking modeled on open receptive dialogue seems valuable even if it is not the whole of such thinking. To be clear, Jenco's accommodation of dialogue *after* self-transformation has begun is not in question. The issue here is that we seem to need the dialogical approach in the very *formation* of self-transformative commitment. For example, the formation of self-transformative commitment to Confucianism, perhaps in the vein of Wang Yangming, would require of the American person without an East Asian or Confucian upbringing a newly learned sense of the relationally-composed person in Confucianism and the kinds of virtues—like *ren* (humaneness), *li* (ritual propriety), *yi* (righteousness), and *zhi* (wisdom)—that normatively configure the project of ethical self-transformation, and these notions could be dialogically compared and contrasted with, say, Aristotelian or Christian analogues. Such a preliminary project would go a long way in facilitating an informed initiation of Wang-style self-transformation. I should add that it is useful to recall that both Wang and Kang, in recommending their respective views, were not speaking to outsiders but to people already familiar with Confucian traditions. So, they could minimize discussion of cross-cultural dialogue and focus primarily on non-rationalistic ritual endeavors. The case at hand, however, requires preliminary bridgework that cannot be taken for granted and that dialogical inquiry partially supplies.

But what about Jenco's first critique of the dialogical model? Again, she claims that in the dialogical model one does not truly traverse a bridge to another tradition, being vulnerable, as it were, to the guidance of another; rather, one engages in a cooperative endeavor in which one deepens one's position in one's already accepted tradition. Put another way, open, cooperative, and meaningful dialogue is compatible with insufficient dislocation from one's starting point.

I would like to suggest that her critique can be recast this way: there is a problematic species of the dialogical model that she has identified, one that arises more frequently and certainly more subtly than one might expect, but the model itself may be sound, and sound in the more limited conceptual role it can legitimately play. And if my earlier remarks about commitment formation are correct, it may be *necessary* that we have something like this model at the beginning because it gives enough understanding of the other tradition and of one's limits in understanding it such that one can *meaningfully* embark on the self-transformation project. Interestingly, she herself gets at this point at the end of her essay when she talks about how the self-transformation model doesn't indicate "what forms of knowledge we should pursue or on what basis we should transform ourselves" (Jenco 2017a). I am suggesting that the dialogical model can and should, at least in part.

A related point, which cannot be developed in this short reply, is that we would need this preliminary (and subsequent) dialogical inquiry and the resulting initial understanding of the alternative tradition in order to determine if non-textual ritual methods are even necessary. I take it that Jenco is not saying that every alternative tradition requires the self-transformation process. And if it is determined that self-transformation is required or at least methodologically helpful, then one can further use dialogical inquiry to explore the extent of the self-transformation one is willing to undergo and the initial "existential" openness one has to potentially controversial claims in the alternative tradition. For example, a feminist who knows early on in this exploratory process that Confucianism has been strongly configured by patriarchy can use dialogical inquiry to determine whether and how the commitment to self-transformation should proceed.

I think the upshot of the foregoing is that we ought to reconfigure the four-fold differentiating taxonomy so that the relevant material is organized in such a way that the cultural embeddedness thesis is united with an inclusive pluralistic methodology, or a harmonized set of methodologies, that can be likened to a tool kit, where different combinations of tools are used as appropriate for a given alternative tradition. Among these tools would be a modified dialogical approach (in light of Jenco's critique) and a self-transformative approach that emphasizes epistemic deference and non-textual ritualization (in light of Jenco's constructive account). Clearly, I am indebted to Jenco for her insights. But, as noted above, I think dialogical inquiry, though but a single tool, has a wider role to play than self-transformation and is necessary for self-transformation.

Importantly, we might add further elements to the multifactorial methodology. For example, following to some extent Farah Godrej's recommendation, comparative philosophy can benefit in many, even if not all, cases from an "existential immersion" in the lifeworld of the culture whose tradition one seeks to understand.¹⁰ This *verstehen*-focused project may be enhanced by (though on her account may require) not just language studies but physical relocation to the relevant culture. Even if one does not think *verstehen* is necessary for determining the veridicality of a set of claims from an alternative tradition, I think most would agree that it offers other epistemic goods, like deeper understanding, which in turn can produce knowledge of new truths.¹¹ Another element for the pluralistic methodology would be decolonial critique.¹² By uniting anti-Eurocentrism and political economy in its particular way, this approach reveals the actual world historical and global epistemic context—this critique calls it "coloniality"—in which comparative philosophy transpires and has been unfairly marginalized by the mainstream of the philosophical profession. It also has potentially unsettling effects upon something comparative philosophers might ignore, namely a safe understanding of one's own *originary* tradition as being only epistemically limited but not morally or politically hegemonic. Sometimes, it is easier to call a philosopher to a distant shore with the lure of greater knowledge than have that philosopher radically rethink and rectify the home that has been left. Conceivably, there are other elements to be included in a pluralistic methodology for comparative philosophy.

* I would like to thank Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach and Amy Donahue for their wonderfully insightful comments.

¹ See her earlier essay, (Jenco 2007), and, more recently (Jenco 2015).

² Alisdair MacIntyre, of course, famously contended that there are incommensurable frameworks within the Western history of ethics discourse. His work highlights complexity in what would count as incommensurability, an issue that does not need to be resolved for the discussion at hand.

³ David Hall and Roger Ames, for example, make a point of this. See (Hall, and Ames 1995: chap. 2).

⁴ Enrique Dussel, for example, characterizes the lifeworld and philosophical work of Latin Americans as being so deeply excluded from Western philosophical dialogue that Latin American philosophy must enter the mainstream philosophical forum from a radically exterior point of entry, making such connective work not so much dialectical as *analectical*. See his (2008). Also, a roughly similar type of concern can be seen in Charles Mills's discussion of Africana and Afro-modern traditions in (Mills 2015). There is no space to discuss the matter, but I see comparative philosophy as large enough to include both the alterity-focused work of East-West comparison and the analectical work that is common in, though not the whole of, Latin

American-Western and Africana-Western comparison.

- 5 Here we are working with general approaches. I do think, however, that in another context it would be worthwhile to consider more moderate and thus plausible variants of this position. One might involve the restriction of the universalism to certain domains of knowledge (e.g. metaphysics) but not others (e.g. ethics). This would be a domain-specific universalism. Another, perhaps a chastened universalism, might contend that though all knowledge (or significant domains of it) is unitary and independent of culture, it must be accessed through cultural forms in such a way that there is a genuine need for a deep kind of comparative philosophy. The idea here is that even if knowledge is manifested in culture, there is nothing “mere” about such manifestation, requiring knowledge to be derived from many cultural sources and thus implying the rejection of Eurocentrism or any form of privileged center. Of course, these two kinds can be combined. In fact, the distance between a chastened universalism and what Jenco calls “the culturally embedded” view may be very small. For reflections conveying these sorts of ideas in Indian traditions, see Ganeri (2011). Thanks go to Amy Donahue for this suggestion. For relevant application to Chinese traditions, see Wong (2006).
- 6 For more on this, see Jenco (2007: 747). Also see Kalmanson (2017): 399–418.
- 7 Jenco (2007: 750).
- 8 See, for example, Zahavi (2005).
- 9 See, for example, Csikszentmihalyi (2004).
- 10 See Godrej (2011).
- 11 Jenco mentions Godrej’s account while discussing the esoteric approach and seems to be critical of Godrej’s account. What I offer here is a different way to think about Godrej’s contributions.
- 12 For some work on decolonial comparative thought that has a partial or strong link to Asian philosophies, see: Donahue, and Kalyan (2015); Kalmanson (2015); Kim (2015) and Kim (forthcoming).

The Assumptions of Cross-Cultural Philosophy: What Makes It Possible to Learn from Other Traditions

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1 Introduction

In “Global Knowledge Frameworks and the Tasks of Cross-Cultural Philosophy,” I read Leigh Jenco as seeking to answer the question of what knowledge must be like in order for cross-cultural philosophy to make sense. More carefully, she considers how we probably have to construe knowledge in order for it to be apt for us to adopt the attitude that philosophical frameworks other than our own have something of value for us. In search of which conception of knowledge would best justify the judgment that non-local ways of interpreting the world have something to contribute, Jenco considers four possibilities, and argues that one is to be favored over the other three. These options are, in catchwords, the esoteric, Enlightenment, hermeneutic, and self-transformative conceptions of knowledge, with Jenco defending the latter as more plausible than the former three.

Jenco’s article is a welcome reminder to the field that it is not enough merely to include non-Western views in largely Western anthologies and curricula, but to take them seriously as giving Western philosophers and related thinkers reason to reconsider their ways of interpreting the world.¹ Given that this fallibilist attitude is appropriate, it is well worth addressing what would make the best sense of it, as Jenco does. Furthermore, I appreciate the big picture that she has provided by way of doing so; despite the routine demand from many post-colonial and post-modern thinkers to focus on particularity and context, I believe there is still an essential role for broad, bird’s-eye philosophy. Jenco’s four-fold division of conceptions of knowledge from around the world is a revealing and useful way to organize reflection on what the proper aims of cross-cultural philosophy are and what pursuing them involves. Her self-transformative approach to knowledge is worth taking seriously, and her criticisms of rival approaches are *prima facie* compelling.

In this critical discussion of Jenco’s article, I consider whether there is a fifth conception of knowledge that might underwrite cross-cultural philosophy of the sort we both endorse, using my own engagements as a springboard. As someone who was initially trained in the Continental and Anglo-American philosophical traditions but who has spent more than a decade learning African philosophy and putting it into critical comparison with East Asian and Western thought,² I have read Jenco’s piece with an eye toward self-understanding. Which conception of knowledge has guided my own enquiry, specifically as someone who has indeed approached African philosophy with the attitude of expecting to discover some new truths from it? I find that my own assumptions are not well captured by any of Jenco’s four options, and so in this article am led to sketch an alternative, pluralist account of knowledge, one that I advance as explaining well what “makes it possible to acknowledge the value, and not only mere existence, of foreign bodies of thought” (Jenco 2017a).

I begin by briefly recounting Jenco's four-fold division of conceptions of knowledge and their purported advantages and disadvantages (section 2). After making some objections that appear to apply to her account, I bring out how a pluralist account of knowledge appears to have been guiding me in my enquiries and how it might serve as a plausible fifth option (section 3). I then consider whether my purported alternative is reducible to a form of Jenco's rejected Enlightenment conception, and argue that it is not (while also suggesting, that, if it is, then the Enlightenment view is in fact defensible when it takes a pluralist form) (section 4). I conclude by reminding the reader that the debate between Jenco and myself has focused strictly on cross-cultural philosophy in search of knowledge, but that it is worth noting that cross-cultural philosophy can make good sense as a way to obtain other epistemic goods even when knowledge is not forthcoming (section 5).

2 Jenco's Self-Transformative Conception of Knowledge

Jenco articulates four "ideal types" (as per Max Weber) of knowledge and associates them with certain views that have been salient in different parts of the world at various times. In this section I summarize Jenco's characterizations of them and of their respective strengths and weaknesses, which will set the stage for me to advance a fifth alternative.

One major approach to knowledge is "esoteric," in the sense of "traditions that limit the scope of who may have knowledge of what," specifically to members of in-groups who have "special qualification or standing—such as their caste, social status, level of moral cultivation" (Jenco 2017a). Often the thought is that only those who have been initiated into a certain way of life are epistemically able to grasp the knowledge, while sometimes the idea is that, even if outsiders could in principle apprehend it, they should for practical reasons be excluded from doing so. As Jenco sensibly points out, doing cross-cultural philosophy in search of knowledge makes little or no sense if knowledge is esoteric. If those from, say, the West are epistemically or practically incapable of grasping knowledge from a non-Western culture, then there is no way that a cross-cultural philosophy can be done in which Westerners can learn something from the other tradition. Of course, one might be able to become a member of the in-group, but Jenco is aptly interested in how an outsider such as a professional academic philosopher could engage in cross-cultural philosophy.

The same problem affects the "hermeneutic" approach to knowledge, according to which knowledge is restricted not to a "small coterie of suitably qualified individuals" (Jenco 2017a) as the per the esoteric approach, but rather to those in "background conditions which give rise to embedded knowledge" (Jenco 2017a). The idea is that knowledge-claims are true, warranted, or even intelligible relative only to a certain culture, so that if one is not a member of this culture, one cannot apprehend the knowledge in it. Ultimately, this is a form of epistemic relativism, which entails that, while there might be *differences* between claims to knowledge throughout the world, there are in fact no *disagreements* between them: either interlocutors cannot understand each other enough to disagree, or truth/warrant obtains only in relation to beliefs that are part of a certain contextual web and are not ascribing competing properties to a mind-independent, common subject matter. Relativism entails that what is true-for-me cannot be true-for-you, insofar as your cultural background differs from mine. Again, a cross-cultural

philosophy, at least one in search of knowledge from a foreign tradition, gains no traction with this conception of knowledge.

A third understanding of knowledge is the “Enlightenment” view of “knowledge as singular, unified and uniquely true” (Jenco 2017a). According to this view, knowledge claims, or at least philosophical ones, are often universally true as opposed to true relative to certain societies, and they are in principle accessible to anyone, whatever one’s cultural background. The idea is that there is a single form of reason available to everyone (who has the relevant epistemic faculties) that can reveal truths that apply to everyone. On the face of it, this conception of knowledge appears easily to avoid the problem facing the esoteric and hermeneutic accounts. However, Jenco says that a bit of reflection shows otherwise:

In this framework, the various forms of knowledge [...] in which what we know is mediated and constituted by a huge range of social, religious, and political authorities, or which is derived from faith or revelation, would not qualify as knowledge worthy of the name. On this framework, or indeed any framework which claims its knowledge as singular, unified and uniquely true, provincialization is by definition impossible (Jenco 2017a).

By “provincialization” Jenco means an approach to knowledge that views itself as “one possibility among rival alternatives, rather than as the only form of true knowledge” (Jenco 2017a). Her suggestion is that since the Enlightenment approach implies that there is a single kind of rational enquiry, it cannot be open to discovering other forms that merit the dignity of the title of “knowledge.”

Finally, Jenco sketches a fourth understanding of knowledge, the only one, it appears, that can make sense of a cross-cultural philosophy seeking to learn from a radically different intellectual history. According to her “self-transformative” conception, those from a given culture can learn from another one insofar as they change their own culture to become more like the one from which they want to learn. Jenco gives the example of Chinese intellectuals who thought they could understand Western knowledge “through replication and participation in those ‘Western’ forms of life that supported such knowledge and made it meaningful” (Jenco 2017a). Roughly, the idea is that in order to appreciate Western knowledge claims, the Chinese had to become (more) Western. According to Jenco, this self-transformative conception “views knowledge as socially embedded, yet capable of circulating beyond its original contexts of production; it sets conditions upon the acquisition of knowledge, yet sees those conditions as malleable over time and across human efforts” and so it “may be the most congenial to the practice of cross cultural philosophy, because it provides a method by which knowledge might be transmitted without at the same time claiming that knowledge is unitary” (Jenco 2017a).

In the following section I provide a fallibilist account of knowledge that I believe rivals Jenco’s favored one. Before doing so, however, I provide some reasons to doubt hers.

One concern is whether Jenco’s view adequately avoids the problem facing the esoteric and hermeneutic approaches. To be sure, she is not committed to thinking that cross-cultural philosophy is impossible. However, she does appear committed to thinking that it is not possible in the absence of self-transformation, where few cultures have, or might even be likely to, self-transform in the ways she prescribes. Her view does not seem able to account for the intuition that cross-cultural philosophy of a

sort that provides instruction can be done *now* by some philosophers sitting behind our laptops, reading books, going to conferences, corresponding with colleagues, and doing the other usual stuff.

Jenco might suggest that those who are doing cross-cultural philosophy now and learning something from it have self-transformed. However, that is unlikely, given that it is supposed to be a large-scale, intergenerational endeavor in the first instance. Note Jenco's key example of how Chinese intellectuals "Westernized" themselves, where this "replication of the social practices that produced certain kinds of knowledge was not the work of one individual, but rather happened collectively over many generations, through the construction of durable institutions, transformation of values over time, and alterations in the languages and forms of inquiry" (Jenco 2017a). As the West has not done that in respect of China, it follows that Westerners cannot yet learn from cross-cultural philosophy with Chinese sources. While I accept that those in the West might well do it better, at least in one respect, if they were to "Sinologize," I submit that they can do it, and indeed have done it,³ to some real degree without their broader intellectual culture having Sinologized.

Another concern about Jenco's hypothesis is that it cannot account well for the intuition that diversity, not sameness, is what really fosters knowledge. It is unfair to suggest that, for Jenco, we all must become the same in order to understand each other. Yet it seems fair to say that we all must become more like each other in order to do so. However, it is commonly held that creativity and insight are often a function of putting two very different perspectives together. Part of the present objection is that, if thinkers around the globe took Jenco's advice, then there would be less diversity among them and hence fewer discoveries by them. However, the deeper part is that cross-cultural discoveries are already being made in the apparent absence of homogenization.

For just one example, salient Western thought about the nature of democracy has plausibly been upended by consideration of consensus-oriented decision-making practices salient among a wide array of traditional sub-Saharan peoples. Contemporary Westerners tend to conceive democracy as a Euro-American invention that is essentially majoritarian and competitive, with it consisting of political parties that jockey for the most votes and then rule in ways expected to benefit their constituencies. However, as African thinkers from a variety of peoples have shown, pre-colonial politics in sub-Saharan Africa was intuitively democratic but did not allow for majority rule. For instance, sometimes a king would enact what was unanimously recommended by a group of (usually male) elders who had been popularly appointed and who sought to resolve conflicts in a way that was to the benefit of everyone. Other times, a king would have all those affected by a dispute talk under the proverbial tree until they found a way forward that all could accept. In the light of these kinds of practices, contemporary African political philosophers have proposed a "non-party polity"⁴ in which Parliamentarians would advance policies that they think are good for the public as a whole and would adopt only those that are the object of unanimous agreement among themselves.

3 A Pluralist Conception of Knowledge

In this section I suggest another way to construe knowledge that would make possible a cross-cultural philosophical engagement in which one seeks to learn from those working in different traditions. I start

by reflecting briefly on some of my own experience, and then draw out of that a pluralist account of knowledge that I have been presuming and that is distinct from Jenco's four categories.

I like to think that I have learned something substantial about African philosophy since I relocated from the United States to South Africa in 2004. If I have not, then someone owes me an explanation of what I am doing in those published works of mine in that field. To be sure, it could be that I am doing more Western (and specifically Anglo-American) philosophy than African philosophy and have hoodwinked dozens of African editors. There are indeed a handful of African nationalists who contend something like that, and I will not take offense if Jenco suggests it! However, for now, let me run with the claim that I have come to understand much of the African philosophical tradition.

Furthermore, let me suppose that I have not merely understood some African philosophy, but have also learned important things from it, particularly concerning relationality in ethics and metaphysics. For example, I now think that relational properties, concerning the capacity for a certain type of communion, are essential to grasp the moral status of a being, not intrinsic properties such as pleasure or autonomy, and further that right action is also at bottom a function of responding to relationality in the right way.⁵ I still remember the shift in my head when I heard an elderly African woman say that for her the biggest problem with being poor is that she has nothing to give away, a view I cannot recall having encountered living in the US.

I have also come to doubt my previously unquestioned acceptance of the view that the essence of a thing, whether it be the nature of the self or of water, is determined merely by intrinsic properties, such as a chain of mental states or a chemical composition, respectively. I am now open to the idea that it is constituted at least in large part by its relationships to other things, if not to a whole.⁶

I am pretty sure that I would not have come to take these views seriously if I had not immersed myself in African philosophy (or in Chinese philosophy, which, I have also come to learn, shares many features with it⁷). So, I believe I have been doing cross-cultural philosophy and with the sort of attitude that Jenco recommends, of seeking something valuable—indeed full-blown knowledge—from a different tradition.

However, I have not been initiated into a sub-Saharan people or in any other sense become an African—people still see me as a foreign white guy. I also have not been part of an on-going self-transformative intellectual culture in the West that has been trying to become more African in the way it experiences and interprets the world. There is no such project. Finally, I also have not subscribed, at least not intentionally or knowingly, to an Enlightenment conception of knowledge of the sort Jenco (2017a) articulates according to which “knowledge is unitary.” On the face of it, I have instead grappled with real disparity when it comes to knowledge in an African context. As above, with respect to ethical content, I have changed my mind in believing now that an individual's extrinsic and not intrinsic properties are fundamental to morality. With respect to metaphysical understanding, I now am tempted to think that one cannot know a thing in isolation but must grasp its relations. Still more, with respect to materials, I have had to deal with the fact that the African philosophical tradition has mainly been an oral one, with not even three generations of sub-Saharan philosophers writing in journals and books having gone by, which has meant, for example, needing to grapple with the meanings of proverbs and stories. With respect to sources of knowledge, I have expanded my horizons to consider emotion to be one alongside perception, memory, testimony, and reason, such that, perhaps, the “African world of art is as

fully knowing in its own right as the world of science” (Anyanwu 1987: 259).

Supposing my self-description is not wildly off the mark, which conception of knowledge underwrites it? What must knowledge be like for me to have been able to learn from the African tradition?

For me to have approached African philosophers with the attitude of learning from them implies that I must have been open to thinking that Western philosophers, from whom I had been trained, were not entirely correct and were epistemically mistaken in some respects. Now, for mistake to be *possible*, it must be the case there are mind-independent truths (or at least justified beliefs), ones that obtain not merely in virtue of the content of a particular society’s propositional attitudes. That is, it must be the case that relativism is false, as Jenco has pointed out in respect of the hermeneutic approach to knowledge. For mistake to be *probable*, it must be the case that there was evidence that the African tradition has had some insight into these objective truths that the Western one has by and large lacked. In sum, cross-cultural philosophy with the aim of learning from a foreign body of thought makes good sense if there are objective truths to which no one culture has a monopoly.

That claim is part of what I take to be the most powerful argument for multiculturalism: any long-standing epistemic tradition probably has some insight into the ways things truly are. The real argument for multiculturalism is epistemic; moral-pragmatic considerations of showing respect, being tolerant, avoiding arrogance, imparting self-esteem, and the like are extras.

To illustrate this view of knowledge in the context of moral values, consider the way Allen Wood has characterized the epistemic status of a given globally-situated ethical philosophy:

[S]ince we cannot coherently act or reason at all about what to do or think without presupposing that there are objectively good reasons, we should not abandon that presupposition. But since the fact of cross-cultural disagreement gives us good grounds for doubting the accepted or traditional ethical beliefs and attitudes of our own culture, we should allow ourselves to question whether these beliefs and attitudes are correct, and we should accept [...] that we will never be entitled to think that these beliefs and attitudes are infallible [...] Accordingly, the most natural assumption about any culture's ethical beliefs and attitudes—those of our own and other cultures—is that they may contain part of the objective truth [...] Different cultures have widely different conditions of life and historical backgrounds in apprehending these truths, so the awareness of any culture regarding this will be fallible and probably partial or skewed in certain ways (Wood 2007: 338, 339).

What Wood says of moral values strikes me as plausible in respect of philosophical knowledge more generally. I presume this pluralist account of who in the world has philosophical knowledge contrasts with Jenco’s and others’ characterization of the Enlightenment as monist, i.e., as presuming that Western scientific culture alone has access to knowledge or is “singular, unified and uniquely true.”

It does not follow that all philosophers should engage in cross-cultural philosophy. There could be excellent practical reason for some to specialize, to stay burrowed in their intellectual homes with their familiar conceptual furnishings, and for others to leave in search of something unfamiliar. The point is that doing the latter with the aim of acquiring new knowledge makes good sense on the supposition that many cultures have some insight into objective philosophical truths and that a decent chunk of that

insight does not get lost in various kinds of translation.

It is surely the case that one would *better* understand another culture's insight into philosophical truths if one knew its language, were not aspect-blind to its ways of perceiving the world-as-something (cf. the late Wittgenstein), could readily deploy its conceptual apparatus, and all the rest that would be particularly facilitated by collective self-transformation of the sort Jenco recommends. A key question is whether doing so is necessary in order to learn something substantial from another culture. I submit not, or else I would not have been able to change my mind so much upon having engaged with the African philosophical tradition.

4 Is Pluralism an Enlightenment Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?

Jenco may contend at this point that I have not in fact changed my mind all that much. I need to engage with her powerful point that even if Enlightenment advocates are open to discovering new knowledge when it comes to *content*, they are not when it comes to *form*. They are "criticized for placing constraints, not on who may have capacities to obtain such knowledge, but on what counts as knowledge itself" (Jenco 2017a), excluding, recall, appeals to faith and revelation. Is the pluralist conception of knowledge vulnerable to this charge?

Looking at the sort of putatively African moral philosophy I myself have advanced, a theory grounded on the value of communion, it appears so.⁸ It reeks of the search for something comparable to scientific law in the realm of the moral. It relies heavily on argumentation, and especially analogy and inference to the best explanation. It does not appeal to faith, revelation, or, it should be added in the African context, the paranormal or divination of what a people's ancestors prescribe for it. Its key elements are secular, including no essential reference to any imperceptible agents such as ancestors and God.

However, it is not merely relational content, as it were, that I take myself to have learned from African philosophers. For example, I now do believe that emotion can be a source of moral knowledge akin to the usual suspects of perception, testimony, and so on. In addition, I am now strongly inclined to think that the best, or at least an important, way to know the nature of something is to consider its relational properties. These are substantial departures from the analytic canon, ones that are seemingly "formal."

More generally, if I am going to be pluralist about not just morality but philosophy generally, then it follows that I must be pluralist about epistemology and, specifically, about what counts as knowledge. Consistency demands, therefore, that I must treat my own tradition's conception of knowledge as fallible and be open to learning differently from other traditions.

However, there are limits to this pluralism about the nature of knowledge itself, limits that I am willing to "bite the bullet" to accept and that I believe would be hard for others to reject reasonably. One limit concerns definitional elements of talk of "knowledge." When using the word "knowledge" (more carefully, "knowledge that") in our linguistic community, we are analytically talking about a belief that is true and has some kind of warrant. If some other community were to use the word "knowledge" without this sense attached to it, then it would be speaking about something different from what we are. We

would be speaking past one another, so that its different use of the term would neither constitute disagreement with us, nor provide any reason for us to change our minds about what counts as knowledge. By analogy, if Buddhists started suddenly speaking of “God” as essential to their long-standing religion, one would be foolish to approach it with an eye to learning about what the monotheist tradition means by the word; for they simply would not have in mind anything about a self-aware, spiritual creator of the physical universe.

A second limit of the pluralism concerns various conceptions of the concept of knowledge, that is, different substantive accounts of the three core properties of belief, truth, and warrant. There is much debate, both within Western philosophy and between it and other traditions, about what a belief consists of, what truth is, and what counts as warrant. A given culture should indeed, by my lights, be pluralist about the nature of these elements, and so be open to learning from other cultures about them. However, it does not follow that the former will in fact learn from the latter at the end of the day. Contending that knowledge about the nature of knowledge is not unique to one culture does not entail that it is distributed equally across cultures. Some might have (much) more insight into the nature of knowledge than others, in the way that some, for a time, had much more insight into the nature of gravity.

Interesting questions arise at this point about how to know that one knows about the nature of knowledge! Those questions deserve answers. However, answering them is not essential to make the points that it is not unreasonable to think that knowledge is unequally distributed among philosophical traditions and that it could turn out to be the case that knowledge about the nature of knowledge in particular is more heavily concentrated in one of them. If so, some philosophers might well know that mere faith is not in fact knowledge since it lacks warrant. They might know that without being certain and while acknowledging they could be mistaken.

Am I back to the Enlightenment view? I do not believe so, for I have not been supposing that when doing philosophy I am deploying, or that others should deploy, a “given set of universal principles or forms of knowledge already known to the investigator” (Jenco 2017a). Being a pluralist about the form of knowledge means being open to debate about the nature of belief, truth, and warrant and hence seeking to learn from other long-standing traditions about those matters. It happens also to mean, however, that there might be cases in which those other traditions have something substantial to learn from one’s own.

5 Conclusion: Why Cross-Cultural Philosophy without Knowledge Would Still Be Worth Doing

This exchange has been framed by a specific question, namely, whether certain knowledge frameworks are more congenial to the aims of cross-cultural philosophy. Jenco and I have therefore focused our attention on knowledge, and not other epistemic goods. I conclude by pointing out that this is a fairly large restriction, and that if it were loosened up, one would discover substantial epistemic reason to engage in cross-cultural philosophy even if knowledge were not forthcoming from doing so. Again, one can “acknowledge the value, and not only mere existence, of foreign bodies of thought,” and indeed their epistemic value, even if one does not expect to learn true propositions from them because of either

relativism, monism, or a “lop-sided” pluralism in which one tradition has a corner on the epistemic market (even if not a full-blown monopoly).

For a key example of an epistemic good that does not consist of knowledge, consider imagining the world to be a certain way. As Ward Jones, an epistemologist, has said, “Imagining a theory to be true is a matter of ‘trying it on,’ of temporarily taking the world to be as the theory describes it to be” (Jones 2011: 134). Thinking in a new, coherent way and considering plausible hypotheses that one had not before are good candidates for intellectual virtue. And even if one denies that they are good for their own sake, they are at the very least good as a means for broadening one’s cognitive horizons, and so can provide strong reason to engage with cultures different from one’s own. There are plausibly additional epistemic but non-doxastic reasons to engage in cross-cultural philosophy besides one’s imagination being exercised in a certain way, but they merit thorough exploration elsewhere.

² For some recent representative texts, see Metz (2016, 2018b); and Hoffmann, and Metz (2017).

³ Might some of Jenco’s other work, particularly insofar as it has engaged in Western and Chinese comparative philosophy, be a nice example of cross-cultural success?

⁴ In the words of Kwasi Wiredu (2000).

⁵ E.g., Metz (2012); and Metz, and Clark Miller (2016).

⁶ E.g., Metz (unpublished draft).

⁷ Metz (2017a).

⁸ E.g., Metz (2012, 2018b); and Metz, and Gaie (2010).

On Justifying the Non-Adoption of Cross-Cultural Approach to Philosophy*

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1 Introduction

In “Global Knowledge Frameworks and the Task of Cross Cultural Philosophy,” Leigh Jenco (2017a) differentiates between four knowledge frameworks—esoteric, enlightenment, embedded, and self-transformative—examines them and investigates the possibility and form of cross-cultural philosophy given their adoption. She starts with the definition of the aim of cross-cultural philosophy as “acknowledg[ing] the value, and not only mere existence, of foreign bodies of thought” (Jenco 2017a) and decides that the self-transformative knowledge framework is the most congenial to this aim. The basis upon which she builds her argument is the need of “provincialization” of knowledge or the need to recognize a particular knowledge “as one possibility among other rival alternatives, rather than as the only form of true knowledge” (Jenco 2017a). Jenco further argues that esoteric, enlightenment and embedded frameworks suffer from certain shortcomings which prevent the full realization of the goal of cross-cultural philosophy. At the end of her paper she offers the self-transformative knowledge framework as a corrective.

In this comment, I want to assume a different starting point. I will start from the current state in philosophy as it is taught at Western universities, and from the two facts that seem to be at odds: a) philosophy taught at these universities is diverse and pluralistic, b) but it is almost exclusively Western. I will then offer a reinterpretation of Jenco’s knowledge frameworks as different conceptualizations of knowledge used in attempts to justify the neglect of non-Western traditions. Namely, I will treat the main assumptions of these frameworks as different answers to the question “Why are our philosophy syllabi almost exclusively Western?” I will conclude that in unjustifiably assuming cognitive constraints in understanding writings from other cultures, esoteric, enlightenment, embedded and even self-transformative knowledge frameworks widen the gap between cultures and prevent the more extensive application of cross-cultural approach. In doing so, I will agree with Jenco’s insight that the first three of these frameworks are detrimental to the practice of cross-cultural philosophy, but I will disagree with her claim that self-transformation, which should better our understanding of others, is the most suitable way for remedying their limitations. Instead I will try to show that obstacles for wider application of cross-cultural approach are rather found in the social and historical aspects of philosophical knowledge, and not in the cognitive abilities of differently situated subjects.

2 Nature of Philosophical Knowledge and the Cultural Divide

Philosophy is as diverse as it is old, and defining its methods, aims, and subject matter is a feat of its own. We can find testimony to this claim in the fact that an attempt to provide an account of what philosophy

is constitutes a field of study of a separate philosophical subject¹, namely, of philosophy of philosophy or metaphilosophy. Professional philosophers will often disagree on aims of their profession in general², and they will equally disagree on the current state of affairs of their study field and about the present direction of their endeavors.³ Subject matter of particular topics will range from the nature of fundamental particles, to the origins of morality; and methods for reaching conclusions about these most abstract matters will include reference to coherence of beliefs, intuition, deduction, conceptual analysis, transcendental argumentation, thought experiments, etc. Years of training in this discipline will usually endow us with the ability to differentiate philosophical writings from other kinds of knowledge, but these recognitional capacities would be probably best described as abilities to pick out some family resemblances⁴ or to recognize paradigmatic examples in Kuhn's (1962) sense. This idiosyncratic feature of philosophical knowledge⁵ is certainly the reason why some philosophers rejected the very idea of a philosophy of philosophy⁶, and a possibility to identify a single method, or aim, of practicing philosophy. The differences between empiricists and rationalists, analytic or armchair and experimental philosophers, Russell and Sartre, Žižek and Kripke, are too profound to be captured under one shared concept, and a single criterion of identification would necessarily leave some of them out.

The reason for such pluralism of topics, methods and assumed aims, even in one single tradition, is at the heart of philosophy. It is a consequence of not conforming to a set of accepted assumptions. Philosophers question conventional frameworks of thinking—whether they are found in our everyday interaction with the world or in science—reflect on hidden truths about the world, provide alternative hypotheses, build theories, or criticize accepted beliefs. The unempirical nature of their hypotheses, which precede a systemization of structured scientific knowledge, and a lack of verification procedures make their positions widely diverse and regularly opposing. The extensive PhilPapers survey conducted in 2009 shows this diversity of thinking in philosophical community, where beliefs in opposing alternatives about the thirty most important philosophical questions are almost equally distributed⁷. This is why studying philosophy can be seen as a way in itself to transform us as epistemic agents. We learn to recognize particular pieces of knowledge “as one possibility among other rival alternatives, rather than as the only form of true knowledge” (Jenco 2017a). Exposure to opposing systems of thought with similar or equal persuasive power makes us prone to question or suspend our own core beliefs, and practice a certain kind of “*epoché*”⁸. Thus, recognizing and then transcending biases and social encapsulation, no matter if ever fully accomplished, is always a part of a task of doing philosophy which seeks to better understand the world independent of our own particular perspective. So, given this, and given that studying teachings from other cultures always reveals cultural differences and thus our further biases, why we do not see more comparative philosophy done? We gladly compare alternatives coming from different periods and from different philosophical systems of the West, for instance Aristotle's and Hume's views on causation, but rarely look at insights coming from Asian, African or Indian traditions.

The problem in philosophy is not to “acknowledge the value [...] of foreign bodies of thought,” but to acknowledge “the mere existence” (Jenco 2017a) of these bodies of knowledge as philosophy. This institutionalized cultural blindness can, paradoxically, be seen as a very consequence of the “liberal” nature of philosophy just described. Namely, given that philosophical knowledge is so diverse in its methods and topics, the main criterion efficiently used to identify something as philosophy is to investigate its historical connections to what Westerners refer to as “the cradle of philosophy,” namely,

ancient Greek thinkers. This problem of identification can be seen as a problem of the determination of reference. Because of the lack of an acknowledged set of descriptions, we implicitly turned to recognizing philosophy by its causal connections to the first grounding of the term. This practice is especially prominent in organizing study courses at Western universities. While I believe that it is necessary to search for these historical connections in identifying philosophy, I also believe that we can talk about multiple groundings of philosophy in different cultures, and not only in a single one.

3 Justifying the Rift by Assuming Different Knowledge Frameworks

Briefly surveying the history of philosophy teaches us two things: philosophy is diverse and pluralistic, and philosophy is deeply traditional. These two insights seem to be in conflict, but are nevertheless tightly connected. They correspond to two different dimensions of knowledge: its cognitive aspect which reflects on methods and abilities for gaining it, and its social aspect or how it is institutionally organized.

We began with the idea that there is some sort of family resemblance between philosophical teachings, and that this resemblance guides us in recognizing something as philosophy, but it turns out that this is not sufficient for such recognition. Philosophy, as other expert forms of knowledge, is necessarily institutionalized. It is a discipline with a history of different topics, various solutions to recognized problems, and doing philosophy professionally assumes that a practitioner is acquainted with different positions and views on the topic he is dealing with. Recognizing a family resemblance with philosophical positions in writings outside this practice would not typically be sufficient to grant it a full-blown status of being philosophy. Whereas in other disciplines (chemistry, biology, etc.) historical references are mainly used as a proof of the scientific progress and accumulation of knowledge within the discipline, in philosophy historical references are also used for identifying a text as a piece of philosophy⁹. But why do we have a problem in recognizing teachings of other traditions concerning recognized philosophical topics or with the mentioned family resemblance to Western philosophy? Certainly, they are not just spurious thoughts about life and existence, or conjectures about ourselves and nature. They are also a product of persistent endeavor to comprehend some of the hardest issues concerning ourselves and our world, with their own history and course of development.

There are two *post hoc* answers that are sometimes provided¹⁰ to justify this rift: 1) Western form of thinking is the only one suitable for true philosophy, and 2) there are vast cultural differences which preclude or at least make difficult cross-cultural understanding. Both of which I find to be false. These two answers correspond to Jenco's identification of enlightenment (and in the most radical form of esoteric) and embedded knowledge frameworks. They reflect beliefs that only our way of gaining knowledge is proper or that we are socially embedded in one community and outsiders cannot completely understand our position. While the first claim assumes that there has to be only one way for gaining philosophical knowledge, the second one assumes that social embedding deeply affects our cognitive abilities; thus, both focus on ways and possibility of gaining such knowledge.

As we saw, it is not philosophical practice itself which assumes a sole method or aim of philosophy; it is the institutional form of philosophy that implies this by offering almost exclusively Western course syllabi. As Anand Jayprakash Vaidya notices all-Western syllabi, for e.g. critical thinking

courses, send a message to students that other traditions do not have anything to offer worth studying concerning logic or methods of argumentation, and disregard contributions such as Hindu syllogism of the Nyāya school¹¹. Justification of such decisions is often rooted in claims that critical thinking, or philosophy in general, is based on Western logic, is independent of religion, and possess a special high degree of rationality, and that these requests are not met by “philosophical” writings of other cultures. It is true that a large portion of Western philosophy shares these traits. They are recognized in cultural psychology as one of the cognitive patterns associated with certain societies, namely, analytic cognitive patterns prevalent in Western societies, which is in opposition with holistic patterns characteristic of East Asian societies¹². But these patterns of thinking present only tendencies. Namely, if we assume that the analytic pattern is the only correct one we will exclude even recognized parts of Western philosophy which are still taught at Western universities. These claims about a universal method can be taken only as a kind of an unjustified bias, a remnant of a colonial project¹³—a bias that we employ when faced with different cultures, but not when assessing our own, a bias we should do well to leave behind.

Nevertheless, perhaps it is not that the requirements are higher for other cultures, but it could be that the views on philosophical problems coming from different traditions are such that they can never become transparent to foreigners as they are to the members of those cultural groups. An embedded framework “presume[s] that forms of knowledge to some extent cannot be shared among participants to a dialogue in the same way that (presumably) they can be shared among those who already participate in one’s “background forms of life and ways of thought” (Jenco 2017a). Our cognitive abilities are strongly influenced by cultural artifacts and social norms shape our beliefs. Even the direction of our writing influences our perception of different movements in space¹⁴, and studies on bilinguals show that the use of different languages influences our judgment of duration of certain kinds of events¹⁵. Every day cognitive science teaches us about different ways in which cognition is very deeply embedded in our environment and shaped by our language and artifact use.

While it is a fact that our way of thinking is socially embedded in many different ways, in order to argue that the relevant knowledge cannot be fully shared across cultures—as, for instance, Western and East Asian—an account is needed why such embedding is different from historical embeddedness of certain views expressed in a single (geographical) culture. In other words, we have to answer why comparing views of Democritus and Descartes is different from comparing philosophies of Plato and Confucius. Also, it is needed to show in what ways such embedding precludes mutual understanding on the level of philosophical notions and views, or what the specific cognitive constraints are that cannot be overcome. I believe that differences that exist are not insurmountable for the following reasons. Firstly, cultural influences on cognition are usually influences on lower level cognitive capacities, our visual perception, sense of space and time, and our emotions, and philosophical thinking involves dealing with highly abstract notions. We would certainly not deny a blind person ability to grasp ideas presented by Locke, so why should we deny this to a person whose visual perception is slightly different from ours. Secondly, one can object that there is one specific problem that is relevant to our present concerns, and that is a problem of translation which affects our understanding of abstract concepts and notions. The problem of translation involves the lack of one-one correspondence of terms, but such a lack of correspondence can be bridged by fuller explications and implicit definitions. A great deal of philosophy deals with its own distinct languages which refer to entities unperceivable by the naked eye, substances,

monads, entelechies, dynamis, propositions, modalities, sense data, selves, mental states, good, qualities, etc.; entities that are highly abstract, theoretical, and implicitly defined. Thirdly, cognitive impenetrability can be due to holding different core beliefs which are heavily influenced by tradition. But as we argued, practicing philosophy is one of the best ways to learn how to suspend our own core beliefs. And lastly, the cultural patterns of thinking mentioned above are such that they tend to influence our particular judgments about the value of particular pieces of knowledge, but not our ability to understand them.

Thus, esoteric, enlightenment and embedded frameworks unjustifiably assume that philosophical knowledge of a certain culture has a defined method and that it is embedded in a way that disables true understanding for every impartial observer. Jenco rightfully notices that if we conceptualize knowledge in such a way the aim of cross-cultural philosophy cannot be fully reached. Nevertheless, her answer for these maladies, seems to assume the same assumption about the incommensurability of knowledge that we tried to dispute. Instead of seeing social embedding as an obstacle for true understanding, we should recognize it as an epistemic resource—a resource which offers us new perspectives with equal value. “Case based” vs. “subsumption under a general rule” kind of thinking¹⁶, when seen as stemming from facts about different social orientation becomes a further alternative and not a wrong way of using reason. I see the call for self-transformation through practicing different forms of life as too radical, and as introducing a threat of the merging of horizons instead of their multiplication. We should abandon the old ways of thinking about knowledge and embrace pluralism based on a multiply-grounded philosophy.

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¹ There are authors who believe that philosophy of philosophy falls outside of the scope of philosophy itself because of its second-order character (e.g. Heidegger 1956).

² Their views on the possible aims of philosophy will range from claiming that the purpose of philosophy is describing the world as it really is, building pre-scientific theories which are empirically untestable but with great explanatory power, providing grounds for moral conduct, conceptual analysis aimed at problem solving, providing alternative hypotheses, studying human condition, etc.

³ For instance, they will take opposing stances on the issue of the importance or even existence of the so called “linguistic turn” of the 20th century philosophy. See Williamson (2008).

⁴ The notion of family resemblance is used in Wittgenstein’s sense. See Wittgenstein (1953: §§ 65–71).

⁵ Biologist or mathematicians certainly do not ponder on their subjects in the same way philosophers do.

⁶ E.g. Ryle (1962).

⁷ Results of the survey can be found at <https://philpapers.org/surveys/results.pl>, and the analysis of the results in Bourget, and Chalmers (2014).

⁸ Suspension of beliefs about things which are not evidently true practiced by ancient skeptics. See Annas, and Barnes (2000).

⁹ These ideas resemble Richard Rorty’s conception of philosophical knowledge found in (Rorty 1979).

¹⁰ I base this claim on personal experience and oral evidence. From the beginning of my philosophical education I encountered such explanations of prevalence of Western writings. Although these answers are grounded in different past traditions, today they usually present inherited opinions and unreflected stances, which nevertheless pervade philosophical community.

¹¹ Vaidya (2016).

¹² “Analytic cognition is characterized by taxonomic and rule-based categorization of objects, a narrow focus in visual attention, dispositional bias in causal attribution, and the use of formal logic in reasoning. In

contrast, holistic cognition is characterized by thematic and family-resemblance-based categorization of objects, a focus on contextual information and relationships in visual attention, an emphasis on situational causes in attribution, and dialecticism.” (Varnum *et al.* 2010: 9); see also Nisbett *et al.* (2001). In their 2010 paper, Varnum *et al.* provide evidence to support the claim that differences in cognitive styles are connected to differences in social orientation (independence vs. interdependence).

¹³ See Jenco (2017a), also Ganeri (2016).

¹⁴ For instance, this fact about our perception was used in directing by Roman Polanski. He discusses his decision about a shot for the film *Macbeth* and says that it is not arbitrary from which side the English army should be seen advancing: “To the Western eye easy or successful movement is left to right, difficult or failed movement is right to left.” (Feeney, and Duncan, 2006) For the effects of writing direction on spatial cognition see Bergen, and Chan Lau (2012).

¹⁵ See Bylund, and Athanasopoulos (2017).

¹⁶ Case based thinking can be found as a mode of methodology in both Indian and Chinese philosophy, and it is seen as an alternative to Western request for generalization. Also, it is one of the traits of mentioned holistic pattern of thinking connected to the interdependent social orientation. See Furth, Zeitlin, and Hsiung (2007); Ganeri (2016); Nisbett *et al.* (2001).

“Are Certain Knowledge Frameworks More Congenial to the Aims of Cross-Cultural Philosophy?” A Qualified Yes

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1 Introduction

I want to start my response to this symposium by thanking my respondents for such provocative and productive commentary on my contribution. I hope in what follows to show how much of an impact their comments have had on my thinking and learning about the subject of cross-cultural philosophy—indeed, I found even their restatements of my own argument illuminating! I am also grateful to them, and to the editors of this journal, for the opportunity to expand and clarify my position in response. Given that space is limited, I will be following the respondents’ example by referring to my own previously published work where it is necessary to expand or provide further evidence for my argument. But I hope to offer enough detail here to support my position, which has now been enhanced thanks to engagement with such careful interlocutors.

As I read them, these commentators raise three interrelated criticisms, which in what follows I will engage by reference to the specific arguments of each individual respondent. These three criticisms are:

- 1) My claim that there exist four knowledge frameworks in which to discuss the project of cross-cultural philosophy is *inadequate*, because there exist other and possibly more nuanced and productive ways to carry out the cross-cultural project (Metz, Fuller);
- 2) That the knowledge framework I recommend as most suited to the task of cross-cultural philosophy, what I call the “self-transformative” framework, would produce a *uniformity* of worldviews, and discourage the kind of pluralism or difference that cross-cultural philosophy intends to foster (Metz, Milojevic);
- 3) The dialogic model that I rule out in my original response should be *(re)interpreted more charitably*, because despite my claims it can successfully support projects of cross-cultural philosophy (Kim).

In general, I respond to these three criticisms by offering further evidence for my position that all knowledge—including most prominently the knowledge produced by contemporary professionalized academic philosophy—is necessarily situated; and that such situatedness can create problems of cognitive imperialism and “subalternity” when one form of knowledge is used to comprehend differently-situated knowledge(s). As such, I argue, these problems are fundamentally irresolvable by any means other than the “self-transformative” view. I join some of the respondents, however, in acknowledging that there may be different “levels” to interaction and that the knowledge we uncover or produce there can remain

valuable—stressing that such “value” of course begs the questions: valuable to whom, and under what conditions?¹

2 The Inadequacy Critique

The first criticism of my essay is most saliently formulated in the responses from Thaddeus Metz and Steve Fuller. According to Metz, I neglected to consider a “fifth conception of knowledge” that can profitably enact cross-cultural learning, one based on the fallibilist assumptions that “there are objective truths to which no one has a monopoly” (Metz 2017b) and that Western philosophy contains at least some errors. On this basis, we can claim that “any long-standing epistemic tradition probably has some insight into the way things truly are” (Metz 2017b). Metz argues that this position is not simply a reiteration of what I call in my original response the “Enlightenment view,” because this position does not subscribe to a conception in which “knowledge is unitary” (Metz 2017b).

I agree that Metz’s view is not an Enlightenment account, insofar as it does not make claims about rationality or progress associated historically with the European Enlightenment.² Yet it is difficult to see how it does not rest on a claim about the unity of all knowledge if it also poses the existence of objective truth—and thus assumes some form of moral or epistemological progress. A fallibilist doctrine may tell us that we can never be in possession of such objective truths at any given time, but the mode of cross-cultural philosophy Metz advocates would entail that we are engaged in the process of trying to at least asymptotically to approach such truths. The “disparities” with which we might grapple on such a conception (Metz 2017b) are thus rendered not as true forms of difference (in which multiple heterogenous forms of being or claims about the world can co-exist simultaneously as legitimate rivals) but rather as instances of either right or wrong claims about the world, that must be resolved within the cross-cultural philosopher’s search for truth. This view bears a strong similarity to Enlightenment forms of knowledge, including the approach of JS Mill, who correctly saw such a view as perfectly compatible with British imperial activity in India.

The main reason I do not accept such a view is because I have been convinced by the postcolonial insight that some forms of knowledge remain “subaltern” to other forms of knowledge. Subaltern forms of knowledge are those that cannot be represented by a dominant discourse or community of knowledge production in any way other than as an inferior form of knowledge. Another way of saying that is, we are capable of glimpsing the heterogeneity of subaltern knowledges, but not validating its premises as legitimate forms of knowledge production as we recognize it.³ Chakrabarty offers the example of how the past is narrated by the tribal Santal people of northern India, who ascribe agency to divine beings. Yet such narratives “cannot ever enter academic history as belonging to the historian’s own position,” because the very criteria of “doing good history” as a professional academic historian systematically prevent their articulation as “real” history. This is because academic history would identify the Santal themselves, and not ghosts or divine beings as the Santal claim, to be the “real” agents of history (Chakrabarty 2000: 105). This paradoxical outcome is precisely *because* (and not in spite) of the attempt by academic historians to take Santal history seriously. In other words, we may very well reject views of foreign others as “wrong” or “underdeveloped” when in fact (unbeknownst to us) it is the

constraints of our own worldview or discipline, and not some objective true state of the world, that entail such judgments. As Pratap Mehta has argued (persuasively, in my opinion), we can recognize that values are held for a reason, while also realizing that articulating those rationales to those who do not already share them may not be possible.⁴

Such insights lead me to a profoundly circumscribed approach to knowledge, one that recognizes (as did many of my Chinese interlocutors, including Yan Fu—see below) that there may exist *some* worldviews we can never accept or even understand, short of adopting the broad social and cultural practices and relationships in which they are embedded. This transformation of entire ways of life—from marriage practices, to forms of inquiry about the natural world, to religious observance—as a means of comprehending or accessing alternative forms of knowledge was of course a key component of Christian and Islamic missionary practice throughout the world, as well as many other “civilizing projects” including the Confucian, Marxist and (I would add) liberal.⁵ Fuller is thus correct when he identifies such “proselytizing” as a possible fifth framework of knowledge within which cross-cultural philosophy might be carried out.

However, I am not as convinced as Fuller (2017a) that this framework might work successfully as one “in which multiple cultures can transact their perspectives”. Fuller submits that such proselytism can and has worked both ways: “Enlightenment thinkers believed in proselytism—and expected to receive proselytism in return,” as evidenced by cross-cultural practitioners such as Leibniz (Fuller 2017a). Yet most historical interpretations of such exchanges see them not as instances of mutual learning but rather of Orientalist appropriation.⁶ The study of the “Orient” in some ways *was* motivated by a critique of Eurocentrism, but it was only because Europe and historical entities such as India were assumed to always-already be the same—whether in terms of values, institutions, or social structures—that the Orient had value for Europeans at all.⁷ Such assumptions, it seems to me, afford very little room for the kind of “reverse proselytism” or traffic in differences that Fuller optimistically portrays. Indeed, such Orientalism offers a historical example of how openness to learning from different traditions can sometimes, even unintentionally, mask an assimilationist project that rejects difference rather than legitimates it—one reason why claims to have learned something from a foreign tradition must be interpreted with caution, and interrogated carefully.

Relatedly, I must push back against how Fuller portrays the reception of Western thought by late nineteenth and early twentieth century Chinese intellectuals, as a means of proving his point about esotericism. To reduce this rich and prolonged engagement to merely an instance of “defensive modernization” does a profound injustice to the creative and plural contributions of Chinese intellectuals and political elites during this period, for several reasons (as I argue in my book *Changing Referents*, where I offer a sustained defense of examining Chinese thought as a theoretical resource).⁸ First, the potential theoretical contribution of their discussions can be evaluated only on the basis of its substance, not its motivation; second, dismissing these thinkers as mere modernizers would fail to recognize that their debates ultimately produced, as I argue in my book, “one of the most sustained, syncretic, wide-ranging, and theoretically rich conversations in human history, on a topic of both popular and intellectual consequence: how, should, and can we learn from the thought and practices of others who occupy different spaces and times?” (Jenco 2015: 18)

As evidence, let me examine Fuller's claim that Yan Fu and Zhang Shizhao engaged European texts, specifically Rousseau's *Du Contract Social*, as merely "a platform for discussing matters that had previously lacked voice in Chinese culture" (Fuller 2017a). Obviously, both were deeply engaged public intellectuals who cared greatly about the fate of their society. But a quick comparison between their work and, say, that of similarly engaged intellectuals of the "Foreign affairs" (*Yangwu*) or self-strengthening (*zhiqiang*) movements writing just 50 years before reveals how profoundly their Western learning had affected not only *how* they discussed social problems but also *what* they discussed, in which genres, and to what audiences.⁹ Zhang and Yan, in particular, were unusually familiar with a broad range of contemporary European social thought (both were fluent in English and had studied in British schools) and each produced a hefty corpus of writings which evinced their deep conversance with such ideas.¹⁰ These two thinkers personally introduced wholly new concepts into the Chinese lexicon that continue to shape Chinese-language knowledge production today: terms such as "society," "culture," and "logic" owe much to their efforts to transform the very language of social discussion, to enable it to say very different things than it ever had before.¹¹ As I have argued elsewhere, these profound and deliberate community-wide changes to how Chinese people thought and wrote constituted nothing less than a change of referents (*bianfa*)—a total shift in what they considered knowledge and how they produced it.¹² As Yan himself argues, these changes constitute a nearly unprecedented "fateful trend" (*yun bu*) that demand profound transformations in basic Chinese practices extending from personal relations, to law and government, to forms of learning.¹³ I therefore do not believe that either Zhang or Yan demonstrates features of esotericism. I do, however, believe that Zhang and Yan present compelling examples of the kind of self-transformation I advocate, a point I noted in my original response and in my monograph devoted to their thought. I hope this further elaboration of their views here strengthens my argument.

3 The Uniformity Critique

My views outlined above help me respond to the second criticism of my approach, particularly as formulated by Metz and Miljana Milojevic: that my self-transformative framework ironically may threaten to "merge" instead of "multiply" horizons (Milojevic 2017a). Milojevic advances her critique specifically in relation to why our philosophical syllabi are almost exclusively Western. She argues that such exclusion is unjustified because philosophy is a task which inherently "seeks to better understand the world independent of our own particular perspective" (Milojevic 2017a), and as such its practice is constrained only by "the social and historical aspects of philosophical knowledge, and not in the cognitive abilities of differently-situated subjects" (Milojevic 2017a). On this basis, she argues that my "self-transformative" approach courts incommensurability, due to its insistence that we take seriously the embeddedness of knowledge in the social contexts—an embeddedness that she claims philosophy is by definition able to overcome.

As should be clear from my response to Metz above, I operate with a very different view of knowledge, which—using terms from David Kim's response in this symposium—contends that knowledge is anchored in culture rather than simply manifested in it (Kim 2017a). As a consequence, I

simply do not think it is possible for human beings to sufficiently transcend their biases, “suspend their core beliefs” deriving from religious or cultural traditions (Milojevic 2017a), or sufficiently operate by way of a purely “abstract, theoretical, and implicitly defined” language (Milojevic 2017a).¹⁴ Even if we accept, with Milojevic, that cultural influences on cognition are limited to “visual perception, sense of space and time, and our emotions” (Milojevic 2017a) we can nevertheless join feminists and philosophers of disability to recognize these as hugely important constitutive components of human life and society; that is, such capacities necessarily have a direct impact on how even the “abstract notions” Milojevic seems to favor in her philosophical method are formulated, chosen, discussed and proven.¹⁵ Recent debates over the “legitimacy of Chinese philosophy” (*Zhongguo zhexue de befaxing*) have further demonstrated how “philosophy” as a discipline—including when defined as an abstract, transcendent methodology—imposes a very specific approach to knowledge, arising from a very specific historical time and place, that may not be shared by, nor is necessarily capable of addressing or engaging, all globally situated modes of knowledge production.¹⁶

That being said, my “self-transformative” approach can recognize such constraints while offering a clear way out of the trap of incommensurability: part of my point was to argue that social, cultural and other contexts are indeed tractable to individual and collective transformation and (re)interpretation over time, rendering new forms of knowledge accessible. Individuals can change themselves, but communities can also change (and be changed by) individuals to enable the production of new sensibilities, languages and structures that produce knowledge in certain ways rather than others. This is true both of historically-situated knowledge, and culturally-situated knowledge—both of which, as Milojevic points out, share similarities in terms of their distance from the philosopher (although it is worth noting that the degree to which “we moderns” can comprehend historically situated knowledge is not as settled as Milojevic seems to assume.¹⁷) I would agree with Milojevic that we should see social embedding as an “epistemic resource—a resource which offers us new perspectives with equal value” (Milojevic 2017a). But I am not sure this epistemic resource can be fully actualized or validated without some lived experience of, and reflection on, the social embedding itself. I am not thus claiming that my “self-transformative” framework can enable us to access or comprehend all knowledge, for the simple reason that not all forms of social embedding will be available to us, whoever we are, located in our particular times and places. Nor am I claiming (as Kim rightly notes) that every alternative tradition requires the self-transformation process in a totalizing way—although our success in producing knowledge will turn on how it is evaluated in the community to which we think we are contributing. But in contrast to thinkers such as Charles Taylor, who argue that due to such embeddedness we can at best forge a third space or “language of perspicuous contrast,”¹⁸ I do believe there is much greater capacity than is usually thought to transform ourselves to actually *learn* from other societies and bodies of thought, rather than only contrast our present state with them.

However, both Milojevic and Metz argue that philosophy offers us a uniquely privileged position in which we can survey a wide variety of perspectives and arguments. In embracing the need for social embeddedness, they say, I am rejecting the possibility of occupying such a privileged position and thus I reproduce the very constraints on knowledge that comparative philosophy is trying to overcome. In Milojevic’s (2017a) case, comparative philosophy should rather involve “suspend[ing] our core beliefs” to understand different forms of knowledge, facilitated by “fuller explanations and implicit definitions” that

bridge the lack of correspondence between them (Milojevic 2017a). In Metz's (2017b) case the task should rather involve changing our minds when presented with "objective truths to which no one culture has a monopoly" (Metz 2017b). But as I said already in my responses to both Metz and Milojevic, I do not think such approaches realistically grapple with the problems of power inequality and particularity that saturate all knowledge production, producing problems such as subalternity. The pluralism that they each present as a desirable feature of philosophy may, from a different point of view, be simply the imposition of another kind of uniformity. For Metz, this is the uniformity of "objective truth," albeit globally rather than parochially distributed. For Milojevic, this is a uniformity of abstraction, achieved through the sacrifice of the very "core beliefs" that in my view are precisely what comparative philosophy should be capable of addressing.

To explain further, it might be helpful at this point to distinguish between transformations of communities and transformations of individuals—a distinction that was not always clear in my original response. Transformations of individuals in the way I describe does not necessarily portend the uniformity of an entire community precisely because communities, defined as those who produce knowledge intelligible to their fellow community-members as such, are internally diverse. Although they may share (uneven and overlapping) criteria that governs what constitutes knowledge, what communities produce is not a uniform set of information but merely *the conditions of mutual intelligibility*—according to which new members can produce meaningful knowledge recognizable as innovative, relevant, and useful (rather than deviant, irrelevant or useless) to other members. What I have in mind is something that takes the form (if not always the substance) of modern academic disciplines, in which transcultural and transnational individuals communicate—and argue—together in a likely unevenly shared language about a roughly shared set of concerns, even as these "overlap with practices and ideas sustaining intelligibility in a variety of other centers, each with diverse membership criteria."¹⁹ So, in so far as academic disciplines such as philosophy may evince any form of pluralism, so too would each of these communities, which would fracture and proliferate as individuals seek to gain or produce new knowledge. Pluralism would exist both within and alongside them.

4 The Charitable Re-Interpretation Critique

This brings me to the third and final criticism of my essay: might the dialogic approach I reject have more value for the project of cross-cultural philosophy, including my "self-transformative" framework, than I claim? David Kim articulates these concerns most poignantly. Unlike Fuller or Metz, who begin from slightly different orientations, Kim seems to agree with my claim that knowledge, including philosophical knowledge, is embedded in backgrounds and institutions that sometimes make its travel to other contexts difficult. To Kim, cross-cultural dialogue need not dichotomize people into "self" and "other," because "the underscoring of a distinction between self and other is part of a generic phenomenological conceptual machinery and is not intended to imply alienated social relations" (Kim 2017a). Understood in this way, it is both necessary and unavoidable in the very formation of those self-transformative commitments I encourage (Kim 2017a).

I would resist the idea that a mere phenomenological account does not carry important and necessary consequences for how we organize our social relationships, because every interaction of knowledge, even abstract knowledge, necessarily takes place on specific terms through specific institutions that privilege some and marginalize others. But I take Kim's point that there may be instances in which dialogue can play an important role in familiarizing us with knowledge to which we would otherwise have no access. But this is true only of some kinds of knowledge, some of the time. It may not work when we can (as I explained above) "glimpse the heterogeneity" of a subaltern account but remain unable to grasp its meaning or claims to truth. So, I think Kim is right that dialogic engagements produce knowledge—not something I ever denied. The issue at stake is whether dialogic engagements are sufficient to produce knowledge recognizable as such to the differently-situated individual or community we are trying to engage. The answer, I think, is generally no. Short of self-transformation, we will, in Orientalist fashion, continue to produce knowledge for ourselves—even if we claim that the motivation or content of that knowledge comes from elsewhere. Farah Godrej's recent call for plural "existential immersion," cited favorably by Kim as an example of how "the cultural embeddedness thesis" can be wedded to "an inclusive pluralistic methodology" (Kim 2017a), is a case in point. First, such an approach paradoxically affirms the importance of historical and cultural contexts while claiming they can be readily and repeatedly transcended (thus rendering context irrelevant).²⁰ Second, it is formulated explicitly as a means of expanding disciplinary knowledge for "us"—that is, professionalized comparative political theorists and philosophers—not as a way of fundamentally displacing our own terms of enquiry.²¹

But there is another way of understanding Kim's critique, and it opens an exciting new avenue to explore. Might it be the case that some forms of knowledge require different "levels" or forms of engagement? In my original essay, I tried to indicate that there do exist such levels, namely the four "frameworks" I sketched. Some of my comments above (and elsewhere) about the partial and overlapping nature of the self-transformation of individuals and communities also speak to this possibility. But I take Kim's response to be asking something a bit different and more radical. Could it be that certain kinds of claims or beliefs or values or traditions pose different kinds of requirements for engagement? That is, might we need to do away with the very idea that there is one "best" framework for doing comparative philosophy, and cling rather to the possibility that different situations require different approaches that may displace us from our starting points more or less radically? Such a position is behind my claim in the latter part of my original response that even the project of "cross-cultural philosophy" itself, from a certain perspective, constitutes a unified field of knowledge that must be interrogated to reveal how it promotes certain forms of knowledge while remaining blinded—or denying legitimacy—to others. But Kim (2017a) takes this further: he mentions such possibilities as decolonial critique, political-structural comparisons, and others.

I am convinced by this point, and look forward to (may I say?) future dialogue with all of my respondents about how we can realize this possibility. My only hope, however, is that as comparative philosophers (and political theorists) we do not become so preoccupied with method—or with talking to each other—that we fail to engage in a substantive and long-term way the very bodies of thought we hoped to include in the first place.

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- 1 One final caveat. Although my topic for this symposium was cross-cultural *philosophy*, it will quickly become clear that I am not a philosopher. I was trained as a political theorist, with closer ties to fields that emphasize context and particularity—such as intellectual history, anthropology, and area studies—rather than to philosophy, which tends to emphasize abstraction and generality. But I hope that my argument will not only be clear, but also resonant, across such disciplinary boundaries.
- 2 It is worth noting, however, that David Kim’s response in this symposium does identify something like Metz’s view about comparative philosophy (in which “comparative philosophy [...] turns out to be a study of different local or cultural manifestations of an underlying, standpoint-independent, unitary body of knowledge”) as a form of the Enlightenment view (Kim 2017a).
- 3 I have been influenced in this formulation of subalternity by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) and Sanjay Seth (2007, 2008).
- 4 Mehta (2000: 625).
- 5 Steve Harrell (1995) argues for the inclusion of Confucian and Marxist “civilizing projects” alongside Christian ones; for an example of what I would argue is a liberal attempt at cross-cultural proselytization, see March (2009).
- 6 The classic argument is of course Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1978); for a more recent examination of such exchanges, and their impact on comparative study and area studies, see Dutton (2005: 89–125).
- 7 Thomas (2010: 655–56). Here Thomas is basing her argument on the work of Orientalists such as William Jones (1746–1794), Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), and Max Muller (1823–1900).
- 8 Jenco (2015: 17–20).
- 9 For more detail of this historical transition, see Hutters (2005).
- 10 For information about their respective backgrounds, see Schwartz (1964); Bai Ji’an (2004). It is important to note, however, that both Yan and Zhang altered their positions over time; here, I am speaking primarily of their positions circa 1895–1918.
- 11 This claim has become accepted wisdom among historians of modern China; for specific examples, see Liu (1995); Kurtz (2011).
- 12 This is the (admittedly quite ambitious) argument I pursue in Jenco (2015).
- 13 Yan Fu (1986: 1, 3).
- 14 Views such as those of Milojevic have been contested many times even within the modern discipline of philosophy (not to mention anthropology, history and other cognate disciplines) so I do not think my claims here and above are all that unusual. But for additional evidence, see Gadamer (1989); Taylor (1985); Pitkin (1972).
- 15 For just a sample of how such capacities influence political philosophy, see for example Krause, (2008); Chambers (2003). In his response, Metz (2017b) also notes that he views emotion as “a source of moral knowledge.”
- 16 For English-language overviews of this debate, see Defoort (2001); Defoort and Ge (2005); for a historical examination of how “traditional Chinese knowledge” was forced into the specific disciplinary terms of the professionalized modern discipline of philosophy, see: Makeham (2012).
- 17 Such was the debate initiated by Quentin Skinner’s classic intervention: “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” (1969); it is continued by postcolonial theorists: Seth (2008); indeed, as many modern Chinese thinkers recognized, even what constitutes the historical past is itself subject to interrogation and transformation in light of the connections present communities may cultivate with it; see e.g., Jenco (2015: 57, Chapters 3 and 7).
- 18 Taylor (1985: Vol. 2, 125).
- 19 Jenco (2015: 225).
- 20 As I note of Godrej’s argument elsewhere: “if history and culture are relevant to the production of

knowledge [...] then not all perspectives can be inhabited at once [...]. We are led back to the same question: how might embedded knowledge travel meaningfully across the communities thought to contain it?" (Jenco 2015: 47).

²¹ Godrej (2009: 151, 159); for further discussion, see Jenco (2011: 27–59).

Eurocentrism or Sinocentrism? The Cultural Grounds of Cross-Cultural Philosophy

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Jenco's response to her critics, including me, reveal fundamental value differences concerning the nature of cross-cultural philosophy itself that deserve an airing, especially given her "Sinocentric" vision of the field.

I assume that cross-cultural philosophy would not exist, were it not for imperialist ambitions, for which proselytism is the vanguard intellectual activity. Moreover, I don't simply mean modern European imperialism but also the background imperial activity that provided the richness of, say, Herodotus' *Histories*, Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles* and Ibn-Khaldun's *Muqqadimah*, three rather different expressions of what I take to be the prehistory of cross-cultural philosophy. What I take to be essential about imperialism is that the desire to "recognize" other cultures extends beyond the weak sense of acknowledging their existence to the stronger sense of incorporating them into one's own culture. Whatever else, this move implies that the aspiring imperialists see sufficient value in the "subaltern" cultures to try to arrive at some common standards by which the two sides of the cultural exchange might not only be compared but also ultimately function as a single unit. In this respect, imperialism is an exercise in socially constructing the universal.

While cross-cultural philosophy is perhaps not imperialist by design, it wouldn't get off the ground if there were no prospects of comparing cultures to mutual benefit. Put in terms that Jenco herself might appreciate, she doesn't take sufficiently seriously the rather specific conditions under which cross-cultural philosophy is made possible. After all, two cultures that encounter each other may simply remain incommensurate, thereby licensing actions that range from disinterested neglect to casual obliteration. This is how humans have historically regarded the social arrangements of other animal species—at least until the animal rights movement. Imperialism may be many things but it's not that. As Hegel and Marx realized, exploitation involves a much more robust sense of mutual recognition.

Of course, postcolonialists are correct that imperialism imposed a hierarchical relationship on the encountered cultures, which justifies use of the term "subaltern." However, this hierarchy should be understood as a net product of the relationship rather than some uniform expression of dominance. After all, imperial operations typically halt once the imperial power finds their maintenance too costly. And while various subaltern uprisings have certainly contributed to the end of historical forms of imperialism, in most cases the imperial power dictates the moment of its retreat. Put bluntly, the imperialists come to lose faith in the viability of their own universalist project—perhaps justifiably. But by the time that happens, a very sustained cross-cultural exchange will have occurred which alters fundamentally the self-understanding of all concerned. Moreover, this exchange is the product of both the "self-transformation" that Jenco stresses and the proselytism that I stress. In fact, I see them as two sides of the same coin.

Now, Jenco probably doesn't like this relatively sympathetic understanding of imperialism

because her own Sinocentric account of cross-cultural philosophy places overriding value on respecting the discreteness of cultures, and so the very fact that imperialism entails a reduction of cultural difference is problematic for her. But it's not at all clear that cross-cultural philosophy needs to be committed to reinforcing the differences between cultures. It could well be a universalist project. Of course, the terms on which such universalism is forged remains an open question—and there's much to learn from imperialism's mistakes. Nevertheless, it is often forgotten that the original Liberal version of British imperialism aimed to create an international free trade zone, once the natives had the proper institutions in place. Had imperialism run its full course, that's what the Commonwealth would be today. Interestingly, albeit perhaps quixotically, Brexit has recently revived just such dreams.

One doesn't need to take the imperialist project entirely at face value to realize that, as a profoundly capitalist endeavor, it was against the essentializing of all cultures—including the British one. I make this point because so much of the postcolonialist rhetoric about “difference” is really a call to essentialism by the backdoor, in response to capitalism's corrosive effects on all cultural distinctiveness. For the true capitalist, “culture” is ultimately just a synonym for “protectionism” (e.g. Friedrich List, the German economist who influenced early US economic nationalism), if not “rent-seeking” (which was J.S. Mill's verdict on India after having worked for the East India Company).

The “solid” to which Marx was referring when he said “All that is solid melts into air” was a strong sense of cultural identity, which in the nineteenth century was morphing into national identity. This feature of capitalism both horrified and fascinated Marx—fascinated, because Marx himself was interested in dissolving the essentialism of class identity, which capitalism not only left untouched but reinforced at a global level through imperialism. However, as Lenin subsequently theorized, imperialism accomplished the first task of World Communism by removing the cognitive barriers associated with cultural difference, which had prevented workers positioned similarly with regard to the means of production from seeing each other as engaged in a common struggle. This was the so-called “global division of labor,” which after it failed to inform a global revolution and its intellectual champion Leon Trotsky was sent into exile and Marxism retreated into the academy, fueled the imaginary of world-systems theory.

Postcolonialism has been largely about running interference on this narrative, which ultimately sees universalism via the creative destruction of essences as world history's direction of travel. Once again differences in starting value assumptions matters in how one assesses the universalist narrative. Like both the capitalists and the Marxists (at least when they were a serious political force on the world stage), I am comfortable with the prospect of attenuating cultural differences to the point that they become branding devices, market signals or—in the Marxist case—bases for spontaneous self-organizing contributions to a collective global effort. Postcolonialists like Jenco appear to believe that this is a fate to be avoided at all cost. But in so doing, they risk failing to respect the dynamic character of the human condition, in which one's future is *not* tied to some nostalgic memory of a collective past, *à la* Benedict Anderson's “imagined communities.”¹ This is not to deny that the past is a resource—indeed, it is capital, nothing more and nothing less. It need not permanently anchor one's sense of identity.

Lest Jenco think I'm simply spouting an ideology of British cultural supremacy, it is worth recalling the significant history of resistance to utilitarianism and economic rationality more generally from within Britain. Whatever else, imperialism was not the imposition of distinctly “British values” on

the rest of the world—notwithstanding that’s how things appeared to Germans when they and the British saw each other as rivals. On the contrary, imperialism imposed values that were historically alien (aka “modern”) which nevertheless enabled the British state to pursue certain expansionist policies. A clue to this mindset may already be found in Jeremy Bentham’s original legislative reforms, which were designed to “rationalize,” largely by replacement, the cumulative case-specific wisdom of common law that had informed English jurisprudence for centuries.

Cultural studies emerged as a mode of academic resistance—expressed as a reaffirmation of working class customs, guild labor and protection of the commons—at an opportune moment, namely, the postwar period, when imperialism was in its death throes. In the hands of some early advocates, such as E.P. Thompson, it verged on nostalgia for a pre-capitalist past. But even at the height of imperialism, Benjamin Disraeli had coined the phrase “One Nation Conservatism” to reposition the Tories as the party that identifies “British” primarily with the inhabitants of the British Isles—and the culture that binds them together—rather than simply a “made for export” ideology of global reform, which was how he cast the policies of his Liberal opponents. Even today the appeal to “one nation” in the face of the potentially divisive pressures of globalization remains a potent part of Tory rhetoric, which can guarantee to attract a substantial portion of working class voters.

My point here is that the postcolonial critique of universalism as the imposition of one or a few European cultural horizons on the rest of the world—“Eurocentrism”—is too simplistic to be credible. Whatever imperialism supposedly “imposed” was imposed on Europe too – by design, not merely as an unintended consequence. It’s worth recalling that the founding work of cultural studies in Britain was written not by Stuart Hall about postcolonial resettlement culture but by Richard Hoggart² about the culture of the native British working class, which had been long neglected and derided by elites of all parties as “backward.” But notwithstanding this cultural studies backlash, the desire and capacity to change one’s own culture is necessary for any robust sense of “cross-cultural philosophy” to get off the ground. Imperialism certainly provided the material conditions for that at a global level, albeit in a ham-fisted and arguably reckless way. The upshot has been that while former colonial cultures struggle to recover their imagined precolonial identities, the British—especially the English—also struggle to figure out who they were before imperialism. In this respect, Brexit is a *cri de coeur*.

But in the end, has this generalized flux in cultural identity been such a bad thing? No, I say. And here I perhaps most disagree with Jenco’s Sinocentric approach to cross-cultural philosophy. Cross-cultural philosophy is facilitated by a willingness of all parties to consider that what they currently believe or possess may be worthy of exchange. Capitalism—and by extension, both imperialism and Marxism—have been historic facilitators of this attitude. Yes, this “learning experience” has happened under conditions that leave much to be desired. Nevertheless, these apparently suboptimal conditions have been justified by both imperialists and Marxists as constituting the very conditions of freedom itself—namely, the freedom not to have to reproduce one’s own past in the future.

To be sure, this claim deserves further scrutiny. In any case, it is difficult to see how Jenco’s own Sinocentric starting point would lead to anything other than a truncated sense of cross-cultural philosophical traffic. I will put to one side whether an explicitly Sinocentric account of cross-cultural philosophy is usefully assimilated to the discourse of “postcolonialism” and/or “Orientalism,” given the degree and nature of European interference in China. (I doubt it.) However, it is clear, as Jenco herself

helpfully says, that she presupposes—thanks to her Chinese interlocutors—a “profoundly circumscribed approach to knowledge.” This is because China’s cultural identity is defined by an unusually strong sense of rootedness in land, blood and language. Admittedly this is impressive, considering the amount of space and time for which a consistent Chinese (Han) identity can be plausibly claimed. Indeed, if any culture deserves the label “essentialist” with regard to its own self-understanding, it is China. But this is not really the most perspicuous model for cross-cultural philosophy, is it?

Thus, I’m less impressed than Jenco by the sophistication with which early twentieth century Chinese intellectuals considered the cultural relevance of Western sources. That’s precisely what one would expect of a defensive modernization strategy conducted in an esoteric key. Even if Jenco sees how Western arguments and turns of thought steered the Chinese intellectuals into culturally uncharted territory, it doesn’t follow that the non-intellectual Chinese public understood matters in those terms—let alone that it radically changed Chinese cultural self-understanding in any sustained way, even if it succeeded in changing particular policies. I have no doubt that Zhang and Yan—the two Chinese intellectuals of most concern—changed their own minds quite significantly through their encounters with Western philosophy. So, yes, they engaged in Jenco’s “self-transformative” process in that narrow sense. But this was basically an internal conversation, not something that deserves to be called “cross-cultural philosophy” in any robust sense, given the relatively limited presumptive capacity to change Chinese self-understanding as a whole. Perhaps this last point helps to explain the violence of the 1966–76 “Cultural Revolution”?

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

² Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working Class Life* (London: Penguin, 1957).

Dialogical Comparison: Reconstruction without Circularity and Contributions to Self-Transformation

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I appreciate Leigh Jenco's thoughtful reply to my response and the opportunity to continue the conversation. As I understand the foregoing exchange, I share many of the concerns and endorse some of the key ideas articulated in Leigh Jenco's account of congenial epistemologies.

In her lead essay, two elements particularly interested me: a case against the dialogical model being sufficient for the aims of comparative philosophy, and a case for epistemic deference and transformation before an alternative, especially subaltern, tradition of thought. These are connected because the dialogical model, on her account, facilitates a subtle kind of insularity rather than vulnerability, transformation, and border-crossing: one may seek out an alternative tradition primarily to better articulate, justify, answer, or enrich one's own originary questions or positions, rather than being open to being transformed by it and changing one's philosophical core. As I have mentioned before, I have learned much from Jenco's work. In the brief remarks that follow, I offer two sets of considerations that might clarify and refresh my earlier concerns and push the discussion a bit further. First, I explore the idea that in some cases the dialogical approach may be sufficient. Second, I suggest that we gain methodological insight by focusing on the actual and potential intimate links between the dialogical and the self-transformative models, something that is potentially obscured by focusing too much on the insufficiency of the dialogical model.

1 On the Insufficiency of the Dialogical Approach

I agree with Jenco that the dialogical framework is insufficient for comparative philosophy as a whole. As I suggested, and as Jenco also affirms, we need a harmonized panoply of methods in order to compare the many kinds of philosophies that exist, including ones outside of the "West" and "East," and the dialogical approach is but one resource. So, for our purposes here, let's narrow our focus upon those comparative projects—for example, ones involving the Confucian or modern hybrid Confucian traditions that Jenco considers—in which the self-transformative approach and the dialogical perspective may vie with each other for methodological centrality.

Like many influenced by postcolonial or decolonial perspectives, I too regard conditions like subalternity or coloniality as having serious epistemic aspects and implications and that dialogical accounts typically underestimate and undertheorize these ideas. Moreover, I am persuaded by Jenco that such underestimation manifests in most of the leading dialogical accounts in the kind of subtle insularity, entrenchment, or self-encirclement that she compellingly describes. So, we share much ground. Yet I hesitate to go as far as to say that the dialogical perspective *itself* is ensnared in this way. Two issues give me pause. First, what is it about the dialogical approach that *necessarily* commits one to remaining within

one's originary philosophical core? It is true that the task of conceptual bridgework between traditions by means of dialogical inquiry is *often* subsumed within the potentially insular goal of only improving and always returning to or circling back upon one's philosophical starting point. But I see no contradiction in such conceptual bridgework being subsumed within the unbounded goal of pursuing metaphysical or ethical truths wherever they may be found, which implies a vulnerability or transformability before the claims (and rituals) of another tradition. Surely one *can* do dialogical comparative philosophy with a one-way ticket, as it were, which implies that it is not of necessity insular or perpetually circling back upon itself. Second, given the distinction between intelligibility and veridicality, between understanding a claim and believing it to be true, couldn't even insular forms of dialogical comparative philosophy meet some minimum standard of comparative philosophy? Someone bred upon Aristotelian or Kantian philosophy might engage with Confucian philosophy without being open to being transformed by the latter, yet still *understand* much about Confucian philosophy while critiquing or rejecting much of it. It is not uncommon for comparative philosophers to regard the entire li-qi framework of neo-Confucian metaphysics, like that of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming, to be both false and convoluted. And yet, they are doing comparative philosophy, perhaps well even, without any desire to be transformed by that tradition. Jenco notes that not every case of comparison requires self-transformation. It would be helpful then to know when it is necessary and when not.

In sum, I do not think the dialogical model as a *model* is insufficient on account of being *necessarily* insular. Put another way, it can be in principle reconstructed to avoid the pitfalls that Jenco has identified. In addition, even insular instances of the model may in some cases actually meet some minimum standard of comparative philosophy.

2 On the Vital Connections between the Dialogical and Self-Transformation

Even if Jenco is right that the dialogical account is insufficient for the aims of comparative philosophy in most or all contexts, it seems not only necessary but important in a variety of ways for one account that she does regard to be adequate, namely her self-transformation account. I think dialogical inquiry has an intimate and vital link to self-transformation that can be underappreciated if the focus is too much on rejecting the sufficiency of the dialogical model. Put another way, the self-transformation account is already and deeply harmonized with important elements of the dialogical model, and we gain distinctive methodological understanding in exploring this.

Laying out the particular ways in which the dialogical is necessary and important for self-transformation can be illuminating. I noted a small handful in my initial response. First, we need dialogical inquiry to understand enough about another tradition to make an informed choice about *whether* to commit to self-transformation. For example, one would need to learn some basic ideas about, say, Confucianism's concept of the self, social constitution, and a specific set of roles and virtues distinctively highlighted by Confucianism. Second, we need such inquiry in order to manage or shape the *extent* of the self-transformation. For example, if one thinks that Confucianism is patriarchal, then dialogical inquiry can illuminate the lines or obstacles a feminist must negotiate in the transformational landscape. And third, we need dialogical inquiry to conceptually extend the knowledge gained in self-transformation. For

example, one can spend a great deal of energy thinking through the neo-Confucian debates about *li* and *qi* in one's basic metaphysics. I think there is another element to add that I neglected in my initial response. A fourth consideration is that we need dialogical inquiry to make sense of the very non-rationalistic rituals that Jenco says are necessary for self-transformation. We need it because rituals are not self-interpreting. Their meaning arises out of a larger constellation that is partly conceptual and hermeneutical, which suggests another way in which dialogical inquiry is necessary for self-transformation. The upshot is that necessary and sufficient conditions aside, the dialogical must be given varied and important roles to play in the self-transformation account, and this could be underscored in our collective effort to synthesize methods that facilitate comparative philosophy.

Why Objective Truth Is the Ally of Social and Epistemic Justice: A Reply to Jenco

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1 Introduction

In an article published elsewhere in this symposium, I critically engage with Leigh Jenco's (2017a) suggestion that there are four basic conceptions of knowledge *prima facie* relevant to showing that one can learn from a foreign philosophical tradition and her claim that one of them, her self-transformative conception, makes the best sense of this judgment. Specifically, I advance a fifth conception of knowledge that appears relevant, and I argue that it does better than Jenco's approach. According to my framework, what makes best sense of the idea that philosophers from one tradition often have something to learn from those in another one¹ is the combination of metaphysical objectivity and epistemological fallibility.

On the one hand, suppose there are objective philosophical facts, ones that obtain independently of the propositional attitudes of human individuals or groups. On the other hand, suppose that it is difficult to access these facts, such that certainty about philosophical matters is almost never forthcoming and it takes a lot of rational reflection by many people over a long span of time in order to make headway. Suppose, moreover, that any long-standing philosophical tradition, roughly one that has put in sustained enquiry over centuries, has some insight into the objective philosophical facts, which means that one's own tradition lacks a monopoly of epistemic access to them and holds some incorrect views about them.

This combination of objectivism with fallibilism, I maintain, best explains the idea that philosophers in one intellectual culture have strong reason to consider the views of philosophers in another if they want to expand their knowledge. One's intellectual culture *could* always be mistaken just because of the objectivity of the pertinent facts, and it is *likely* to be mistaken about them in the absence of systematic exchanges with other cultures that have engaged in substantial rational reflection on them and, chances are, thereby acquired some knowledge.²

In her response to this position, Jenco (2017b) contends that it is insufficient to account adequately for the intuition that various philosophical traditions have an equal standing and that traditions other than one's own are not to be considered inferior. In addition, according to Jenco, an appeal to objective truth on the part of one epistemic culture is unavoidably oppressive, or overly risks being so, with regard to another one.

In this brief reply, I argue that an appeal to objective truth about epistemic and moral justification in fact makes the most sense of Jenco's concerns about inegalitarianism and oppression. Objecting to arrogant expressions of cultural superiority and imperial, colonialist, and related ambitions consequent to them probably commits one to an objectivist framework according to which these ways of treating people are *really* unjustified.

2 Objectivity as Oppressive?

One frequently encounters the suggestion that making a claim to objective knowledge objectionably risks legitimizing colonialism, paternalism, and related forms of oppression. One thinks of self-righteous Christian armies marching off to forcibly convert heathens or European missionaries out to civilize natives. Jenco (2017b) remarks that my view that there are objective facts to which no one culture has a monopoly, thereby requiring multicultural engagement in order to make substantial progress toward the truth, “bears a strong similarity to Enlightenment forms of knowledge, including the approach of JS Mill, who correctly saw such a view as perfectly compatible with British imperial activity in India.”

There is no denying that those in a position of power have often been, and no doubt will continue to be, inclined to try to justify their exercise of it over others by claiming to be in possession of a putatively objective truth. That, however, does not mean that there is no objective truth to be apprehended.

For an analogy, consider that Charles Darwin’s theory of the origin of the human species was put to unfortunate use by some thinkers who, for instance, suggested that it entailed letting the poor die off. However, the misuse of a theory does not mean that it is false or even epistemically unjustified. For all we can tell, Darwin’s theory is true; and it is true objectively, i.e., in virtue of mind-independent biological and historical facts (upon which an overwhelming majority of those who have studied the evidence have recently converged), as well as universally, such that someone who disagreed with the theory would be making a mistake.

The point applies more broadly. Although some people might say that they are uniquely aware of an objective fact and seek to justify oppression in the name of it, it does not follow that there is no objective fact. It does not even follow that they are not actually aware of it.

What follows are instead two things, I think. First, one should be epistemically careful when claiming to know an objective truth in which others have some stake or when holding a belief that could lead to actions that affect others. One need not double check one’s evidence that, say, one has a headache, but there might well be reason to take extra precaution when making a claim about how the human race originated or what the best way to live is.

A second lesson is to be morally careful. Even if there are terrific grounds for thinking that one is aware of an objective truth, does that knowledge really license coercion, denigration, and other forms of disrespect in order to get others to believe it or to live in accordance with it? The answer is presumably “no”; it is perfectly coherent to maintain that one knows something, say, about human nature or values, that is objectively true but to deny that such knowledge authorizes the use of force against others.

In fact, the claim that it would be wrong to use force against others in the light of objective knowledge is *itself* a claim that is plausibly objectively true, or at least implicitly believed to be such upon being made! Jenco is contending that British imperialism in India was unjust. Indeed, her claim is that it was unjust even though some people, such as Mill, thought it was not. But to make such a claim is, I submit, naturally (though, I acknowledge, not necessarily) understood to be asserting that British imperialism was objectively unjust and that Jenco knows at least this one objective moral truth whereas Mill and those like him did not. In short, her claim that British imperialism is wrong is best justified by the kind of knowledge framework I am advancing and that she is rejecting.

On what other basis can Jenco object to the imperialism of the British empire in the way that she does? How else to make good sense of the idea that Mill was incorrect or unjustified about the injustice of imperialism in India, except by positing something mind-independent about injustice that Jenco is claiming knowledge of while claiming that Mill did not have knowledge of it?

The problem I am raising is one that applies to many relativists, post-modernists, and post-colonialists. Often scholars who describe themselves with these terms advance moral claims, about socio-economic or epistemic injustice, that they passionately believe, that they know are not believed by everyone, and that they advance as claims that others would be mistaken or unjustified not also to believe. And then they juxtapose this sort of moral orientation with the further claim that there are no objective moral truths (perhaps since appealing to objective moral truths purportedly occasions injustice). I am afraid I find this combination of views to evince a serious tension that needs to be addressed: if one maintains that others' moral views are mistaken, then one is probably committed to thinking that some moral views are objectively true³ and to maintaining that the others' views are objectively false.

I am not contending that Jenco's claims cannot sensibly be held together, but I need help to see how she is going to avoid incoherence. It would be revealing for Jenco to explain how her knowledge framework can underwrite her moral criticism of British imperialism in India in the face of disagreement, and to consider whether it can do so with as much plausibility as an objectivist one according to which such imperialism was *really* unjust, something that many societies have thankfully learned over time.⁴

3 Objectivity as Inegalitarian?

Jenco advances another, distinct criticism of my appeal to objective truth, which is that, even if it did not legitimate intuitively unjust socio-economic practices such as imperialism, it could not avoid epistemic injustice. The latter "cognitive imperialism" (Jenco 2017b) comes in two forms that Jenco mentions.

On the one hand, Jenco points out that we might make a mistake and believe ourselves to be in touch with an objective truth or justified in a certain belief when we are not. She says, "we may very well reject views of foreign others as 'wrong' or 'underdeveloped' when in fact (unbeknownst to us) it is the constraints of our own worldview or discipline, and not some objective true state of the world, that entail such judgments" (Jenco 2017b).

In reply, of course it is possible for one culture to be mistaken and to think that another one is incorrect when the latter is in fact correct. But that point is part and parcel of the fallibilist epistemology I am advancing. According to my view, there are objective philosophical truths to which any long-standing culture probably has some access. Implicit in this approach is that one's own culture is likely mistaken about some things, that other cultures are likely mistaken about some things, and that it is difficult to find the mistakes without substantial cross-cultural engagement! Keeping this fallibilism in mind alongside the positing of objective truth should lead one to be epistemically careful when making knowledge claims of philosophical realities and to take other perspectives seriously as rivals.

Epistemic care need not mean the constant suspension of belief, however. The prospect of mistake is no reason to categorically prohibit thinking something to be objectively true. The earth is round, dinosaurs lived well more than 10,000 years ago, and water is H₂O. We are not certain, are not 100

percent sure, of these scientific claims, but we are justified in taking ourselves to know these apparently objective truths despite others who might disagree. Analogous claims could well be forthcoming when it comes to issues of metaphysics and ethics, on the supposition there are objective facts about them.

The other worry about epistemic injustice that Jenco discusses is that, upon pursuing (putatively) objective truth from within one's own epistemic culture, one could not avoid viewing other knowledge frameworks as implausible. She suggests that some rivals "cannot be represented by a dominant discourse or community of knowledge production in any way other than as an inferior form of knowledge" (Jenco 2017b), and that my objectivist fallibilism means that views that conflict with one's own are

rendered not as true forms of difference (in which multiple heterogeneous forms of being or claims about the world can co-exist simultaneously as legitimate rivals) but rather as instances of either right or wrong claims about the world, that must be resolved within the cross-cultural philosopher's search for truth (Jenco 2017b).

The example Jenco gives is of an indigenous people that explains many events by appeal to the agency of imperceptible, divine beings. From a Western scientific worldview in the 21st century, this people would be incorrect, if not also unjustified, to claim that the movement of planetary bodies is a function of the efforts of gods or angels (as medieval Europeans tended to do prior to Isaac Newton).

For an initial reply, I wonder whether it makes it any better if one recognizes that, from this indigenous people's perspective, the Western scientists would be mistaken. There is a parity of viewpoint (though of course only rarely a parity of power) upon positing an objective fact of the matter and the presence of at least two incompatible accounts of it. Both sides will view the other party as incorrect, and there is at least a kind of epistemic (even if not political) evenhandedness, here.

It does not follow that one should make those with the rival view feel bad, or that the other view should be forcibly wiped off the face of the earth, or that it has no right to exist. These are issues about what to *say* to others or about them, and about which *choices* to make when relating to others, and so they concern *socio-economic practices* that would be (in my view, objectively) unjust. These issues are therefore distinct from the present matter of whether there is *epistemic* injustice simply in *judging* others to be mistaken. The present issue is about how rival views are "represented," as Jenco states above, not how the people who hold the views are treated.

Of course, if one believes that other people are systematically mistaken about a topic, and if one continues to believe that upon having taken epistemic care, then one is unlikely to go out of one's way to consult them if one is interested in *knowledge* about it. Yes, one could be mistaken, as per the fallibilism I am advancing, and so one might have reason of *some* strength to consult them. However, it would be fair of Jenco to note that, at a certain point of perceived epistemic justification, my framework grounds little reason of *knowledge pursuit* to take this sort of rival seriously.

At this point, I find myself willing to bite the bullet. Should geologists and cosmologists really be spending their time trying to engage with, say, members of the Flat Earth Society or other people who tenaciously hold beliefs that logically contradict each other about the nature of our planet? Would the scientists *necessarily* be epistemically *unjust* toward them in not citing them, not attending their conferences, and the like? Conversely, would there unavoidably be "cognitive imperialism" in the Flat Earthers merely

believing that the scientists are incorrect for failing to apprehend what they deem to be objectively true? My intuitive answers are “no” to these questions.

Furthermore, as I mentioned toward the end of my previous article about Jenco’s conception of knowledge, there are probably epistemic reasons other than knowledge pursuit, particularly concerning the development of imagination, to continue to reflect on worldviews that appear to be false or unjustified, for all we can tell. And there are also reasons of morality and etiquette not to ignore, let alone denigrate, people whose worldviews seem to us to be false. If I were to visit an indigenous people and some of its elders shared their cosmology with me, I would be rude to be dismissive or not to listen at all. However, these matters again concern how to treat people who hold certain views, not the present issue of how to appraise the views that people hold.

4 Conclusion

At this point the natural suggestion to make on Jenco’s behalf is to go reaching for the first objection, concerning oppression. It might continue to seem as though one should not be inclined to believe others’ worldviews to be false since doing so would be likely to occasion disrespectful behavior, either small-scale dismissiveness or large-scale colonialism.

However, I like to think that the exchange between myself and Jenco is a counterexample to this hypothesis. She thinks, or at least suspects, that I am (objectively?) incorrect about what knowledge must be like in order for cross-cultural philosophical engagements to make sense, and I have the same orientation toward her view. I submit, though, that our exchange has not involved epistemic injustice, oppression, or anything similar. By my lights we have instead exchanged competing views (about a mind-independent subject matter) with an eye toward learning from one another and with a respectful disposition. If we two intellectuals can do it, then why not two broader intellectual cultures?⁵

¹ In this brief essay, I set aside the issue of how to distinguish different philosophical traditions or intellectual cultures. The points made here about knowledge should apply, regardless of how one draws a distinction between two different epistemic communities.

² Another move would be to posit the existence of philosophical problems that demand consensus in order to be resolved, a move inspired by the work of Jürgen Habermas. This intersubjective approach, which contrasts with my objective one, is worth considering elsewhere. However, one reason I have for favoring objectivism is skepticism about the prospect of consensus ever being achieved among all rational enquirers. Another reason is that consensus, which has not yet been achieved, has not itself grounded the philosophical claim that consensus is necessary to resolve philosophical problems, meaning that there is a *prima facie* incoherence in the intersubjective position.

³ Or perhaps intersubjectively true, i.e., in virtue of consensus, as per note 2 above.

⁴ For one thorough articulation of such a perspective, applied especially to slavery, see Gilbert (1990).

⁵ For comments on a prior draft of this article, I am grateful to the editors of the *Journal of World Philosophies*.

Three Aims of Cross-Cultural Philosophy and the Need for Self-Transformation

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First, I want to thank the editor, Leigh Jenco, and all co-symposiasts for making this thoughtful exchange of ideas possible. As the debate progresses it seems to me that our seemingly different views converge at some important points and that they are more similar than they look at the first glance. I have come to believe that most of the differences in our views stem from focusing on different aspects of the overall aim and role of cross-cultural philosophy and its different subjects. Let me elaborate on this in my short reply to Jenco's response.

The most common way to approach the topic about aims and methods of cross-cultural philosophy, which Leigh Jenco also seems to employ in her essay, is to address its difficulties and how to resolve them. Namely, given that cross-cultural philosophy strives to establish a dialogue between different traditions, it is thought that this endeavor encounters a number of difficulties which have their origin in the different situatedness of the researcher and the researched subject, which—interestingly—cross-cultural philosophy tends to address. More precisely, it is claimed that engaging in a fruitful cultural dialogue can be impaired by a potential inability to a) recognize¹ or b) overcome² methodological and conceptual biases of our own tradition. This kind of approach then seeks for ways which can help surpass such problems. Jenco's own elaborate view stresses that we should assume the self-transformative knowledge framework, which would enable us to reach common ground and a proper understanding of differently situated philosophical traditions. Some of the reasons for endorsing such an approach can be found in the need to address and rectify the inglorious history of the earlier attempts at addressing philosophical knowledge of other cultures, but also in the need to specify a unique subject of cross-cultural philosophy, namely, cultural embeddedness of other traditions and how to properly understand it.

I have decided to take a different approach and reevaluate the above described strategy which focuses on the importance of the difficulties mentioned. This does not mean that I choose to ignore the existing problems. Rather I would like to investigate their scope and importance. Namely, it may turn out that the cultural embedding of the researched subject and the specific perspective of a researcher do not pose the same kind of threat for an adequate understanding of different philosophical subjects and traditions. It may seem that this kind of analysis is contrary to the very essence of cross-cultural philosophy, inasmuch as it presupposes that some pieces of philosophical knowledge may not exhibit important influences of cultural embedding; if this turns out to be true, then, it seems to follow, that there will be no work left for the cross-cultural philosopher. But I believe that cross-cultural philosophy is not under a threat by this reevaluation, and that there is a more fundamental task of a cross-cultural philosopher than understanding particular forms of culturally embedded knowledge which I will soon address. Also, I am convinced that an approach to cross-cultural philosophy, which does not focus solely on its difficulties, is more productive. We are still living in a time of poor reception of cross-cultural philosophy. Presenting it as facing obstacles that can be resolved only in labor-intensive ways can offer

further excuses for not including it in general philosophical curricula.

I have started from the comparison of history of philosophy and cross-cultural philosophy because they share some important traits. Most importantly, they share their difficulties in approaching their subjects which are historically and culturally embedded.³ In short, I tried to show that we practice and use history of philosophy, at least sometimes (for instance, when we focus on metaphysics and solving general philosophical problems), in ways that do not presuppose thorough engagement with historical and social contexts in which particular pieces of philosophy arose, and that there are no *a priori* reasons for not assuming a similar stance in cross-cultural philosophy. Assuming such a stance would neither mean that we are automatically giving up on “proper” cross-cultural philosophy, nor that in every case we should ignore or deliberately delete a wider context in which some philosophical hypothesis originated. It also does not mean that such a treatment will necessarily lead to the uniformity of knowledge and/or to an improper appropriation of philosophical teachings of other cultures.

Namely, I believe that there is not a single level of *relevant* cultural embedding⁴ and that there is no single proper way to deal with the knowledge of other traditions. The answer about the depth of engagement and the level of the needed transformation of the perspective of the researcher will depend on the subject being investigated, the particular culture and the overall purpose of a specific project. I can only assume that there will be a continuous line on which we could position different pieces of knowledge with respect to their cultural embedding and the importance of this embedding for practicing philosophy. This pre-evaluation is of the utmost importance before deciding on the relevant methodology for properly understanding differently embedded pieces of knowledge, and I believe that this constitutes the main task of a cross-cultural philosopher.⁵ Positioning all knowledge on the very beginning of this line, where cultural differences are not taken into account, was a mistake of the colonial project, but we should be equally hesitant about placing most of the knowledge from other cultures close to the other extreme. After this evaluation⁶, the cross-cultural philosopher should strive to properly understand the other perspective (this might be called “the independent” aim), but no less importantly s/he should make his findings communicable to a wider audience of philosophers who should use them as valuable resources that can potentially change our perspective on the topics of their respective fields.

I have come to believe that the differences in Jenco’s and my own views on the importance of self-transformation come from focusing on different ends of the abovementioned line. Jenco seems to be focused on political philosophy, whose subject matter is indubitably socially constructed and deeply embedded, and also on the “independent” aim of cross-cultural philosophy. In response, I have narrowly focused on a potential cross-cultural approach to metaphysics and on the role of communicating primary results for the purposes of pursuing general philosophical aims. Although we have focused on different extreme forms of cross-cultural philosophy we share some common assumptions. It seems that we agree that all knowledge is culturally and historically embedded, although we do not necessarily agree on the nature of relevance (relative vs. absolute) of this embedding for practicing philosophy. I also believe that we agree that there are levels of relevant embedding, Jenco notes that she is not claiming “that every alternative tradition requires the self-transformation process in a totalizing way” (2017b), but it seems that we see the importance of this stratification in a different way—I see it as the most important subject of cross-cultural philosophy, and as both culture and subject dependent. Given all this I still have my reservations about the self-transformative process if it is to be understood as a comprehensive strategy

for dealing even with deeply embedded knowledge, because I believe that in order for cross-cultural philosophy not to become self-serving it has to find a way to express its results in a language which will be understandable to a wider population of those not fully acquainted with other traditions, and who have to be educated in a proper way by a cross-cultural philosopher in order to introduce new perspectives in general philosophical discourse. In other words, in talking about the relevant methodology of cross-cultural philosophy we have to take all of its three aims into account: evaluation of the level of cultural embedding, understanding different perspectives, and communicating its results to a wider audience.

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- ¹ The inability to recognize our own cultural biases in engaging with other traditions is historically reflected in the colonial project or in the idea of enlightenment. See Berger (2017); Jenco (2017a). Although this kind of unreflective approach to other traditions is part of a particular historical period, the inability to recognize our own cultural biases still presents a constant threat in the form of descriptive and normative chauvinism, or “cognitive imperialism” if we describe or value other traditions by the standards of our own. See Nussbaum (1997); Jenco (2017a).
- ² On the other hand, there is potentially even greater problem in engaging in cross-cultural philosophy, namely, that even if we are able to recognize our cultural embeddedness and our own prejudices that we would still be unable to overcome them because of the incommensurability of knowledge coming from different cultures (see Kuhn 1962); Wong (1989) which precludes us from gaining a common ground needed for mutual understanding and comparison of different views, or because of the impossibility to transcend our own perspective and our situatedness due to its constitutive role in our general cognizing.
- ³ It could be objected that there are many important differences between them: history of philosophy cannot enter into a dialogue with the past so it is more similar to area studies than to cross-cultural philosophy, it usually follows one tradition with which it shares common assumptions, etc. I accept that these differences exist but insist that they are not important for the description of their, for this project’s, relevant commonalities. The two disciplines in question share the same difficulties in understanding their subject matter, and, both being sub-fields of philosophy, share their aim of explaining different perspectives on persistent philosophical problems which constitute a valuable philosophical resource.
- ⁴ If we start from a premise that our thinking, language and knowledge are deeply influenced and shaped by our physical make-up, environment, culture and history, then we should simply claim, in the absolute sense, that they are embedded and situated in particular contexts in which they arise. When I use the phrase “level of relevant cultural embedding” I am referring to cultural embedding in a relative sense relevant for the practice of cross-cultural philosophy. Relative with respect to the already embedded perspective of a researcher (because we can expect that there will be shared cultural influences between the researching and researched perspective, where only those aspects of cultural embedding which are not shared present a difficulty to understanding), and relative to the specific philosophical project (as Lakatos [1970] differentiates between the internal and external history of science in accord with different scientific methodologies, we can differentiate between internal and external cultural influences in accord with different views on general aims of philosophy. See more in the next endnote). Also, we can expect that different philosophical concepts and problems will exhibit a different number and strength of connections with other forms of knowledge and beliefs specific for the culture in which they originated (e.g. those referring to socially constructed phenomena vs. those which tend to refer to more fundamental entities), and also that sometimes these bonds will be deliberately broken in some specific philosophies.
- ⁵ It could be objected that this is an instance of circular reasoning, and that we have to be sufficiently acquainted with the other culture in order to evaluate the appropriate level of embeddedness. This does not have to be so. The judgment can be based on more general knowledge of history, cognitive science, language, etc. Also, it could be objected that the perceived relevance of a particular embedding will depend

on the presupposed understanding of the aims of philosophy in general; thus, a threat of uniformity emerges. This is a valid objection and it asks for a more detailed answer. In short, in order to enter a process of comparison there have to be assumed commonalities. Different researchers will most probably choose different ones, which will hopefully open a discussion on the appropriateness of particular evaluations and interpretations, which will further deepen our understanding of the subject in question.

- ⁶ It is important to note that even if this evaluation reaches conclusions—in an argumentative and responsible way—that some parts of another tradition's thoughts are not significantly culturally situated; these pieces of intellectual legacy will still form a part of the subject of cross-cultural philosophy insofar as they have to be evaluated as such by the cross-cultural philosopher. The subsequent use of such evaluated insights that does not include thorough investigation of the relevant other culture, will not be unreflective appropriation, but engagement with thoughtfully processed different perspectives and ways of thinking on some particular issue.

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