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Diversifying Academic Philosophy

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Diversifying Academic Philosophy: The Post-Comparative Turn and Transculturalism

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Abstract

The article asks why, in Western universities, the success of the academic field of comparative philosophy has so far failed to significantly diversify the curricula of academic philosophy. It suggests that comparative philosophy has mainly relied on the same approaches that have made academic philosophy Eurocentric, namely, on the *history* of philosophy as the main mode of teaching and researching philosophy. Further, post-comparative philosophy and transcultural studies are presented as providing tools to address the foundations of the institutional parochialism of academic philosophy, while preserving one of the most fundamental tenets of philosophy—the quest for universal knowledge that transcends cultural particularities.

Keywords: academic philosophy, homogeneity, comparative, post-comparative, transcultural studies

Diverzifikacija akademske filozofije: postprimerjalni preobrat in transkulturalizem

Izvleček

Članek postavlja vprašanje, zakaj uspešnost akademskega področja primerjalne filozofije na zahodnih univerzah še ni uspela bistveno diverzificirati študijskih programov akademske filozofije. Ugotovitev je, da se je primerjalna filozofija večinoma opirala na enake pristope, ki so pripeljali do evrocentrizma v akademski filozofiji, namreč na *zgodovino* filozofije kot temeljni način poučevanja in raziskovanja na področju filozofije. Poleg tega postprimerjalna filozofija in transkulturne študije ponujajo orodja za reševanje temeljev institucionalnega parohijalizma akademske filozofije, pri čemer ohranjajo eno temeljnih načel filozofije – iskanje univerzalnega védenja, ki presega kulturne posebnosti.

Ključne besede: akademska filozofija, homogenost, primerjalne, postprimerjalne, transkulturne študije

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Introduction[1]

The debates on what is philosophy, whether or not philosophy is essentially a product of a European way of thinking that starts with Ancient Greece, and whether or not the term "philosophy" is a misnomer when applied to the various ways of thinking that formed and persist outside of the European cultural universe, are certainly not new ones within Western academia (for one particular discussion on this topic see Defoort 2001; Raud 2006; Defoort 2006). One reason for continuing discussion of these and similar questions and the reason for them being raised more pressingly is the context of the institutional structure of the university system, and how it defines the academic discipline of philosophy as taught in Western universities.

Increasingly more vocal and persuasive objections are being raised to the fact that philosophy departments in the West—with only minor exceptions—as of yet do not adequately incorporate topics, texts, thinkers, terms, and even faculty members that originate from areas and traditions that do not fall under the broad umbrella term of "the West" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016; Van Norden 2017; for a good collection of studies on the multiple facets of institutional racism not only in philosophy, but all of the academy, see Arday and Mirza 2018).

This article addresses the problem of "cultural homogeneity" or, what some have called the institutionalized parochialism of Western academic philosophy.[2] The almost exclusive focus on European thinkers and ideas of European (starting from Ancient Greece) origin in academic philosophy is a well-known, albeit very complicated phenomenon that has been discussed, criticized, but also defended by many (Rorty 1989, 333; Derrida in Defoort 2006, 628; Heidegger 1968, 224). However, recently we have noticed a new and intensified wave of discontent with the perceived lack of diversity in academic philosophy curricula, as well as the lack of diversity among those who teach and study these curricula. I call it a new wave, as this time the discontent has spilled out of inner circles of academia

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2 In this article I will only be talking about the Western academic philosophy, by which I mean philosophy as the discipline taught and studied at European, North American, and Australian universities. Different—or even similar—issues with cultural homogeneity might exist in academic philosophy conducted at African, Indian, Chinese, and other non-Western universities, but that is beyond the scope of the present article.

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and is receiving increasingly more attention in both the cultural and mainstream media, thus being presented to an increasingly wider public (Schwitzgebel 2015; Salami 2015; Garfield and Van Norden 2016; Levine 2016). In addition, this time these critical voices are not only coming from professional philosophers (SOAS Students' Union, 2018).

Science popularization, cultural, and even mass media have reported objections both from professional academics and students alike as to the current cultural and geographical scope of academic philosophy. *The Guardian* has run several articles on a widely reported and harshly criticized requirement by the student union of SOAS to diversify philosophy courses by including thinkers from Africa and Asia (Whyman 2017; Malik 2017).[3]

The conference "Minorities and Philosophy", organized by the graduate students of University of Pennsylvania, has inspired an opinion piece in *The New York Times* by the academics Jay L. Garfield and Bryan W. Van Norden, challenging the departments that only offer courses on Western philosophy to name themselves appropriately: "Department of European and American Philosophy" (Garfield and Van Norden 2016). The opinion piece resulted in a whole book explicating the argument in detail (Van Norden 2017). The *Los Angeles Times* published an op-ed by Eric Schwitzgebel (2015) claiming that U.S. college philosophy classes are missing Chinese philosophers for no valid reason. Peter Levine (2016) noted that "philosophy is a remarkably un-diverse discipline", and argued that this lack of diversity is blocking its progress. Julian Baggini, presenting ten Asian, Middle Eastern, and African schools of philosophy that should be "better known" to Westerners, even argues that "the parochialism of Western intellectual goes far deeper than willful ignorance of non-Western traditions", pointing out that American pragmatists are largely ignored in Britain (Baggini 2019). In a similar vein, Dag Herbjørnsrud notes that institutionalized philosophy is segregated not only culturally, but also by gender, and claims that, "philosophy departments, journals, and curriculum lists are often as lacking in diversity now as they were in the 1970s" (Herbjørnsrud 2018).

One reason for holding on to the old ways might be that inclusion of new materials, thinkers, traditions, texts into university curricula is also a matter of struggle over very limited institutional resources. These considerations may have created what Chakrabarti and Weber call the "political resistance against comparative philosophy" within academia (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 17). I want to

3 It seems to be somewhat telling that these requirements have been also reported with misleading headlines, suggesting that the students demanded Kant and Plato be removed from syllabus "because they are white" (as in Turner 2017).

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sidestep these political reasons, and, first, look instead if there is something in the way academic philosophy has come to be conducted today, that creates, fosters, and upholds the parochialism of Western philosophy departments.

Sources of Monoculturality of Academic Philosophy

One position that looks for reasons directly where the problem lies, that is, in the academic discipline of philosophy, is a study by Peter Park (2013) on the racist overtones in the formation of Western philosophical canon. In order to understand how our current dominating philosophical canon has formed, Park suggests that we look at how and when a currently mainstream version of the *history* of philosophy came into being. This is important, because, as Park notes, "by recounting philosophy's past (what philosophy was), the history of philosophy teaches what philosophy is (the concept of philosophy)" (Park 2013, 1). Moreover, at contemporary universities the dominant mode of teaching philosophy at undergraduate and graduate level takes the history of philosophy as the main framework of teaching the subject. This, of course, is understandable as an introductory step. However, it still means that the academic discipline of philosophy and its curricula are directly linked with the dominant view of the origins and history of philosophy.

Unlike the dominant view in the current curricula of history of philosophy, Park shows that "extremely few early modern historians of philosophy regarded the Greeks as the first philosophers" (ibid., 70). Instead, most of histories of philosophy in the 17th century began with "ancient Asians (Chaldeans, Jews, Persians, Indians, Phoenicians, and Phrygians) and Africans (Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Libyans) before turning to the philosophies of the ancient Europeans (Thracians, Druids, and Greeks)" (ibid., 71). Park goes on to show that the formation of the philosophical canon as we receive it today in most philosophy departments occurred in late eighteenth—early nineteenth centuries, when the targeted exclusion of Africa and Asia from the history of philosophy started. This was initiated by Christoph Meiners (1747–1810) and was strongly developed by mainly Kantian philosophers (ibid., 76ff).

Meiners directly and falsely attacked the "delusion" of an Oriental origin of science as an alleged forgery by "non-Greek" writers to conform his story of "worldly wisdom" (*Weltweisheit*) with assumptions about the racial superiority of Europe. Thus, even if non-Europeans had anything of intellectual worth, according to Meiners, their ideas needed the cultural touch of the Greeks (i.e. Europeans) in order for these to come out of a "perennial childhood" (Meiners in Park 2013, 79).

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Studying both the ethnological work of Meiners and his history of philosophy, Park comes to a conclusion that "racism and Eurocentric history of philosophy go hand in hand" (Park 2013, 82). This particular Eurocentric version of history of philosophy is still a mainstream position and the exclusivist, homogenizing effects of it are further fortified by the virtual substitution of philosophy with *history* of philosophy in contemporary universities.

This explains the charge against the current Eurocentric nature of academic philosophy as a form of "institutional racism" (Garfield in Van Norden 2017, xix). We might take a less confrontational stance and say that the current Eurocentrism of most of Western philosophical programs is more a sign of inertia, rather than of a stubborn racism. However, we still can expect that as long as the *history* of philosophy will be by far the most dominant axis around which the philosophy curricula are structured across Euro-American philosophy departments, the nature of academic philosophy will not only keep its Eurocentric bias, but will also likely stay susceptible to allegations of racism.

Adding to this exclusivist and purist vision of the origins of philosophy, two other aspects of how the discipline of philosophy functions in academia enhance its resistance to calls for diversification. There are: (a) philosophy's striving for universalism, and (b) philosophy departments' relative isolation from empirical sciences in today's departmentalized and highly specialized university system.

One of widely held agreements is that all types of philosophy strive for a universal type of knowledge. Knowledge that defies the ramifications of any one place, time, or culture. Philosophers want to know what the human condition is, and not only what were the conditions for human development and flourishing in Ancient Greece, Enlightenment era Germany, or pre-imperial China. Even if we want to avoid the term "universal" as too unifying and absolute, we may simply say, along with Rein Raud, that philosophy seeks "to clarify the nature of things on the most abstract level" (Raud 2006, 621). This quest for an overarching explanatory system, however, has to arise from the particular details on the ground. That is why the great philosophers of the past were mastering methods and knowledge that in the contemporary university fall within the competence of the departments of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and even health and natural sciences. On the other hand, it also has to overcome the various differences and inconsistencies that are present in the concrete details on the ground. The philosophical mind strives for and attains the knowledge that incorporates contingencies into the bigger picture.

This "universalist thrust", Baggini claims, has many merits and yielded many positive results for philosophy and philosophers (Baggini 2018). But at the same

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time, a universalist thrust can lead to a short-sighted and a mistaken view, once it is followed exclusively from within one cultural milieu without any exposure to others. As Wolfgang Welsch noted, the incompleteness of one culture "is not visible from inside the culture itself, since aspiration to the totality induces taking *pars pro toto*" (Welsch 1999, 222).

And this exposure to other (philosophical) cultures in academic philosophy is prevented from the outset by the purist Eurocentric vision of the origins and history of philosophy. In other words, a particularity is taken to be universality, and postcolonial thinkers have talked a lot about how this ends up being "Eurocentric hegemony *posing* as universalism" (Appiah 1992, 58; quoted in Baggini 2018).

Furthermore, the misled and misleading "posing as universalism" within academic philosophy does not get challenged and exposed as much as it could, because of philosophy departments' relative isolation from the empirical sciences in contemporary universities. To be sure, plenty of philosophers in their philosophical practice pay very close attention to empirical data. Sarkissian and Nichols point out that "today, many philosophers working in the philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, moral philosophy, and applied ethics routinely and systematically draw upon the social, behavioural, and biological sciences to inform their theories" (Sarkissian and Nichols 2016, 354). However, in philosophy as an academic discipline taught at universities, the data is often subordinated to the neat systemic "grand picture". As Nicholas Rescher stresses in his article on philosophical methodology, we do not start our philosophical quest empty handed, but rather use the data provided by common sense beliefs, the scientific facts of the day, and personal experience (Rescher 2001, 5). However, Rescher further notes, "there is nothing sacred and sacrosanct about the data. (...) For those data are by no means unproblematic. (...) What we owe to these data, in the final analysis, is not *acceptance* but merely *respect*" (ibid., 6; emphasis in the original). While I agree completely with the spirit of Rescher's claim, but when coupled with philosophy's universalist thrust, what academic philosophy ends up of offering is often only a lip-service of "respect" to the data, without much of obligation to accept it. Field research and empirical data are not altogether discarded, that would be deemed unscientific, but are rarely made a substantial part of discussion and argument in the academic discipline of philosophy. The respect for data is much more binding in other academic disciplines of the humanities and social sciences. Psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists are more confined by empirical data, as their *respect* necessarily has to encompass a fair degree of *acceptance* of data.

To be fair, we see a significant attempt to change this situation from within academic philosophy in the form of "experimental philosophy", or X-Phi for short,

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an academic field that has been growing rapidly since early 2000s. Experimental philosophers not only incorporate empirical data in their thinking and arguments, but also design and carry out empirical research where the needed data is lacking or is inadequate. While I strongly believe that further development of X-Phi has great promise to help culturally diversify academic philosophy in the future (see Sarkissian and Nichols 2016 for similar position), so far it has mostly dealt with questions and concepts originating from European philosophical cultures.

Universality might be a *goal* of philosophical activity achieved through rigorous thought and observation by a philosopher who engages philosophical thinking as a way of life. However, the teaching of academic philosophy does not usually start from the same point as the greatest philosophers have started. Universal claims, highly abstract concepts, and overarching categorizations, instead of being arrived at, are mostly the starting point in the philosophical training starting from undergraduates. The introduction to philosophy at university rarely if ever starts with careful observation and detailed description of the particular, the different, the accidental, and contingent. It starts rather with the outcomes of this "universalist thrust", that is, with the historical recounting of the biggest ideas formulated by the biggest thinkers. It starts from the idealized, the universal, the essential. Prescriptions how we should see humans and their environment overshadow any description of the variety of ways how humans and their environment actually are. All the particularities are left for the other university departments, which makes academic philosophy relatively blind and deaf to cultural diversity, compared to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. Hans-Georg Moeller points out the following uniqueness of academic philosophy: "unlike the academic field of Religious Studies, which largely developed as an offshoot of anthropology and related disciplines and thus affirmed a plurality of religions, academic philosophy in the West was hardly open to the notion of philosophies in the plural" (Moeller 2018, 36).[4] Thus, this combination of a deliberately (and relatively recently) distorted story about the Eurocentric origins of philosophy, together with the thrust for universal knowledge and the relative isolation of philosophy departments from other departments in the humanities, social and natural sciences, has put philosophy in a rather unique place of continuing monoculturality.

4 Rein Raud (2006) suggests six criteria that would enable more flexible definition of the term "philosophy", which would be inclusive of cultural and geographical diversity and could, in Raud's opinion, provide the theoretical grounds for, what Moeller later has called, the "notion of philosophies in the plural". While I agree with Raud and his position contributes a lot, my underlying argument throughout this article is that the biggest incentive for diversification of academic philosophy will not come from discovery or creation of theoretical grounds, but from intensified practice of actual philosophizing that draws ideas and concepts indiscriminately from various cultural sources.

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Failure of Comparative Philosophy to Diversify Academic Philosophy

What makes the issue of "cultural homogeneity" in current Western academia truly surprising is that it persists despite the fact that the research and education on non-Western philosophy in Western universities has never been in a better position. So-called comparative philosophy[5] enjoys great interest both from scholars and the wider public. There are journals devoted to non-European philosophy, established journals of "general" philosophy regularly publish articles of a comparative nature, PhD theses and books on various non-Western philosophical topics are increasing in number, and professional associations help philosophers working with non-Western materials get institutional acknowledgement within Western academia (see also Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 4). What is probably most important of all, new and heavily commentated translations of non-Western canon are being printed and reprinted showing a wide, shared demand. These translations often specifically focus on revealing the philosophical significance and uniqueness of these non-Western materials both in comparison with Euro-American or other non-Western tradition(s) of past and present, and also their relevance to the lives of contemporary human beings. This, however, does not mean that charges of Eurocentrism against academic philosophy, especially how it is taught in Western universities, are not factually accurate. On the contrary, they are, and sadly so (for data or links to data see Schwitzgebel 2015; 2019; Van Norden 2017, 2–3; Herbjørnsrud 2018). What deserves attention here is rather a question as to why the obvious success of an academic field of comparative philosophy has not—as of yet—translated into a significant degree of diversification of the academic discipline of philosophy? And this diversity, the data shows, is also lacking in the structure of philosophy departments, faculty, hiring decisions, and the contents of philosophy curricula. I propose that this is because the academic field of *comparative* philosophy has mainly relied on the same attitudes and approaches that made academic *philosophy* Eurocentric in the first place. Specifically, comparative philosophy has formed based on and, to a large degree, has remained overly reliant on, the *history* of philosophy as the main mode of teaching and researching. As Ganeri notes, "the ambition of comparative

5 Chakrabarti and Weber (2016, 3–5) show that there is no common and satisfactory definition for the term "comparative philosophy", and maybe there cannot be. Despite these difficulties and for the sake of convenience, in this article I take the term "comparative philosophy" to also encompass all other terms used in Western academia that name non-Western philosophical tradition: Asian philosophy, African philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and so on. In the vast majority of cases, these academic fields in the West seem to involve some explicit or implicit comparison of these philosophies with Western philosophical ideas.

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philosophy was not to generate new philosophical insights but to protect thinkers in colonized countries from the peculiar form of intellectual servitude colonialism sought to impose" (Ganeri 2016, 135). This leaves comparative philosophy entangled in the inherently Eurocentric vocabulary and academic framework of academic philosophy, and does not allow comparative philosophy to radically challenge the extant Eurocentric orientation of the discipline. As an illustration I will briefly discuss the academic field of Chinese philosophy at modern universities. Variations among different subfields of non-European philosophies can be important here, but the main story, I believe, would remain valid.

The initial stages of research into the Chinese intellectual world, as Blitstein notes, grew up in the West from area studies (in this case, Chinese studies), where a geographical area is the prime object and binding focus of a scholarly study and they were further developed as "history of Chinese philosophy" or "history of Chinese thought" (Blitstein 2016, 137). The origins of it can be traced to classical Sinological studies, initiated in the nineteenth century, largely by missionaries and colonial administrative institutions that had a strong emphasis on language (primarily classical Chinese) and texts. As Blitstein notes, although this branch of scholars have also engaged in philosophical (as well, as religious and literary) discussions, especially the ones inherited from the Enlightenment philosophers, their academic identity was much more rooted in philology than philosophy (ibid., 144–45). It means that a significant number of academics who worked with Chinese thought traditions did not identify themselves as philosophers. Such research did not have the "universalistic thrust" characteristic and indispensable for philosophy, and it did not attempt to challenge and change Eurocentric orientation of academic philosophy. Later, some departure from the mainly philological orientation followed, as the generation of scholars in the first part of the twentieth century built their academic identities not only around the study of China, but also around a set of methodologies of other academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, mostly history, archaeology, or sociology, and, eventually, philosophy. But initially, the academic field of Chinese philosophy was started not in Western, but in modern Chinese universities.

Along with introduction of Western style universities into China in the early twentieth century, the Western type of academic philosophy was been introduced. Accordingly, the making of *Chinese* philosophy as an academic discipline started with the writing and publishing of the first *histories* of Chinese philosophy by Hu Shi (1919), and then later by Feng Youlan (1931). Apparently, the Western academic framework of history of philosophy was taken as the form, and "Chinese philosophy" was modelled and framed accordingly. Hu Shi, for example, in his introductory chapter, where he explains the methodology of his trailblazing

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History of Chinese Philosophy, quotes mostly Western authors, and Cua noted German Windelband was the main influence for Hu (Cua 2003, 10). In this process, traditional categories of Chinese knowledge were translated into modern categories of disciplinary knowledge with a Western "philosophical terminology and historical and systematic framework" (Moeller 2018, 37–38). This locked up the academic field of Chinese philosophy in a vicious circle that Ganeri describes as: "make your use of reason like ours (in which case what extra value does your philosophy bring to the table?), or admit that you are outside reason and not actually engaged in philosophy at all" (Ganeri 2016, 136). And a lot of scholars in comparative philosophy have willingly or not succumbed to this imperative by putting Chinese authors, texts, terminology into a framework of Western concepts, philosophical questions, and ideological rivalries that have formed in particular historical and cultural settings, but are, nevertheless, used as universal reference points and measuring sticks.

Thus Chinese philosophy (or, more generally, comparative philosophy) has only limited resources to impact changes in the (still) Eurocentric departments of philosophy while the *history* of philosophy remains the dominant mode and framework in which comparative philosophy functions. It is difficult to make a case that Chinese philosophers have to be taught within the introductory course into ethics, if we see these Chinese philosophers as simply "similar" to consequentialists, deontologists, or virtue ethicists. Western thinkers who formed the vocabularies and main arguments of these mainstream branches of ethical thought will always be more eloquent, more rounded, more precise in their own game than their Chinese (especially, historical) counterparts who were forming their own vocabularies and their own philosophical arguments. As we saw earlier, Park (2013) showed that the current mainstream understanding of history of philosophy is a product of the intellectual concerns of modernity. Similarly, as Moeller notes, comparative philosophy is also historically connected to modernity (Moeller 2018, 31). Thus, both the parochialism of academic philosophy and inability of comparative philosophy to challenge and shatter it are the fruits of the same tree.

What Should Comparative Philosophers Do?

If my analysis is correct so far, then it follows that diversification of philosophy as an academic discipline would be facilitated by a significant—but, obviously, not a complete—move away from the mode of history of philosophy and history of ideas as the dominating framework of academic and comparative philosophy, and towards the mode of active philosophizing. Historical and cultural

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contextualization, which can be adequately achieved only through a rigid study of history of ideas, is a necessary foundation, but it has to be complemented by actual reconstruction, reinvention, and reformulation of the inherited philosophical classifications and technical philosophical terminologies in working our novel ways to address *current* problems surrounding *current* societies of *current* people. I want to suggest that two academic approaches—one from within comparative philosophy and one from outside—are going in this direction and, therefore, have the most promise to shatter and change the present monoculturality of academic philosophy.

As a position from within the so-called "comparative philosophy", I will present the idea of "fusion philosophy", recently suggested by Chakrabarti and Weber (2016) and the idea of "post-comparative philosophy" suggested by Moeller (2018). Although these ideas were developed somewhat separately, I argue that there is a common thread running through them, one that pushes for overcoming what I have called an overly concentration on history of ideas *vis-à-vis* actual philosophizing within comparative philosophy. For the sake of convenience, I will hereby combine both these positions under the common name of "postcomparative philosophy".

Postcomparative philosophy admits that, in Ganeri's words, comparative philosophy is not "a branch of philosophy nor it is a distinct philosophical method: it is an expedient heuristic introduced at a particular moment in world history" (Ganeri 2016, 135), because comparison cannot be seen as a method unique to so-called comparativists. Comparison is a widely used and one of the main instruments of any philosophy, not limited to those philosophers who work with non-Western materials: "philosophy had always been comparative: Aristotle had already compared himself with Plato and other Greek philosophers he knew of; medieval Christian philosophy had compared itself with the Greeks" (Moeller 2018, 31). Chakrabarti and Weber go further, claiming "that all means of knowledge including direct sense perception are, indeed, at heart forms of comparison" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 3). This means that postcomparative philosophy contends that even in the so-called "comparative philosophy" comparison should only be seen as a means to one's own creative philosophizing, not as an ultimate goal of academic activity. Thus, as a tool, comparative work in philosophy—and in the academic field of "comparative philosophy", for that matter—is seen only as a stage or a phase that has to be overstepped and transcended in order for it to come to fruition.

Comparison in philosophy—and "comparative philosophy"—should not be abolished, discarded, or discredited. It simply has to be completed and complimented

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with the creation of one's own philosophical position that would be other than the two (or more) positions involved in the previous act of comparing. The second reason why "comparative philosophy" cannot stick with comparison as an ultimate goal of academic research is that there are no static, stable objects that could be "compared", and, more importantly, there is no neutral position from which to compare, just as there is no neutral agent who could compare.

There is always a certain engaged "comparer" who is looking at things from a particular situation, and this situation dictates certain specific conditions. And the *comparanda* (that, which are compared) are always just ahistorical generalizations that are only provisional and should always be remembered as being such.

Chakrabarti and Weber stress we must not to forget that comparison always requires a third member (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 6).[6] That "third" member is, on one hand, an idea or a concept with respect to which we make the comparison, and, on the other hand, the comparer himself. As Chakrabarti and Weber put it, "compare" turns out to be "a four-place predicate: 'From his specific historical cultural context P compares A and B with respect to F'" (ibid.). What is important in this observation, is that if we keep in mind that this "third"— the comparer— can never be neutral, we better embrace that she is rather proactive, that is, that she intentionally directs her research. It means that such a proactive researcher is not "comparing" two external positions with respect to a neutral "third" position, but is really forging her *own* philosophical position. She might be drawing inspiration and insight from the first two (in positive or negative manner), but in the end—and most importantly—the outcome is a new and current (present) philosophical position. Chakrabarti and Weber call this process "fusion", and see it ultimately as an act of forward looking philosophizing, rather than backward looking comparison. Thus, their formula could be alternatively summed up as "from his/her specific historical cultural context P philosophizes about F, drawing inspiration, ideas from A and B".

To give an illustration of this point, we might think—as is often the case in the simplistic understanding of what "comparative philosophy" entails,—that by comparing St. Aquinas' and Mencius' notions of "courage", (Yearley 1990) or Confucius' and Aristotle's notions of "friendship", (He 2007) we will understand better Aquinas' and Mencius' position on "courage" and Confucius' and Aristotle's position on "friendship". Here, as the formula of Chakrabarti and Weber shows, we have to notice the twofold imposition of the "third" onto comparison of past thinkers: a comparer (either author or reader of comparison), who is culturally very different from any of the compared thinkers, and the current

6 Ralph Weber, University of Basel, has first formulated this idea at some length in Weber (2014).

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terminology, that is linguistically very different from any of the compared terms. After all, Aquinas and Mencius didn't use the English term "courage". Thus, the culturally, linguistically, and historically sensitive comparative philosophy would rather set itself a goal of such comparison to understand better, deeper, and more adequately Aquinas' notion of *fortitudo*, or Mencius' notion of *yong*, or Aristotle's notion of *philos*, or Confucius' notion of *you, peng*, or *pengyou*. There is hardly deniable theoretical value and academic benefits of such historically oriented scholarly endeavour, especially if we see the understanding—at least in some degree—as a hermeneutical never ending process of cognitive refinement. But, if thus constructed, such scholarly endeavour has only limited practical existential philosophical value. We would only get a more complex, refined, and nuanced understanding of Aquinas', Mencius's, Aristotle's, or Kongzi's centuries old ideas. What would, however, bring a true philosophical importance to this process is a realization that in this way we can develop *our own* conceptions of courage or friendship, make them more consistent and robust. This new understanding would be supported with the ideas we got from contemplating carefully and multidimensionally, maybe even innovatively on *fortitudo*, on *yong*, on *philos*, on *peng*, and on how these terms and philosophical positions they embody relate to our own current needs, conditions, understandings, challenges, and our own lived and experienced present. With such a realization, postcomparative philosophy is all about the active and prospective process of philosophizing, and not about the retrospective process of balancing the books.

Thus, in order not to get caught up in the dominant, that is Western, philosophical framework, the attempt has to be made to try and look for entirely different kind of cultural (philosophical) contexts and cultural (philosophical) vocabularies that various peoples might have used to express similar (but not identical) sensibilities. Burik points out a relevant distinction made by Heidegger between *das Selbe* and *das Gleiche* (Burik 2009, 3). So while looking for this alternative vocabulary that other people (cultures, philosophical systems) might have used in expressing *similar*, but not identical sensibilities, the researcher has to be ready to acknowledge important shifts in those sensibilities, allowing the initial question of interest become an importantly different, that is, *other*—although closely related—question. This is what Henry Rosemont had in mind that in the comparative philosophy we ought to stop asking to what extent other cultures provide different answers to the problems that vex *us*, and start asking "to what extent do these [non-Western] texts suggest that we should be asking very different philosophical questions?" (Rosemont 1988, 66). In such a fusion, postcomparative project, conclusions can rarely be made in the form of statements about an initial question. Most likely, the initial question would change significantly. Such an investigation

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is better seen not as a closed circle of argumentation leading to a conclusion, but as an open spiral of argumentation, where "conclusions" are merely new and different questions for subsequent investigations. In this postcomparative framework, a question, if properly asked before engaging the comparison, is always eluding the researcher, as it lies outside of comparison.

So postcomparative philosophy criticizes "comparative philosophy" only in as much as it holds back and stays only in the historically oriented stage of comparing seemingly static and historically settled philosophical cultures, traditions, thinkers, texts, and concepts. Burik (2009) likens this challenge to the one that Heidegger levelled against philosophy: there is an important task comparative thinking can fulfil, but comparative philosophy must end. As Chakrabarti and Weber point out, comparative philosophy should not focus on "questions of sequence—which came first, which is the original—or questions of influence or direct refutation" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 230). It should not simply make claim of "correct exposition" of philosophical views and positions we already know of. Instead, it should set itself for "solving hitherto unsolved problems possibly raising issues never raised before anywhere" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 22), and to do it in a vocabulary perhaps never formulated anywhere in the past. This is why Moeller picks out the work of Roger Ames and his collaborators David Hall and Henry Rosemont as examples of philosophers who do step beyond comparative philosophy and embody the call for strengthening postcomparative philosophy. Moeller says their most decisive contribution lies in the creation of their own terminology, in the formation of their own philosophical vocabulary that does not evolve solely from within either of already existing philosophical traditions (Moeller 2018, 42). At one instance Rosemont readily admits the possibility that his and Ames' historically oriented work at adequately presenting early Confucian ethics—as a form of what they call "role ethics"—might turn out to be a "creative misreading"[7] of early Confucians texts, if other, better interpretations are formulated. However, Rosemont does not see this as damaging to his (and Ames') ultimate task to step over comparisons of the past ideas and formulate a philosophical position that resonates with the challenges we face today. In Rosemont's own words: "even if we are both interpretively mistaken in attributing an ethics of roles to the early Confucians, it would not alter my basic point about the importance of challenging individualism and advancing an ethics of roles, for I could simply re-title this work 'Role Ethics: A Different Approach to Moral Philosophy Based on a Creative Misreading of Early Confucian Writings'" (Rosemont 2015, 9). Rosemont's and Ames' attempt to "suitably modify" the

7 For "role ethics" as both an interpretation of early Confucian ethics and "a moral vision for twenty first century" see Ames (2010), Rosemont and Ames (2016), and Rosemont (2015).

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historical materials to our modern sensibilities is conscious and explicitly stated, as any comparison is subordinated to the development of their own philosophical point (Rosemont and Ames 2016, 7). This is not to say that philosophical analysis of past ideas can be wilfully manipulated or distorted. On the contrary, both Rosemont and Ames put a lot of effort to reconstruct a cultural context native to early Confucians, in order not to distort their thinking by using our own cultural assumptions, but not theirs (see Ames 2010, 41–85; Rosemont 2015, 89–110; Rosemont and Ames 2016, 17–31). However, this historically oriented work is seen as a groundwork and a catalyst for philosophical work that is future oriented. As Moeller puts it, they "employ comparative philosophy in order to eventually develop a post-comparative philosophy in its own right" (Moeller 2018, 43).

Similarly, Chakrabarti and Weber in their version of postcomparative philosophy emphasize that it "decidedly demands of the comparative philosopher not to be satisfied with the role of the comparatist. The comparative philosopher should aim beyond comparison at a philosophical argument (strictly or loosely understood) that can stand on its own" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 233). The similar call to function more as philosophers, not only as *historians* of ideas, is expressed by Ganeri, who pointed out that the comparative work with philosophical ideas "from distinct geographical regions or linguistic communities should be seen as being itself a creative one, (...) a form of philosophical practice, producing in time new measures, new philosophies, new models for the way individuals conceive of themselves and their place in the world" (Ganeri 2016, 140). In doing this, postcomparative philosophy would overcome the limitations of a comparative philosophy, stemming from its tendency to stay in a fixed set of divisions, philosophical questions and terminologies inherited from the times when philosophical investigations in the West were defined exclusively by the study of the European history of ideas. This is also a reason why I suggest that postcomparative philosophy—in contrast to its earlier comparative phase—has the potential to impact a more substantial and rapid diversification of academic philosophy.

Finally, an important thing to add is that the postcomparative philosophy would by no means seek to annihilate all differences among the various philosophical cultures and traditions by incorporating them all into a single and unitary realm of "world philosophy". As Moeller notes, the inclusion of non-Western philosophies into the academic field of philosophy "does not necessarily lead to 'consensus', a 'fusion of horizons', or a 'future world philosophy'. Modern society is highly complex and not integrated by one underlying rationality or common set of cognitive operations" (Moeller 2018, 41). Far from seeing it as deficiency, postcomparative philosophy takes that lack of a fully integrated, globalized version of "philosophy in the singular" as the means to challenge the current philosophy

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internally "by creating a break-away semantics derived from traditions at the fringes of mainstream discourses" (ibid., 42). Moeller has called it an act of "re-barbarizing ourselves", that is, a process of making us a little less self-evident and transparent to ourselves.

As Chakrabarti and Weber note, this requires us to "ask 'trans-traditional' questions that expose philosophers' own assumptions and vocabulary to the challenge of reformulating it" (Chakrabarti and Weber 2016, 13). The cultural, historical, and other differences of various philosophies are a driving force for the post-comparative philosopher, because it allows her to "add clarity about the exact problem at hand" (ibid., 19) by exploring it from both within and outside her inherited philosophical culture. This explicit support for the diversity and plurality of (philosophical) cultures in postcomparative philosophy brings me to the academic field of transcultural studies as a natural ally that could contribute towards the attempts to diversify academic discipline of philosophy.

Input from Transcultural Studies

Transcultural studies is a growing academic field, and, according to some commentators, the term *transcultural* itself "probably constitutes one of the most important and widely discussed conceptual keywords in the humanities and social sciences of recent years" (König and Rakow 2016, 89). However, so far it seems as if there is not much mutual interest or common topics between transcultural studies and academic philosophy. König and Rakow listed a wide range of theoretical fields where "transcultural paradigm" gave a "new impulse" to various topics that are routinely discussed within these fields, but did not mention philosophy (ibid., 92). All the more telling is the fact that transcultural studies and the term *transcultural* (transculturality) is virtually absent from philosophical—including comparative philosophy—discourse.[8] This is completely to be expected, having in mind the monocultural nature of academic philosophy. I suggest, however, that this mutual disinterest is a lost opportunity for academic philosophy. Transcultural studies are often understood as primarily a challenge to the traditional concept of culture (Blitstein 2016, 143; König and Rakow 2106, 91; Cuccioletta 2001/2002, 7; Welsch 1999). However, I see the work in this field in a broader sense as yet another turn of hermeneutical circle in an ongoing attempt

8 Ralph Weber is the only philosopher I have managed to find talking about transcultural studies in the context of academic research of Western and non-Western philosophies (unpublished conference presentation "(How) Is Sinology about China? On the Paradigm of Transculturality", Beijing, October 28–29, 2017).

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at understanding (*verstehen*) of different cultural systems. And in as much as philosophy is a cultural system, the idea of transculturality is relevant to philosophy.

The academic field of transcultural studies has formed in a time when a range of academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (cultural studies, area studies, anthropology, etc.) were in a similar situation as the academic discipline of philosophy is now. Towards the last third of the twentieth century, scholars from Asia and other areas of the Global South started challenging inherited academic terminologies, categorical hierarchies, and institutional structures that proved inadequate to account for the diversity of people and their actual practices, and for the diversity of cultural processes in the real world. As Blitstein sums up, transcultural studies represent "a critical response to the abuses of the concept of culture as a heuristic tool" (Blitstein 2016, 136). The main source of these abuses is the traditional essentialist concept of single cultures. As Welsch points out, this traditional concept was developed by Herder in the late eighteenth century and among its most distinguished features Welsch has indicated the unificatory and separatory characteristics of the concept. The concept is unificatory as it purports homogenization: a culture allegedly makes "every act and every object an unmistakable instance of precisely *this* culture" (Welsch 1999, 194).

The concept is also separatory, as it assumes strong delimitation towards the outside: "every culture is, as the culture of one folk, to be distinguished and to remain separated from other folks' cultures" (ibid., 195). This I find to be similar to the criticism towards academic philosophy that I have recounted in earlier sections. Mainly, the tendency in academic philosophy of assuming the one and only possible mode of rationality that made it "hardly open to the notion of philosophies in the plural" (Moeller 2018, 36), and the tendency to gloss over cultural borrowings or, at the very best, to depict them as being conducted between "intellectual traditions" that are seen as completely self-contained and separate from each other.

The authorship of the very term *transculturation* (*transculturación*) is attributed to the Cuban cultural anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who in his 1940 article was looking for a term to substitute the at that time widely circulated "acculturation". As König and Rakow state, "acculturation" in Ortiz's opinion, "failed to express that processes of interaction between groups of different cultural origin do not only result in processes of transmission, reception, adaptation, and assimilation, but also lead to the transformation and amalgamation of previously distinct cultural elements *within a new cultural synthesis*" (König and Rakow 2016, 90; emphasis added). If we change the term "culture" to the term "philosophy"[9] in this quote, we

9 For four possible definitions of the term *transcultural* and its uses in current academia see König and Rakow (2016, 93–95).

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will recognize a similar sentiment expressed by the proponents of postcomparative philosophy. In earlier sections we saw that the ultimate goal in scholarly activity is seen by postcomparative philosophers not as "comparing" head-to-head two seemingly separate, self-contained, and self-sufficient philosophical systems, but in creating a new philosophical fusion, a new philosophical position, a new philosophical identity. And transcultural studies joins in and strengthens the challenge that postcomparative philosophers are mounting towards the monoculturality of institutionalized philosophy by highlighting—as Cuccioletta does—that "one's identity is not singular but multiple" (Cuccioletta 2001/2002, 6). This hybrid and mosaic nature of any identity is equally stressed by philosophers arguing for the cultural diversification of philosophy. As Ganeri notes, "in this new era every philosophical identity is hybrid and dynamic, criss-crossing multiple localities of geography and epoch, transcending each and again returning" (Ganeri 2016, 137–38). As transcultural studies are built on the attempts to spell out the process of such hybridization concealed by concepts such as "identity", "culture", and others, it can provide a useful framework to challenge the supposedly monocultural and homogeneous nature of the concept of "philosophy".

Looking for the most salient features of such framework, we must note that transcultural studies are resting on a cluster of interrelated ideas and concepts that can be summed up into two main pillars, each partially overlapping with, incorporating, and inviting the other. Transcultural studies (a) focus on the *dynamic* (transitional, transforming) elements of cultures and people. According to Blitstein, transculturality "assumes that everything moves and changes; it posits that stasis is only the momentary interruption of motion, and that the actual flows of persons, things, and ideas across the world prevent the definitive consolidation of any boundaries" (Blitstein 2016, 139). This recognition of a constant and continuous dynamic change requires full attention to the ongoing, the present, the lived and the practised. As Berg noted, transculturality is "a useful and fruitful concept if we approach to cultural items (...) with an empirical interest" (Berg 2011, 8). This aspect of a transcultural approach draws attention to empirical research in a much more natural and inevitable manner than an *a priori* universalistic attitude of much of academic philosophy. Moreover, transcultural studies (b) stress the *relational* nature of all our categories and concepts, thus opposing the unwarranted use of clearly delineated concepts such as "culture", "society", "class", and so on (König and Rakow 2016, 95). These terms make sense only as relational, and not as essential notions, describing fundamentally static and stable phenomena. Of course, these terms can be used in an academic environment (and they surely are and will be used), but only as useful (*if* useful) shorthand terms for very complex phenomena.

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Blitstein highlighted an identical structure in what he called "the (not necessarily explicit) social ontology that characterizes transcultural studies" (Blitstein 2016, 138). Blitstein labelled this social ontology as "both relational and kinetic" (ibid., 139). I would claim that this "not necessarily explicit" ontological conviction is more fundamental, encompassing not only the constitution of social groups, but of all existence. Guilherme and Dietz, noting the different connotational implications of closely related terms, like "multiculturalism", "interculturality", and "transculturality", claim that interpretations of what these terms stand for "are eventually deeply rooted in cultural traditions and *ontological standpoints*" (Guilherme and Dietz 2015, 5, emphasis added). It is an ontological position that sees relations as primary, in the sense that they are not reducible to objects involved in the relation. Or as Blitstein puts it, this position assumes that "relations precede isolation" (Blitstein 2016, 139). All existence functions as a totality of fundamentally interrelated entities, were the individuating properties of any "single" entity are provisional, negotiable, and in a constant flux of becoming.[10] This idea directly relates to the philosophical position that some philosophers of the postcomparative bent argue for from the perspective of non-Western philosophical traditions (see Rosemont 2015; Rosemont and Ames 2016 on the relational concept of person).

Finally, transcultural studies not only draws attention to the changing, particular, and contingent, but also keeps up the version of "universal thrust" akin to philosophy, which makes the transcultural approach a fitting framework for philosophers. In the words of Slimbach:

> Transcultural development begins with the realization that, amidst the diversity of cultural expression, we share common human potential and experience. From here, we discover the ways that others make sense of their world. In so doing we expand the range of alternative mores and manners, values and visions that are available to us for running our lives. (Slimbach 2005, 209)

The suffix "trans-" in the term "transcultural" suggests transcending not only one's borders, one's limits, while enriching, updating oneself. It suggests also the possibility to step beyond the very fragmentation and separateness of various

10 Ralph Weber first draw my attention to ontological assumptions behind the idea of transculturality. Weber has referenced to metaphysics of relations "distinguishing between the view of ontic structural realists who reject intrinsic natures of objects and the view that proposes seeing all relations as reducible to objects and that rejects the idea of irreducible relational properties" (unpublished conference presentation "(How) Is Sinology about China? On the Paradigm of Transculturality", Beijing, October 28-29, 2017).

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cultures and philosophies. It can give rise to commonality. In this possibility lies, I believe, the potential appeal of the transcultural approach to the professional philosopher with her quest for universality that interweaves together and gives a due account to all observable diversity.

Conclusions

In this paper I argued that the seeming paradox that the Eurocentric parochialism of academic philosophy in the West persists, despite the very significant success and expansion of academic research on non-Western philosophical traditions, can be traced to and explained by an over reliance on the history of philosophy and history of ideas in teaching and research, in both the academic discipline of philosophy and academic field of so-called comparative philosophy. My suggestion throughout this article was that a new kind of philosophy—one that addresses current issues rather than recounts the ways and concepts by which previous philosophers used to address issues of their times—would necessarily foster and strengthen the move to culturally and linguistically diversify academic philosophy. I presented positions, summed up as postcomparative philosophy, that call on us to go beyond the "comparison" stage of the process of recognizing various different philosophical cultures. As the power to diversify academic philosophy lies primarily in the hands of those who already are working with different cultures, I suggested that this power will be unleashed by comparative scholars becoming more like postcomparative *philosophers*.

Finally, I suggested that the academic field of transcultural studies is a natural ally for philosophers calling for the cultural diversification of philosophy, despite the virtually complete absence of interactions between philosophers and scholars in transcultural studies to date. The concept cluster of transcultural studies—here crudely summed up into binary schema of dynamism and relationality—provides many ways to keep formulating philosophical positions that will remain challenging to the monocultural conception of academic philosophy. Many philosophers have raised and are raising similar points, regardless of their academic and/or philosophical affiliation. Even if transcultural studies do not present a new—as in "never heard before"—idea or concept, nevertheless, as an already well-established academic field with a consistent set of core ideas and methodologies it can provide philosophers with a new impulse and stronger focus to keep reinventing, reformulating, and rearranging various ideas, regardless of the place or language of their origin.

The resistance of academic philosophy to calls for diversification is partly the result of the myopic condition of taking what is close (and, therefore, seems clear)

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and making it absolute, while skipping over what is far and appears to be blurry. There's a need for a lens to correct that vision, and postcomparative philosophy and transcultural studies provide just that. Despite my effort to give here a *theoretical* overview of the problem and *theoretical* hypothesis how to deal with it, I am convinced that the diversification of academic philosophy is unavoidable, because it is getting its greatest incentive from the intensifying *practice* of active philosophers in drawing ideas and concepts indiscriminately from various cultural and geographical backgrounds. I believe the same vision is behind Henry Rosemont's dictum, that comparative philosophy has a dubious past, a very bright present, and, hopefully, no future.[11] As this process of philosophising across borders intensifies further, the structure and the content of academic philosophy will change in the manner of a Kuhnian paradigm shift.

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11 Henry Rosemont has expressed this idea multiple times during his various talks and conference presentations. One such occasion is documented in Sigurðsson and Rosemont (2008, 11). I thank Geir Sigurðsson for reminding me of this quote and providing its source.

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