

Preface

“Comparative Philosophy” means many things to different scholars and thinkers. To some it means an exploration of non-Western philosophies (and religions) in order to find, to accept, or to assimilate those values, ideas, and concerns that one believes to be missing in one’s own culture; to others it means an objective, scholarly examination of various individual thinkers and schools of Asian philosophy, and sometimes the comparing and contrasting of these with leading Western examples, in order to promote greater knowledge and understanding of the East; and still to others it means an articulation of the basic “ways of thinking” which are exhibited as persistent cultural traits in various civilizations both for the sake of knowledge and for a possible synthesis of Western and Eastern philosophy. Through the immense efforts of many workers in all these areas of comparative philosophy Westerners, with an interest in Asia, have come to an understanding of the patterns and structures of thought in Asian cultures, of the history of various traditions in the East, and of the intricacies and subtleties of specific systems and individuals in these traditions. A great deal of work still remains to be done in all these areas, and indeed an enormous amount of significant research in comparative philosophy is being carried out today by both Western and Eastern scholars.

But it is also becoming increasingly apparent that we are ready to pursue new goals in comparative philosophy and to bring comparative philosophy into the mainstream of *creative* thought—East and West. We are aware now that there is much of intrinsic philosophical value and interest in Asian thought and that consequently this thought need not be cast merely in the mold of a historical (or exotic) curiosity. Students ought to be able to study

Asian philosophy simply for the purpose of enriching their philosophical background and enabling them to deal better with the philosophical problems that interest them. Without losing sight of the distinctive and sometimes unique characteristics of a tradition one ought to be able to concentrate on a tradition as it is a response to a series of universal questions and problems, and with the express intention that these responses will influence one spontaneously in one's own thinking. A new goal for comparative philosophy, in short, would be to approach Asian philosophy as material for creative thought. I am quite convinced that on its merit Asian philosophy is indeed worthy of being approached in this spirit. This little book is but one small effort pointing in the direction of that goal.

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