

WESTERN AND EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

Some Reflection

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I

In some sense, to talk about Western and Eastern philosophy is not the difficult thing if the main thing that we would do is to consider them in terms of the history of the human thought. But if the thing that we need concerning the talking of these two traditions of the human thought is something more than this, it is not easy. In this paper, the thing that I decide to do is concerned with the difficult thing.

Knowing things in the universe can be of different levels. The deepest level of understanding in my view must be concerned with that thing at its deepest essence. This is not the easy thing to explain. The best way is to do something which would show that this is the thing that I call the deepest understanding of the subject. I would like to say to the reader of this paper that the whole content of this paper has been dedicated by me to deeply understand the things that we call the Western and Eastern philosophy.

I would like to start with something that might be the thing which people in general know from their experience. The first thing is *reason*, and the second thing is *emotion*. This is an example of the action of human beings which is caused by these two things in our life. A girl has three men coming to her life and all of them saying to her that they need to marry her. The thing done by the girl one day before giving the answer to one among these three men that she accepts to marry him. The girl thinks that marriage means something that can be called a kind of *planning*. She thinks that the life of people would be either happy or not depending on one important condition: the person knows how to plan things in their life or not. Happiness would happen to people who know how to plan things in their life. This rule has to be applied to the marriage as well. From this thought, the girl has put all three men into the process of *calculation*, and the result says that one among them gets the highest score. And this makes her decide to say yes with that man.

The decision of the girl might be the thing that people in general would call *decision from reason*. Suppose the thing that forces the girl to decide to marry one man among these three men is not reason, but her feeling which says to her that I love this man more than other. People in general might call the decision of the girl as the thing which is directed by *feeling* or *emotion*. In the view of people, the action that comes from reason is one thing and the action that comes from emotion is another, and these two actions are different. We have the natural ability to know which is the action that comes from reason and which is the action that comes from emotion.

I talk about reason and emotion to be used as the starting ground for understanding Western and Eastern philosophy. We will not yet consider what is the sameness and the difference between these two systems of philosophy. I would like to consider what is the thing that happens in the history of these two systems of philosophy.

Let us begin with Socrates as the representative of the Western philosophy. Socrates likes to meet and talk with people. One day he comes to the market place and there he meets some people who think that they know what is goodness. The first thing that Socrates questions these people is that what is the meaning of goodness in your perspective. Some of these people say that goodness is the thing that pleases a god. Socrates questions that I understand that something which is the thing that makes god happy is the good thing such as giving food to the poor people. But this is not yet the definition of goodness because we can doubt that in case god sees it is good for god himself if we would kill someone who acts against god, can we say that the killing of the person who acts against god is the good thing for the reason that god is very happy with this our action? The result of the question by Socrates makes the person who says that the goodness is the thing that pleases a god be silent and seriously think about their doctrine.

The thing that I would like to suggest concerning the thing done by Socrates is that if we call the thing done by this philosopher as a kind of philosophy, the thing that we would see is that *philosophy has some function which is different from religion or science*. Here, I would like to talk about the difference between philosophy and religion only. In human community, everywhere in the world, there are some people who like to think and talk about goodness. We know that religion is the main source of the ideas concerning goodness. When people who are the followers of

religion talk about the meaning of goodness, that meaning will have some property that I would like to call the religious property of goodness. The man who says that the good thing is the thing that makes a god happy could be a follower of some religion in the Greek community at that time. Philosophy might have nothing to argue for or against the religious concept of goodness. But the function of philosophy is to make sure that when we say that this is the goodness, there should be no weakness in our claim. In this sense, we would find that philosophy in some sense acts like science.

Science is the human intellectual activity which aims at two things at the same time. The first thing is *knowledge*, and the second thing is *certainty*. And these two things have to merge into oneness. So, we can say that if there would be something which has been accepted in the scientific community as knowledge, that thing must be based on certainty, not just based on belief. When the scientist says that this kind of food is good for human body, that saying must be based on the research which is reliable. This is the example of the requirement of knowledge and certainty in science.

The philosophy as given by Socrates could be considered as the activity that requires knowledge and certainty, like science. But the difference between philosophy and science lies in that *the meaning of certainty in philosophy is wider than the certainty in science*. The certainty in science seems to be based on human sense perception alone. But certainty in philosophy can be based on things other than sense perception.

We would understand the meaning of certainty in philosophy with the comparison with the things which are used in science and religion. In religion, the faith is one among the important things that required. You cannot be the good follower of religion if you do not have faith. Faith means a kind of feeling which forces the emotion of people to think that they do not need to question about that thing. In the *Bible*, Jesus says that if we have the good father and we have no doubt that this is the good person and this man loves us so much (we know this from the long experience with living with the father) we might not need to prove that the things done by the father would be good or bad for us. Jesus says that when the sons ask for fish, it is not possible that the father would give them the snake. This is the saying of Jesus that appears in the *Bible*. If we do not

have the faith in God and Jesus as the good fathers, we might not be the true Christian.

Note that religion never says that God or religious masters are the good fathers. The thing which is claimed by religion is that if you do not have the faith in God and religious masters, you might not be the good followers of religion. Religion believes that being the good followers of religion would give the deep happiness in the soul of people. This thing requires the deep faith. Religion accepts that people can doubt whether or not God really exists. But the point given in religion is that if you have that doubt in your mind, you could be good philosopher, or other kind of thinker in the world. But you are not the good followers of religion. And the people who are not the good followers of religion would miss something which is highly valuable in the human life. That thing is the deep happiness. To understand this thing, people need feeling or emotion, and not reason at all.

II

There are religions both in the Western countries and Eastern countries. And the Western philosophy in its general aspect can be considered as the human intellectual tradition which stands at the other side with religion. I think Socrates might think differently from Christianity and Hinduism. And this is the thing that we can understand. Things which are important in the human life in the view of Socrates are knowledge and certainty. But in the view of religion (both religions which are accepted in the Western and Eastern countries) the things which are important in the life of people are *happiness* and the *peaceful life*. These things do not come from knowledge and certainty. This is the difference between religion and Western philosophy. At the present, there are some philosophers in the world who work in the field of the philosophy of religion, and some of these philosophers say that they believe in religion. The thing that we should know is that these philosophers have two sides of life. One side is the individual life, and another one is the social life. In terms of individual life, the philosopher can be considered as a human being like other human beings in the world. This means that as a human being, the philosopher can have the faith in religion like other human beings. This might be better understood if we use the life of a famous scientist, Isaac Newton, as an example.

Newton is well known for his firm belief in Christianity. The religious faith of Newton is not a strange thing if we look at this thing from the perspective of individual life. But when Newton joins the scientific community to present his work, such a religious faith has to be dropped off. In the scientific community, the things that the scientists need to do must follow the scientific rules, and these rules do not allow anyone to present personal religious feeling as the ground of scientific work. In the same way, some philosophers in the world could say that personally they believe in religion. But when they present the work in the community of philosophers, the use of personal faith might be the thing which other philosophers, including those who personally also believe in religion, consider as the weakness.

The wall that divides philosophy from religion that we have considered above seems to be the thing traditionally adopted in the West. But in the East, we would find the difference. In China and India, we think that there are some kinds of philosophy. In China, we have Taoism and Confucianism as the main philosophical schools of the country. Besides these two main philosophical schools, there are other philosophical schools such as Buddhism which has been developed to be the Chinese version with the Chinese wisdom of the Chinese followers of Buddhism. In India, we have three major philosophical schools which are Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Besides these three major philosophical schools there are other philosophical schools such as Indian materialism and so on. These Chinese and Indian philosophies are the philosophical schools in the fullest sense. I mean that there are some basic elements which are required if we need to call something a philosophy. I believe that we would find these required things in Chinese and Indian philosophies that we are talking about.

However, these names in the view of Chinese and Indian people also belong to religion. This is the difference between Eastern and Western philosophies. We can say that there might not be a Western philosophy which Western people feel that this should belong to religion as well. Philosophy is philosophy, and not religion. But in the Western world some religion has been considered to belong to philosophy too. Christianity is a religion. This is the thing that people in general know. But we have the thing which is called the Christian philosophy. In the view of some Eastern philosophers such as Radhakrishnan, the making of Christianity to be the

Christian philosophy could be considered as the thing that happens from the influence of Eastern thought. That is, in the view of Radhakrishnan, something can play the role both as religion and philosophy at the same time. Buddhism and Hinduism are well known as religion. But at the same time these two religions have been considered as the philosophy.

The main difference between Eastern and Western philosophy might lie in that in Western philosophy, the thing that we can say is that the content and the method to present the ideas are merged into oneness, and that makes it is not possible to consider Western philosophy as religion. But in Eastern philosophy, the ideas and the method can be separated. For example, we have the idea of non-self in Buddhism. This idea has been given in the texts as the content. This content says something about the nature of the human life and the world. If we treat this content in some way, this idea would be called the religious concept. But if we treat this idea in some other way, it would become the philosophical concept. This can be applied to understand Christianity and other religion such as Islam. The ideas in these religions can be religious or philosophical concepts. And this depends on we utilize which method to deal with these contents.

III

The name of philosophy has the firm connection with reason. And the name of religion has the firm connection with emotion. This could be considered as the thing that makes religion and philosophy the different things. Western philosophy in its tradition can be understood as the human intellectual activity which is based on reason alone. But Eastern philosophy is different in that even though reason is the main tool used in philosophy, but the emotion of human beings is never overlooked. In Buddhist philosophy, sometimes we understand that the source of goodness can be found in the good form of human emotion. It seems that to say that we can find goodness in human emotion is something that cannot be accepted in Western philosophy.

Kant, one of the great Western philosophers, argues that goodness cannot be found in human emotion, even though it is the good or best emotion. To say like this is based on the basic assumption of Kant which states that morality has to be based on the strongest ground like mathematics. This thought is not found in Eastern philosophy. In the view

of the Buddha, the thing that we need is not the moral rules which are firmly-grounded like mathematics. But the thing that we need is the system that would develop the mind of people to think, speak, and act in such a way that happiness would happen to that person and other men, animals, and other things in the world. While Kant thinks that we need certainty to say that this is the real goodness without a question, the Buddha thinks that we need the thing that would have the power to change the mind of people in the world to think, speak, and act the things that would create happiness in the world. And emotion in the human mind in the view of Eastern philosophy plays the role in terms of knowledge and morality *not less than* reason. The perfect person in Eastern philosophy is the one whose emotion and reason have been developed side by side.

IV

I think the point that we should consider from the perspective of the person whose work has to deal with other people such as the nurse is that how to utilize reason and emotion in such a way that our work would be perfect as much as possible. *Reason provides us the clear-cut thinking. But sometimes it could make us to be a robot.* We have some reason to have the human nurse, even though it could be possible that we can have the robot nurse which works in terms of logical judgement better than the human nurse. The difference between the human and the robot lies in that the robot does not have emotion. In dealing with people in some case, we might not need emotion as the tool, but we know that in some case, emotion is extremely needed. And this is why we always need the human nurse even though we can have the robot nurse that can work better than the human nurse in some areas of the nursing work.

Finally, I think human beings are social beings in the sense that we would feel not good if we feel that we are living among the machines and there are not human beings to be our friends. Suppose one day I am extremely sick and I am brought to the hospital. Suppose there are two kinds of medical services that I can choose. The first kind is that I will be sent to the system in which things that are involved such as the doctors and the nurses are all the robots. They say to me that exactly this system works better than the system in which some doctors and nurses are human beings. The second system that I can choose is that there are human doctors and nurses to take care of me, and it could be possible that if

something that they would do to me can be done through the machine because that thing does not require human relation, they would apply the machine working with me. The question is between these two ways, which one is the way that I most prefer? I think there can be different thought among people concerning this thing. But for me, sometimes I do not feel that the thing that I need from the hospital is just the destruction of my sickness. Certainly, one of the important purposes in coming to the hospital is that we need to come back to the normal state of life. But human beings are the living things that need things other than getting the thing that we want. The way of getting things has the meaning to human mind.

For this reason, in the hospital, I need the human beings who play the role as the doctors and the nurses to have some kind of relation to me as fellow human beings. And this is why finally I need the hospital where I can have the human doctors and nurses.

One thing that I feel is that *death* is the common thing to happen to everyone in the world. Western philosophy seems to give little attention to the thing which is called death. In the view of some Western philosophers, the contents of philosophy are concerned with the living life of man alone. They say that they have nothing to say about the death. I understand these Western philosophers. But in the view of the Eastern philosophers, we have many things to talk about death.

In the view of the Buddha, death and living are equal parts of the thing called life. That is in the view of the Buddha, when we talk about life, we should not understand that life means living, as understood by most of Western philosophers. In the view of the Buddha, death is also part of the life.

For many people in the world, we cannot have sense experience with death while we are alive, and this would lead to the doubt that death could be nothingness as understood by most of Western philosophers. We have considered previously that one of the differences between Western and Eastern philosophies lies in that belief is more allowed in Eastern philosophy than Western philosophy. So, the concept of death in Eastern philosophy could be understood to be based on belief that cannot be proved with sense perception. However, Eastern philosophers have argued that we can understand the concept of death through intuition and reasoning. Taoism says that everything that we have seen or observed with other kinds of sense perception which are not the eyes is composed of two kinds of

nature. Man, animals, and even plants have the male and female and these two things are the origin of the new life in this world. Electricity has the positive and negative poles. In the view of Taoism, things in the universe are expressing something as their energy, and the expression as said must not be possible without two different things to generate the energy. We need the father and the mother to have a new child. This is the very clear example for understanding that things in the universe are designed by something (in the view of Taoism this thing is called Tao) to be under the force of two different principles. Life is the positive state and death is the negative state of the human life and the life of animals and plants. We can understand that for Taoism the whole life is the 'being' in the sense of the thing that exists in the universe. As a being, the life has to be under the force of death and living. These two things are the principles of life. In the view of the Buddha we die for some reason. In terms of the thing that has created things in the universe, the death of one thing means the chance of other thing to exist in the universe. But in terms of the internal property of life itself, the Buddha believes that we die for having the new life. We cannot have the new life within the condition that we are living in this world.

V

It is not my intention to prove that the belief of death as part of the human life adopted generally in Eastern philosophy is the true belief (there is the state of the human life that exists after the person has died.) I cannot do this thing. But the thing that I would like to suggest concerning the belief in death as part of the human life is that this tradition of belief makes Eastern people do not think that death is the enemy of our life. It could be possible that because Western philosophy does not say anything concerning death as a state of the human life that could have the meaning not less than the living, and this is the deep cause of the struggle by Western science to fight against death. Life prolonging is the thing which has been counted among the missions of science. On the contrary, we might not find the tradition to fight against death in Eastern science. To accept that *'death is not our enemy, but something that must happen in our life and this thing should be considered as part of our life'* has reduced the effort and energy to fight against death. This is the common phenomenon to be found in Eastern countries.

Finally, everyone has to die, including the Western thinkers who try to challenge the power of the death. Suppose the thing that really happens in the life of people in the modern world is that a large amount of money has been used to fight against death during the last days of the life of people, the Eastern wisdom which says that the best thing that we can do is not trying not to die, but accept that the time to die has arrived and we should accept it with the happy mind. This could be the best thing in terms of the beauty of life and the reasonable economy.

One thing that I believe to be the missing part of the Western philosophy is the deep exploration of death. I accept that death is the thing that we cannot have the direct experience with. But the doctors and the nurses are the persons who have more experiences with the death of people than other people in the world. This can be considered as the good opportunity for deeply studying the thing which is called death. The thing that we can observe from the people who are dying might be of several kinds and among these some might be the resources that we can link to the idea of death as part of the human life generally adopted in Eastern philosophy.

The thing that we know well in our life is that we have to sleep. Exactly, the death can be roughly understood through the sleep which is the thing that all people in the world know well. Suppose we do not wake up in the morning forever, people would say that this person has died. People who are seeing the body of the dead person are those who are alive. What is the state of our consciousness in the death? This question can be answered with the experiences with the sleep. Sleeping in the view of Buddhism is a kind of empirical death.

Should we look at sleep as the enemy? No!

In the same way, we can look at death with this feeling.

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