

## Migrating Texts I: Introduction and Summary of Session

Irene Switankowsky  
University of Wales, Lampeter

In the first paper, "Approaches to Philosophical Traditions: Platonic Dialogue, and Systematic versus Transformative Philosophy", Bharathi Sriraman focuses on the application of the transformative approach within the Western philosophical tradition. The distinctions between the systematic and transformative approaches that Sriraman discusses in the paper are inspired by Richard Rorty's ideas in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. The purpose of Sriraman's paper is to show how the idea of a transformation is present in Platonic thought since Plato is a classic example of a transformative thinker. Sriraman argues that transformative thinkers believe that the unreflecting mind must awaken to a new state of awareness.

Traditional, Western, systematic philosophy requires a commitment to a system of knowledge, based on the assumption that there is a universal basis for knowledge on which all human beings can acquiesce. Transformative, Eastern philosophy, on the other hand, is concerned with the phenomena of transformation. In other words, Western philosophy is concerned with information, while Eastern philosophy is concerned with transformation or a radical changing of man's nature. There are many limitations to systematic philosophy. This was especially brought about by the Hermeneutics developed in Heidegger's philosophy. According to Heidegger, knowledge cannot be approached as a mechanical process; instead, knowledge must be able to change us.

The transformative philosophy proposed in the paper has more in common with hermeneutics than with Western, systematic philosophy because of its emphasis on transfor-

mation. Transformative philosophers live their philosophies. What one believes is what one usually is. In other words, for Sriraman, an individual's beliefs make up one's ethos.

Sriraman disagrees with Rorty's claims that the Platonic dialogues are works of systematic philosophy. Instead, Sriraman argues that Plato can be seen as a transformative philosopher since the dialogues can be viewed as a philosophical exercise meant to aid the reader in questioning his/her motives. Sriraman believes that Plato's dialogues are not merely about argumentation but also about sensitizing the reader through images and emotions. Thus, Plato's thought is transformative since Plato invites the reader to be transformed by the dialogues.

**In the second paper**, Vincent Shen discusses "The Migration of Aristotle's Philosophy to China in the 17th Century". According to Shen, Aristotle was the first among the Western philosophers to be systematically introduced into China by the Jesuits in the 17th century. At that time, Aristotle as a person and the Scholastic commentaries on Aristotle's philosophy were introduced and translated into Chinese. The project of translation became a project of "rewriting" the Aristotelian texts into Chinese. One may ask, why were the early Jesuit missionaries so interested in Aristotle's philosophy during this time?

Shen examines three main reasons to explain why. First, Aristotelian philosophy was emphasized by Jesuit education programs around that time. Second, Aristotle's philosophy was considered to be capable of offering a philosophical system compatible with Christian faith and serving as a philosophical mediation

between different areas of culture (such as science, technique, ethics, politics and religion.) All of these were seen as laying the philosophical foundation for a world vision which was compatible with both the sciences and Christianity. Third, this educational program was compatible with the Jesuit missionaries work in Chinese contexts, especially for the formation of seminarians and advanced Chinese believers.

By introducing Aristotle's person and rewriting his texts, the early Jesuits in China and their Chinese followers since they have allowed Aristotle and his theories to migrate into China and to be absorbed gradually into the Chinese educational system. According to Shen, the Jesuit's insistence in bringing Aristotle's *De Anima* and Chinese theory of human nature into an early form of synthesis should not be neglected in the history of Chinese philosophy. Their contribution to the association of Western and Chinese philosophies cannot be overemphasized.

**The final paper** in this session is Linda Patrik's "A Buddhist 'good life' theory". In the paper, Patrik examines why there have been so many obstacles for Western Society to accept Buddhist philosophy. The first part of Patrik's paper is devoted to comparing and contrasting Buddhist and Aristotelian conceptions of the "good life". Patrik argues that there is one important similarity between Buddhist and Aristotelian conceptions of the good life: both view happiness as the ultimate aim for human beings. However, Buddhist accounts of the good life differ substantially from Greek ones. According to the ancient Greeks, happiness is understood as the fulfillment of self-interest, while for Buddhists happiness focuses on the renunciation of self-interest. Thus, the two conceptions of the good life cannot be easily reconciled. Therefore, Western society has been hesitant in accepting Buddhist conceptions of the good life.

For Buddhists, self-actualization, self-

fulfillment, self-regard and self-love are illusory since there is no self. Instead of having interests of one's own, an individual can only lead a good life by realizing selflessness. But how, one may ask, can life be directed by self-interest if there is no self doing the directing? The Buddhist good life is a life leading to enlightenment, and any introduction of self-interest would mean that an individual's life has somehow gone astray. Thus, there are several major obstacles to the reception of Buddhist philosophy in the West.

First, according to Western ethics, a self leads a good life while according to Buddhist ethics, multiple conscious processes proceed through the threshold of death into further living processes in the next rebirth without a self. Thus, for Patrik, there is an incommensurability between the Western ideal of the good life and the Buddhist ideal.

Second, according to Buddhist ethics, there is an unquestioned emphasis on altruism. In ancient Greek theories of eudaimonia, other-regarding motivation and behavior are problematic. Buddhist ethics propose other-regarding virtues such as compassion and generosity because these will end another person's suffering. Thus, the benefit of compassion and generosity is for the other person, but not for oneself. A Buddhist's development of other-regarding virtues is described as an awakening from ignorance and from the belief in a self. One of the most important Buddhist virtues is regarded as the "Awakening Mind". Thus, other-regarding virtues should not be viewed as additions to self interest, but as exemplifying the very nature of the mind. In other words, the other-regarding virtues do not add or replace anything.

Lastly, the most important incommensurability between the Buddhist and Greek notions of the good life hinges on the vastness of the Buddhist's altruistic demands. The good life requires that a person engage in a time-consuming, strenuous and self-negating path

of transformation. Altruism is not a sporadic or piecemeal attempt to benefit others; instead, altruism is extended to all sentient beings. In other words, according to Patrik, the good life is a natural expression of how the mind works when the mind has removed its obstacles and revealed its true nature.