

Spiritual and Physical Exercises in Eastern and Western Philosophies

- A Report on the Tsukuba Global Science Week 2014 -

Yoshinori TSUZAKI

During the Tsukuba Global Science Week 2014 held from September 28th to 30th at the University Hall at the University of Tsukuba, our department facilitated a session, *Spiritual and Physical Exercises in Eastern and Western Philosophies*. This session was held in the afternoon of the first day. As the session organizer, I would like to introduce it briefly.

Our session was inspired in a certain way by Pierre Hadot's way of understanding the history of philosophy. In his highly praised book *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Hadot, one of the most prominent French historians of Western philosophy in the last five decades, articulates the distinction between the social function of ancient and modern philosophies. "Ancient philosophy proposed to mankind an art of living. By contrast, modern philosophy appears above all as the construction of a technical jargon reserved for specialists."¹ Most significantly for us here, Hadot characterizes ancient philosophy in Europe as "an art of living," with its goal being "to transform the whole of the individual's life."² Such transformation is accomplished in everyday life by undertaking *exercises*. As Hadot notes in a different book:

By this term, I mean practices which could be physical, as in dietary regimes, or discursive, as in dialogue and meditation, or intuitive, as in contemplation, but which were all intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practiced them.³

Why were these exercises required - particularly in ancient philosophy? In order to shed some light on this question, it is interesting to consider the relationship between "a subject" and "the truth." This relationship can be defined by three factors, according to Michel Foucault, whose last lectures at the Collège de France (including *On The Government of the Living*, lectures given between 1979 and 1980; *Subjectivity and Truth* (1980-1981); *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1981-1982); and *The Government of Self and Others* (1982-1983)) were greatly influenced by Hadot. First, the subject does not, by nature or in essence, have the right or the capacity to gain access to the truth. As a result of his natural mode of existence, he is cut off from the truth. Second, in order to gain access to the truth, he must undergo spiritual

¹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. by Michael Chase, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, p. 272.

² *Ibid.*, p. 265.

³ Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. by Michael Chase, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002, p. 6.

and/or physical exercises and transform his way of being “a subject.” He becomes other than what he used to be, and this “becoming something else” is the price he must pay in order to experience the truth. Finally, the truth is not experienced only in the form of knowledge. The truth comes to him in the form of salvation. When he has undergone the proper exercise or has been transformed by the proper exercise, the truth rewards him with salvation, happiness, beatitude, completion, and fullness.

Whether we directly accept the adequacy of these two thinkers’ account of the history of philosophy or not⁴, when we think about these exercises, we may be encouraged to reconsider what Western philosophy should be today; we also should reconsider how Eastern philosophies cannot so easily separate philosophy from religion as Western philosophies have. From this perspective, we are able to criticize the distinction between religion and philosophy since religion should be practically inseparable from these exercises. In other words, it is still important for today’s studies in the field of humanities to analyze, from the diachronic and synchronic points of view, using the comparative method, how practices and discourses have developed in different types of philosophies and religions, focusing on acts unique to mankind: spiritual and physical exercises.

Therefore, our session aimed, first, to use a philological analysis of primary sources to understand how practices and discourses on these exercises can be characterized in each of the two cultural spheres: Asia and Europe. Second, we tried to describe, by using the comparative method, the differences and similarities between these spheres. In the process of this analysis, we tried to identify any commonalities in exercises developed, seemingly independently, in the Western and Eastern spheres of influence without ignoring the specifics of each philosophy and religion. This question was discussed by Japanese specialists, including young researchers of Confucianism, Christianity, and Western modern philosophy from the University of Tsukuba as well as foreign scholars of Buddhism from the University of Hamburg and Harvard University.

The first speaker of the session was Professor Leonard Willem Johannes Van der Kuijp (Harvard University, USA). The title of his talk was “The Spiritual Teacher in Tibet: ‘Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal’s (1392-1481) Assessment of His Master Vanaratna (1384-1468).” This talk was followed by Professor Yoshitsugu Igawa (University of Tsukuba, Japan) who described his inquiry into the “Chinese Theory of Mind’s Transformation and Gottlieb Spizel’s *De re literaria Sinensium commentarius*.” The last speaker of the first part of the session was Dr.

⁴ Their books and lectures have become the subjects of frequent discussions both in English and French since the beginning of this century. The following are three remarkable examples of discourses that have resulted from such discussions: the first publication is by Edward F. McGushin whose Ph.D. dissertation is published as *Foucault’s Askēsis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007); the second is by Arnold I. Davidson and Frederic Worms who edited *Pierre Hadot, l’enseignement des antiques, l’enseignement des modernes* (Paris: Editions Rue d’Ulm, 2010); and the third discussion is by Michael Chase, a translator of almost all of Hadot’s books into English, who recently edited *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns: Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, published by Wiley-Blackwell in 2013.

Martin Delhey (University of Hamburg, Germany), and the title of his talk was “On the Place of Knowledge in Ancient Indian Buddhist Spiritual Practice.” After an intermission, we welcomed Professor Michael Zimmermann (University of Hamburg). The title of his talk was “Practicing Ethics and Purifying the Mind: the ‘Four Immeasurables’: an Early Buddhist Spiritual Exercise.” Then, Ms. Yoko Ito, a graduate student of the University of Tsukuba, discussed “Thomas Aquinas and Dionysius the Areopagite: the Relationship between the Creator and the Creature.” The second part of the session closed with the presentation of Professor Akio Kikai (University of Tsukuba) on “Diaries, Religious Experience, and Philosophical Change of Ludwig Wittgenstein.” After the general remark by Professor Naoki Kuwabara (University of Tsukuba), we had a thirty-minute closing discussion over which Professors Chizuko Yoshimizu and Yoshinori Tsuzaki (University of Tsukuba) presided.