



Comparative Philosophy

Together with the more recent Intercultural Philosophy, Comparative Philosophy is the only philosophical branch eager to undertake a critical evaluation of World Philosophy on a comparative. Intercultural philosophy “departs from the thesis that in the fields of philosophy and arts intercultural communication can happen on the level of equality” (statement of the Foundation for Intercultural Philosophy). Both Comparative and Intercultural Philosophy are working within the margins of the academic discipline of philosophy.

What comparative philosophy and ICP have in common with [Ethnophilosophy](#) is that they take the “ethno-” part of any philosophy seriously and are even ready to establish it as a starting point for fruitful comparisons. The approaches of Comparative Philosophy are meant to transcend the statements contained in a certain tradition and to lead to a “higher” truth. Retrospectively, even the initial suggestions made within the framework of a single tradition will be understood in a better and “fresher” way. The model of Comparative Philosophy is efficient and justified as a method. Moreover, it represents a case in point for the illustration of those difficulties involved in ethnophilosophical projects in general. Among the numerous comparative branches practiced in academic research (for example comparative literature, comparative religion, or comparative linguistics) comparative philosophy has an outstanding position. In the case of comparative literature, it is not really the *subject of the disciplines* (for ex. “literature”) that engages in comparative activities, but a certain “science of literature” compares its subjects among each other. Also in the case of comparative religion we do not really mean that “religion” itself would become comparative but rather that a “comparative science of religions” compares different religions. The exceptional status of philosophy becomes clear here. Philosophy, by comparing different philosophies among each other, does not become a “comparative science of philosophy” but *is* philosophy.

Comparative philosophy is marked off by an inner self-contradiction: on the one hand, philosophy, like literature and art, is part of a cultural experience that cannot be fully materialized because it is an intimate process. In principle, these intimate processes cannot be “compared” (there is, for example, no “comparative art”). On the other hand, philosophy *is itself* one of those

materializing disciplines that attempt to transform culture, art, religion, etc. into something that can be “grasped” through concepts, ideas and notions and—finally—be compared.

So far Comparative Philosophy and ICP have been unable to coordinate different regionalist attempts with the help of a more comprehensive theory. In the long run, Comparative philosophy cannot limit itself to the random comparison of different traditions but must engage in the coordination of individual philosophical items by establishing the meaning they can have within a general system of World Philosophy. When Kwasi Wiredu explains, for example, that the Akan word for ‘truth’ (*saa*) means both ‘is true’ and ‘is so’ (1996: 107), this individual statement about Akan truth remains meaningful to the Akans but has, so far, no purpose to fulfill in the world-philosophical context. A shift from Comparative Philosophy to [World Philosophy](#) can only be effectuated through the establishment of meaningful contexts, by contrasting and interlinking different concepts, and by providing new insights into topics that concern every human being.

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