

# Moving through non-essential commonalities

## Dialectics as a Method for Intercultural Philosophy

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### Abstract

In this article, I attempt to show how, by articulating the dialectics of Hegel, Nāgārjuna and Nishida, one could arrive at a fruitful way of conceiving intercultural philosophy by means of a dialectical method. To articulate the dialectics of those different philosophers in a method of doing philosophy interculturally, I shall also introduce Ram Adhar Mall and his conception of situated unsituatedness (*orthafte Ortlösigkeit*) into discussion. I believe that Mall's concept not only provides a foundation for articulating the different dialectics of Hegel, Nāgārjuna and Nishida in a method of doing intercultural philosophy, but Mall's concept can itself be better understood if comprehended dialectically and beyond the idea of "perennial philosophy". I hope to show that to do philosophy interculturally according to that method means to search for the (non-essential) commonalities between different traditions, in order to not only understand each of them in their differences and specificity, but, through those differences, also gain new insights into their shared commonalities.

**Keywords:** Dialectics, Intercultural Philosophy, Self-relation Dialectics, Other-relation Dialectics, *orthafte Ortlösigkeit*

### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In my article, I will attempt to show how, by articulating the dialectics of Hegel, Nāgārjuna and Nishida, one could come up with a fruitful way of both conceiving dialectics interculturally. To articulate, however, the dialectics of those different

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philosophers in a method of doing philosophy interculturally, I shall also bring into discussion another philosopher, to wit, Ram Adhar Mall and his conception of situated unsituatedness (*orthafte Ortlösigkeit*). I believe that Mall's concept not only provides a central basis for articulating the different dialectics of Hegel, Nāgārjuna and Nishida in a method of doing intercultural philosophy, but can itself be better understood, and even in a way that avoids issues with Mall's own understanding of the concept, if comprehended dialectically.

## 2. *How to Relate to the Other?*

When we think about doing intercultural philosophy, there are two fundamental questions we have to pose to ourselves, in order to reflect on the very possibility of this enterprise: i) how do we conceive of the other and our relationship to the other? And ii) how can we conceive of this relationship in such a way that makes philosophical, intercultural dialogue possible?

At first, the two most basic ways we can conceive of the other and their relationship to us seems to be either by means of *identity*, or by means of *difference*. Yet, both of these ways, as I shall argue, are completely unsatisfactory to fully grasp our relationship to the other and provide an adequate conception of the other. It is, indeed, the fact that they are unsatisfactory that will lead us to argue that a dialectical approach to our understanding of the other might be necessary. Thus, before fully delving into discussion of our dialectical proposal of an intercultural method, let us briefly take a look at those two different ways of conceiving of the other, and why they are insufficient.

## 3. *Identity, Difference, Comparison, and the Inseparability between Identity and Difference*

It might seem that the first, easiest way of conceiving the other in such a way that allows us to relate to them is by means of positing their *essential identity* to us. In other words, if we can relate to the other, that is due to the fact that, despite

appearances and superficial differences, the other is still fundamentally and essentially identical to us. The other, thus, has the same fundamental determinations in their way of thinking as we do, and therefore think essentially in the same way as we do. This seems to be the approach taken, for instance, by Paul Deussen, when he argues that the philosophy of Ancient India and of Modern Germany is one and fundamentally the same, i.e, idealism, as if, by means of that one, fundamental essence, one could fully understand the crucial determinations of the philosophy not only of nineteenth century German Philosophy, but of Ancient Indian philosophy as well, more specifically of Vedanta philosophy as represented by the figure of Shankara (Deussen 1970; Nicholson 2016).

I believe it would serve no purpose to extend oneself, attempting to show how, historically, there are many criticisms to be made of this view; for, although certainly there are many interesting and thought-provoking comparisons and dialogues that can be made between nineteenth German Philosophy and Ancient Indian philosophy, there are also plenty of reasons why we can understand that such broad claims of one and the same fundamental essence being shared by both philosophies are very problematic, ignore relevant distinctions between how German and Indian philosophers understand some concepts (such as the concepts of mind and conscience), as well as the existence of divergent currents of thought that cannot easily or simply be lumped together in the same sack as being “idealist”. Yet, such criticisms have already been made, and it is not my intention here to make them again. I do not want merely to argue that conceiving of the other as essentially identical is historically mistaken. Rather, I want to make the claim that to conceive of the other as fundamentally identical is *logically inconsistent*. Even more so, I want to argue that the idea of an identity that precludes difference is, itself, logically inconsistent. Thus, any attempt to conceive of the other purely by means of identity necessarily fails, for the very idea of a pure identity is untenable.

In fact, it has been long acknowledged by none other than Hegel himself – and other representatives of German Idealism – that the idea of a *pure identity*, such as  $A = A$ , is not only untenable, but fails to provide precisely that which it is supposed to – a *determination* of that which it is presenting by means of that equation (Hegel 2012,

413). For, by means of an equation, we are supposed to expand our knowledge of the thing that is being determined by that equation – the ‘A’ – and yet, we only return to the very determination that was there at the beginning – the ‘A’ itself. However, an equation, precisely because it is an equation, is supposed to be a relationship between two minimally different terms – even if that difference is none other than the *numerical* difference between the first and the second A. Thus, even an equation such as  $A = A$  has to, against the intent of those who would like to posit a *pure identity*, posit a difference, and can only be made by means of such positing, in such a way that those who seek pure identity ultimately fail to be true to the very purpose of an equation: *to compare terms at least minimally different*. Pure identity is, thus, unattainable, for identity arises only by means of comparison, and comparison is only possible between terms that are minimally different.<sup>2</sup>

This might seem like a far too abstract consideration to have any weight on reflection on the way we do intercultural philosophy, since we might be expected to dwell more on historical reasons or considerations to ground such a way of doing philosophy. Yet, since we are talking about a *method* to do intercultural philosophy<sup>3</sup>, it is important to provide a *logical frame* within which such a method would operate, and argue against other methods regarding their logical consistency. This has the advantage, I believe, not of providing an “universally valid” method, but rather of trying to provide a bigger picture of “what is wrong” with many of the ways we conceive of the other and that limit our understanding and the horizon of philosophy as an intercultural activity. With this in mind, let us move on to the other basic way of conceiving the other, i.e., as fundamentally different.

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<sup>2</sup> This is also the case even when we compare a term with itself, for, in that case, *it has also to be minimally different to itself in some regard* – something that, no doubt, was also crystal clear to Hegel (Hegel 2012, 412-413).

<sup>3</sup> Although in the Anglophone academia, one might be inclined to identify what I am proposing here with the concept of “world philosophies”, I believe the term “intercultural philosophy” is much more aligned with my perspective and proposed method, since I aim not only at making philosophy in a “cross-cultural” way, but also believe that philosophy is *constitutively* intercultural, i.e., a product of the encounter of different cultures. That is, there is no isolated culture or philosophy which is not constituted by its relationship to other cultures and divergent philosophical stances, to its ‘other’, while, at the same time, being irreducible to it. Thus, my proposal of a dialectics as a method for intercultural philosophy aims not only at promoting a cross-cultural philosophical practice today, but also at showing how philosophy is constitutively *intercultural*.

It might seem that, given the dangers of conceiving of the other by means of pure identity, we should conceive of the other by means of *pure difference*, i.e., by claiming there to be no fundamental, essential or even common determination that would allow us to say that the other somehow thinks like us, or has in anyway a similar mode of thought. In that case, even the possibility of communication is rendered nearly impossible, for there is no guarantee that we have any means of understanding, within our own framework, what the other means, without already distorting it. This seems to be what Richard Rorty, for instance, believes to be the case when he talks about “basic vocabularies” and their differences, which would render it nearly, if not completely impossible to truly understand the other in their own terms (Rorty 1989 apud. King 1999, 234).

Again, I believe there is plenty of room for a critic of this point of view from an historic perspective. One could argue not only that there is plenty of historical evidence and historic documents that show how similar ways of thinking arose in different cultures, sometimes even independently, regarding the nature of a valid argument, the nature of knowledge, the nature of politics, of an ethic action etc. Of course, this is not to say that those ways of thinking are absolutely identical, but to claim that they are not susceptible even to minimal comparison seems to be only tenable to those who do not have contact with those documents themselves, as van Norden accurately pointed out in a very much debated article (van Norden 2017). Sure, the proponent of pure difference can argue that we are begging the question: how can we say that they are similar? Is that not because we are already projecting our own concepts and categories in the thought of the other? Yet, the one who truly begs the question is the proponent of difference, because they exclude any possibility of verifying empirically their claims about unmediated difference, and thus offers no way of disproving or testing their claim, no way of checking the evidence in favor or against it.

Yet, as it was the case with identity, I do not want to focus on a criticism from an historic perspective. Rather, I want, again, to point out the logical inconsistency of pure difference, in order to show how it is untenable as a way of conceiving of the other and as the basis for a method of doing intercultural philosophy. Again, the

inconsistency arises from the fact that difference is only possible by means of comparison between two different terms. However, comparison between two terms is only possible, *if they are minimally identical to each other*, i.e., if there is some sense in which they share some sort of common determination. After all, if no common determination was possible, then even the claim that they are different could not be made, for they could never possibly be considered simultaneously. At the very least, they must have the common determination of being an object of one's thought, of one's conscience, in the moment one thinks of them as being different, in which case, they will be, at least, *different* objects of my conscience, but, still, *objects of my conscience*. In fact, this is defining difference, its 'transitive quality', so to speak: *that to be different is to be a different "x", but still be an "x"*, no matter what the "x" in question is. If there is no commonality regarding which two things can be compared in their difference, then there is also no possibility of stating or establishing their difference. Just like identity, difference only arises by means of comparison between two terms; comparison, however, is always done *in regard to some aspect shared by both terms*. Thus, just like identity presupposes minimal difference, *difference presupposes minimal identity*.

This, however, leads us to a very important conclusion: identity and difference are only possible by means of comparison, and comparison requires both minimal identity and minimal difference between the terms compared. Moreover, this leads us to an even broader conclusion: that identity is only possible by means of difference, and difference is only possible by means of identity. In fact, identity and difference are themselves opposite terms which, as we have seen, require, at the same time, each other, and cannot subsist without their relationship to their opposite. It is not logically tenable to conceive of the other either as purely identical, or as purely different from us; we have to conceive of the other as necessarily both identical and different from us. Thus, the only way that one can speak of identity or difference, is if there is a necessary relationship between us, i.e., the self, and the Other, by means of which self and other are *both identical and different to each other*. In other words: one has to think of the self and the other as being in a *dialectical relationship*.

#### 4. What is Dialectics?

This, however, begs the question: what do I mean by “dialectics” here? First and foremost, I am talking about *ontological dialectics*. In other words, I am discussing dialectics not merely as a method for attaining knowledge or analyzing phenomena, but as a way of conceiving how something is structured, or, more specifically, as self and other are constituted<sup>4</sup>. In this ontological sense, dialectics is, in a very broad sense, the conception according to which opposites, in our case, self and other, are constitutively related by a common reality<sup>5</sup>. A dialectical ontology thus considers that opposites necessitate each other to exist, and only exist insofar as they are related to each other by means of a common reality. What is opposite is not separate: that could be defined as the motto of ontological dialectics as discussed here. Or, to put it in a more precise way: opposites, while simultaneously being defined as negating each other, are constituted by their relationship with each other, and thus cannot be thought of as two completely separate and independent realities: they are ontologically related and, thus, have to share some sort of reality<sup>6</sup>.

With this in mind, one could ask: by what means could opposites be thus related? How should one conceive of that relationship, in order for it to be possible for opposites, even if defined by their mutual negation, to be constitutively and really related to one another? It seems for us that there are two main ways by which such a

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<sup>4</sup> That we have good reason to use this definition here is corroborated by Schultz, who, in many respects, has a very similar approach to this subject as ours. In fact, as she herself says: “The extension of logic into the realm of the concrete in the philosophies of Hegel and Nishida means that existence itself takes the form of a dialectic. In other words, according to these thinkers, the dialectic is not just a mode of thought; it plays a vital role in shaping the world” (Schultz 2012, 319).

<sup>5</sup> In her article, Schultz defines dialectic as the “understanding that opposing terms are complicating and mutually defining” (Schultz 2012, 320). Her definition, thus, closely resembles ours, although, for our purposes, it is important to stress the role the idea of “common reality” plays in dialectics, which is not stressed in Schultz’s definition thereof.

<sup>6</sup> One could ask to what extent Adorno’s negative dialectics would fit within that definition – for, contrary to Hegel, he is precisely attempting to show that there is no synthesis that could do away with the irreducible non-identity of the opposites, no ultimate unity in which those opposites could be absolutely “reconciled”. Yet, it is no coincidence that we avoided talking about unity or synthesis in our definition of dialectics, but rather spoke of “relating” and “common reality”. For those terms imply not that there must be an all-encompassing reality within which both opposites are contained, but rather that there must be some sort of *constitutive mediation* between them, which, even in Adorno’s case, seems to imply a reality that relates them both, even if that reality is no third term over and above the opposite terms, but rather just the reality of the processual mediation itself. See Adorno’s critique of Heidegger in his *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno 2004, 117-22).

relationship can be conceived. They go each in the opposite direction of each other regarding their proposal of how to conceive this relation. The first way is to conceive of this relation as a *self-relation*; that is, opposites are constitutively related to each other because opposition is nothing more than the way by which a reality relates to itself, being nothing more than the product of this reality's self-relating and self-determining. Thus, its opposite cannot be thought of apart from itself. In that case, opposition is nothing more than a form of self-relation, and thus, in self-relation dialectics, the *other* is just an internal moment, an internal difference of the *self*.

On the other hand, the second way of conceiving of this relationship would be to think of the relationship to the opposite term – to the other – itself as a sort of overarching reality which contains both opposites and is the ground of possibility of their constitutive relationship, while being logically and ontologically prior to them. A relationship to the other is, in that case, not produced by the *self-relation* of one of the opposites, is not the result of the self-determination of one of the opposites, but rather it is what constitutes both opposites in the first place and without which none of them could exist. In other words, opposites can be related to each other because, on the most fundamental level, they are nothing but *the relationship to their other*, or are fundamentally relationality itself. Or, to be more precise: the terms do not exist *apart from their relationship to the other*, and so they are not the product of an internal, self-relation, but rather of an external, other-relation, i.e., their relationship to something other than themselves.

Given these two different ways of overcoming opposition, one could name a dialectic which uses the first approach as a *self-relation* dialectic<sup>7</sup>, and one which uses

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<sup>7</sup> I am aware, of course, that most of the Hegelian Scholarship in English would use the term *self-determination* rather than self-relation (see for example Pippin 1997, 7) to describe this sort of dialectics, just as the Hegelian Scholarship in German would use the term *Selbstbestimmung* (See Martin 2012). However, I believe that, for the purposes of our text, *self-relation* pins more clearly the characteristic through which we intend to distinguish two different types of dialectics, to wit, the way they conceive the dialectical relationship between opposites, i.e. whether they think this relationship is the result of one of the opposites relating to itself by positing its own opposite, and thus is nothing more than *self-relation*, or if both opposites are made possible by the relationship itself, which is, thus, ontologically prior to any of the opposites and not posited by any of them in the first place, in such a way that, by relating to their opposite, they are, indeed, relating to something *other* (that is, not produced by their own positing) through means of the ontologically prior relation.



the last approach as an *other-relation* dialectic<sup>8</sup>. While the first kind of dialectic holds that the relationship between opposites is one of self-relationship, that is, one by means of which, *ultimately*, a term is constituted and exists by means of itself, independently of any kind of *external* relationship, the last kind of dialectic holds that a term is constituted only by means of its relationship to one *irreducible other*, and thus, since both terms depend on this external relationship, none of them subsist on their own, but rather *only in the relationship to the other*.

Since each of these approaches relates the possibility of dialectics with one or another kind of relationship, that is, either with *self* or *other-relationship*, it follows that each of these approaches consider the contrary sort of relationship *non-dialectical*. In other words, for *self-relation* dialectics, *other-relation* is non-dialectical (if taken as not grounded ultimately in self-relation), while, for *other-relation* dialectics, *self-relation* is non-dialectical (if taken as the ultimate form of conceiving of the reality of the opposites<sup>9</sup>).

And yet, with this in mind, one could wonder: is this opposition between *dialectical* and *non-dialectical*, as conceived of by self and other-dialectics, *itself dialectical*? For it seems to presuppose that there's a rigid distinction between what's considered to be a truly dialectical and a non-dialectical approach regarding the relationship that is to be conceived between opposites in ontological dialectics, and that one of those kinds of relationship is fundamentally, and essentially, non-dialectical. This means, in other words, that self-relation dialectics has no dialectical conception of other-relation and holds no such conception to be possible, while other-relation dialectics has no dialectical conception of self-relation dialectics and holds that no such conception is possible.

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<sup>8</sup> Which is why, unlike Schultz, I don't believe that "the key insight fueling a dialectical critique of dialectics is the recognition of the dependent nature of all points of view" (Schult 2012, 334). For, although no doubt a fundamental insight, this insight is nothing but precisely what is behind just one of the models of dialectic, namely *other-relation* dialectic, and thus does not suffice to bring together the antithetical dialectics and realize a critique of both of them.

<sup>9</sup> Which is reflected, for instance, in Nāgārjuna's discussion of the self in chapter XVIII of *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle way*, where the self is seen as being existent, but non-permanent since it only comes into being dependent on another. See Nāgārjuna 1995, 48-49.

One could argue, however, that this lack of a dialectical conception of the opposite kind of relation than the one advocated by each of these dialectics denounces the limits of each of them, something that they are not able to conceive dialectically and thus that limits their capabilities of conceiving the reality of the self and of the other dialectically. In that case, one could ask oneself if it is not possible, and even desirable, to bring both these kinds of dialectics together to conceive of another kind of dialectic, one which attempts to conceive dialectically both self-relation and other-relation.

Having said this, I would like to expose what I consider to be one example of self-relation dialectics and one example of other-relation dialectics, namely and respectively the dialectics of Hegel and the dialectics of Nāgārjuna. With this in mind, I would like to expose what I see as an attempt of bringing both these dialectics together and briefly discuss it in its merits and shortcomings: the dialectics of Nishida. I shall then try to overcome its shortcomings by bringing into discussion Ram Mall and his conception of *orthafte Ortlösigkeit*. Thus, I hope to provide a useful framework by means of which one could utilize the proposed conception of dialectics here as a method for intercultural philosophy.

##### 5. *Abstract Negation, Determinate Negation, and the Absolute Idea: Hegel's Conception of The Self-Relationship of the Absolute*

Hegelian dialectics can be named as a self-relation dialectics by the fact that they attempt to begin with absolutely no *external presupposition* – that is, they attempt to have as its “absolute beginning” a beginning that is completely *immediate*, and thus *indeterminate*. In fact, Hegel's philosophy (and more specifically the *Science of Logic*), can be considered, in many respects, an *ontology of self-determination* (Martin 2012, 16-17), and of what is required for self-determination to fulfill itself as such. As the science of such self-determination, the Science of Logic, the science par excellence, cannot, like other sciences, begin with any kind of presupposition (Hegel 2012, 43). After all, this would imply that it must begin from something it cannot itself justify, with a postulate that is not its object but rather what is presupposed by it, and thus

*external* to it – which would imply that it is determined by something external to it and, thus, it is not self-determined (Hegel 2012, 70). It follows that the Science of Logic cannot have in its beginning anything determinate, for to be determinate means precisely to be mediated by something, and thus to presuppose that by means of which it comes to be mediated as something previous to it and, in that sense, external to it. Science of Logic has, thus, to begin with that which presupposes absolutely nothing external to it, and with that which has absolutely no mediation, no relationship with anything external to it; it must, thus, begin with *Being* (Hegel 2012, 70).

This is very important to remark here: as a dialectics of self-relation, Hegel's Science of Logic begins, precisely, with *that which has no relation to something external to it, and thus, with Being*. Its justification for this fact is that one could only scientifically approach the object of the Science of Logic as the science that grounds all thinking (and thus, all being), without being vulnerable to skeptical objections as it would be, if it began with something determinate and, thus, something that presupposes something else. But, in order to begin from something completely indeterminate, and thus with no relationship to anything external to it, the Science of Logic has to begin with that which negates *all determination*, with that which is nothing more than precisely the negation of all determination as such – that is, with what Hegel calls Abstract Negation. Being as such, in other words, is the abstract negation of all determinations, for it *excludes* from itself anything that is determinate, any determination, any mediation as such, being nothing but what is absolutely immediate and has no relationship with anything external to it (Hegel 2012, 81).

However, this beginning, in Hegel's account, is faced with a problem: if Being is to *exclude* all determination from it – if it is to be completely indeterminate in that sense – then all determination must be *external* to it, for it must be *opposed* to all determination. This, however, would mean, precisely, that being is *determinate*; for to be determinate means nothing else than to be opposed to something else and thus constituted by means of this relationship with something *external* to oneself. Indetermination is the determinacy (or quality) of Being (Hegel 2012, 81) – and thus, Being, as the Abstract Negation of all determination, fails to be that which has

absolutely nothing external to it, that which *negates* all determination, since it does not negate its own determination as being *indeterminate*, i.e. as *excluding* all determination and as being opposed to all determination as to something *external* to it.

Thus, in order to fulfill its reality as the negation of all determination, *Being has to negate itself* – that is, it has to *negate its own determination*, which is being indeterminate, and thus become something *determinate* (Hegel 2012, 109). This means, in other words, that *Abstract Negation itself must be negated* – moreover, it must *negate itself*. What, however, does that mean exactly?

As I remarked before, Abstract Negation is the negation which *excludes* each and every determination from itself – in other words, it's a negation constituted by the fact that it makes determinations something external to it, not internal. The negation of such a negation, therefore, would be precisely a negation which *does not exclude from itself that which it negates* – a negation of determination which does not exclude determination from itself. Negating Abstract Negation means negating that negation excludes that which is negated, and thus coming to a form of negation which simultaneously *contains* that which is negated by it, a negation which does not merely annihilate that which is negated by it, which does not exclude the determination it negates as something *external* to it. Such a negation, in Hegel's conception, would be nothing more than *determinate negation*, *Aufhebung*, a negation which *limits*, while at the same time *containing* and *elevating* that which is negated.

By means of this fundamental progress from Abstract Negation to Determinate Negation, however, self-determination will finally be able to fulfill itself as the *Absolute Idea*. For it is the need of overcoming each and every determination, insofar as it excludes its other, that will lead from Being to the series of determinations, each of which will be the object of Determinate Negation, insofar as they are still determinations that exclude something from themselves and thus fail to satisfy the concept of self-determination at the basis of the Science of Logic<sup>10</sup>. The Absolute Idea

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<sup>10</sup> For they fail to negate the determinateness of the beginning of being indeterminate, i.e. of excluding determinations from them.

is nothing but the point in which, by negating all determination *insofar as it excludes from itself its opposite*, i.e. insofar as it is an abstract negation, the negation of the abstractness of the beginning (i.e. the fact that it excludes determination) is fulfilled. This means that *no determination is external to self-determination as such*, for it realizes itself as the negation of all determination that, however, *includes* determination within itself, and thus has nothing *external* to it that determines itself (Hegel 2012, 836). The only way to properly conceive of self-determination, according to Hegel, is thus to conceive of it as a negation of all external determination that, however, contains external determination within itself, i.e. as a *moment* of self-determination itself. Only thus can self-determination be truly accomplished: as being itself in the other, as a self-determination that negates any relation to something truly other, not by excluding other-relation from itself, but rather by making it only a moment *internal to self-relation* (Hegel 2012, 842). In other words, other-relation can only be dialectically comprehended as an internal moment of self-relation.

#### 6. *Vacuity and the Two Truths: Other-relation and Co-dependence in Nāgārjuna's Philosophy*

In his arguably most fundamental work, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Garfield 1995), Nāgārjuna argues that everything is *empty*, *śūnya*. But what does it mean to say that something is empty?

Here, it is important to note that the notion of emptiness, *śūnyatā*, in Nāgārjuna, is a *fundamentally transitive notion* (as it could not be different in an other-relation dialectics): to be empty is to be empty of *something*. More specifically, to be empty is to be empty of *essence* or *own being* (*svabhāva*), of an existence that is comprised of being completely independent of the existence of other things and of subsisting entirely on one's own. Things are what they are only *insofar as they are in a relationship with something other than them*, and thus they are, *from the very beginning, unconceivable on their own*, as something that subsists by itself or that determines itself. In other words: things lack an essential *Self* (*ātman*) (Garfield 1995, 221).

Interestingly enough, this has methodological consequences for Nāgārjuna's approach in *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. For, if things have no *self*, rather than saying what things *are*, Nāgārjuna has to show that they are *not* essences; thus, the chapters of his book are dedicated to showing, from each thing one could think that could be an essence, that it actually can only be conceived of in its relationship to something else, and thus it cannot be the essence either of itself or of anything else. Nāgārjuna's argumentation thus follows a path in which he attempts to show that, as long as we conceive of something as having an essence, one actually cannot conceive it in any of the four possible ways: neither as being, nor as not-being, nor as both being and not-being and nor by neither being nor not-being (Nāgārjuna 1995, 105). His argumentation, thus, is purely destructive, a *reductio ad absurdum* of all attempts of conceiving of something as being or as having an essence, by showing that, as soon as someone tries to conceive of something as having an essence – say, for instance, of movement – one falls into contradiction and is inevitably led to admit that which one considers as being or having an essence can only be conceived by means of a relationship – such as the movement cannot be conceived apart from that which moves, and vice-versa – and thus, is *empty* (Garfield 1995, 221).

One could argue, however, that, ultimately, Nāgārjuna contradicts himself; for, if he is saying that *everything* is empty, is he not saying that *emptiness* is the very essence of things, that which everything is and that is their fundamental, underlying reality that exists independently of them? Wouldn't this emptiness – and therefore nothingness – be the only fundamental reality, from which a sort of ontological nihilism would follow, for nothing could be said to ultimately exist? This is an objection that Nāgārjuna himself addresses in chapter 24 of the *Verses of the Middle Way*, the two truths of Buddhism (Garfield 1995, 67-72). There, Nāgārjuna distinguishes between conventional truth and ultimate truth. According to our interpretation of this distinction<sup>11</sup>, one could formulate it as follows: conventional truth regards the fact that things *exist conventionally*, that is, exist *insofar as they are in a*

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<sup>11</sup> We exposed in more detail our interpretation of the Two Truths in Nāgārjuna in Machado 2016. Regarding this topic see also Ferraro 2013a, 2013b and 2014; Garfield 2009; Garfield, Siderits 2013.

*relationship to each other* (being a convention in the sense that they are what they are only as they are conceived in a relationship). On the other hand, ultimate truth regards the fact that things *do not exist essentially*, i.e. that things have no subsistence outside their relationship to each other, outside of their *codependent-origination*.

However, the twist of this argumentation lies on the fact that even emptiness itself – even this ultimate truth – does not exist apart from any relationship; *emptiness is, itself, empty*, or, in other words, *emptiness itself is conventional*, i.e., exists only insofar as it is the *emptiness of something*, and thus only insofar as it is related to that of which it is emptiness, *to something other than itself*. Or, in Nāgārjuna’s words: “Whatever is dependently co-arisen/That is explained to be emptiness/That, being a dependent designation/Is itself the middle way” (Garfield 1995, 69). Even emptiness, as underlying the fact that nothing exists apart from its relationship to its other, exists only insofar as it is related to something else, i.e. to that of which it is emptiness. Thus, conventional truth and ultimate truth are, ultimately, only two different ways of describing one same, conventional (i.e. relational) reality: things *exist* only insofar as they stand in a relationship of codependent origination to each other, and do not exist insofar as they are conceived of as essences that exist apart from this relationship.

Other-relation, i.e. *emptiness* or codependent origination is itself only possible and grounded by other-relation, i.e. by its relation to the things of which it is the relation of (to the things of which it is the emptiness of). Other-relation is not, ultimately, grounded in any kind of self-relation, of a self, of an essence or an *own being* which would have nothing external to it. On the contrary, to the extent that something can be said to exist and to have a self, this self cannot be any *ultimate* self, anything that exists *absolutely* on its own, but rather what it is, is defined always by the relationship it is in with something *other*. Insofar as it has an existence of its own which is different than the existence of its opposite, each and every thing has only this existence insofar as it simultaneously relates to something which is external to it and cannot be reduced to it (or to its self-relation).

Thus, in other-relation dialectics, there is no dialectical conception of self-relation as *absolute* self-relation. For, according to other-relation dialectics, it is

impossible to conceive of a thing's relation to its opposite if it is something that exists *absolutely* on its own, that is, in its *self-relation*. On the contrary, this relationship to its opposite is only possible insofar as everything, *from the very beginning*, is constituted by its relationship to its other, by its relationship to something external.

### 7. Nishida's Absolute Dialectics as an Attempt to Putting Self and Other-relation Dialectics Together

To summarize what I exposed, we could say the following: self-relation dialectics grounds other-relation in self-relation, taking as its starting point self-relation; other-relation dialectics, on the other hand, grounds self-relation in other-relation, and takes as its starting point other-relation. Thus, each type of dialectics takes one kind of relation as granted, grounding the other kind of relation in it and assuming that it is the only one by means of which one can truly approach the relation between opposites, and more specifically between self and other, dialectically. However, for many reasons which cannot be deeper explored in this article, one could say that both dialectics fail to think of self and other in a *fully* dialectical way, because they fail to conceive of one or another kind of relationship as being *in itself* dialectical, and thus exclude something from their dialectics as something that can be thought of dialectically. For self-relation dialectics, there is no way to conceive of other-relation *in itself* (that is, without being grounded in self-relation) as dialectical; for other-relation dialectics, there is no way of thinking of self-relation *in itself* (that is, without being grounded in other-relation) as dialectical. Both dialectics maintain an opposition between dialectical and non-dialectical which is not, itself, *dialectically* resolved. Thus, dialectics, if it is to fulfill its intent of overcoming oppositions and fully relating self and other dialectically, must also overcome the opposition between self and other-relation, the opposition between dialectical and non-dialectical. To do so, it must show that no kind of relation is, *in itself, absolutely non-dialectical*. Rather, both self-relation and other-relation are in themselves, and in their relationship to each other, *fundamentally dialectical*.



This project of conceiving of both self-relation and other-relation as being dialectical and as standing in a dialectical relationship, however, seems to us to be what is behind Nishida's dialectical philosophy, most notably in his late philosophy<sup>12</sup>. In fact, this attempt at reconciling both kinds of dialectics becomes clearer as Nishida moves further into his philosophy and reaches his late period, particularly in his text *Self-identity and continuity of the world* (Nishida 2011), where he tries to conceive in a fully dialectical way of the relationship between the one and the many – which, according to our reading, is none other than the relationship between self-relation and other-relation. For, according to Nishida:

That an individual is completely and totally individual means that he completely and totally determines himself and is not determined by anything other [that is, the individual is self-relation]. That the universal is completely and totally universal means that it completely determines the individuals and contains the individuals or at least mediates them under each other [that is, the universal is the other-relation] (Nishida 2011, 57).

Since the individual and the universal are exactly contradictory to each other, to think of them simultaneously can only mean to think of them in a contradictory unit. This is why Nishida conceives of their relationship as a relationship of *contradictory self-identity*, which “cannot be neither an individual that unites everything in the direction of individual determination, nor the universal that includes everything in the direction of the universal determination” (Nishida 2011, 59). Thus, there must be a “determination without determinant”, or a “determination of the nothing” (Nishida 2011, 59), a place (“the world”), in other words, where neither the individual (and thus self-relation) determines whole and completely the universal (the other-relation) nor the universal (the other-relation) determines whole and completely the individual (self-relation). Rather, in this place, individual and universal determine each other reciprocally, they are dependent on each other as the

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<sup>12</sup> In this, I agree with Matsumaru, who claims that “the logic of place (...) brings together the logic of the Soku-hi and Hegel's Dialectic (Matsumaru 2014, 97).

limit of each other's determination. The determination of the universal, in its other-relation, comes at its extreme, at its limit, to self-relation, and the determination of the individual, the self-relation, comes at its extreme, at its limit, to other relation<sup>13</sup> – only by thinking the relationship of individual and universal, of (in our terms) self-relation and other relation can one, according to Nishida, speak of an absolute dialectics.

However, that relationship requires, precisely, the place or the world, thought of as *absolute nothingness*, as the determination without determinant that allows for both individual and universal to determine each other reciprocally, for it is by means of that reciprocal determination that the place, the world, *determines itself* and develops itself in a processual and historical manner (Nishida 2011, 72). It's the place or the world, thus, that, in its self-determination, puts both self-relation and other-relation, individual and universal, in a reciprocal, dialectical relationship, and thus makes it possible to think of both of them dialectically. Thus, as Heisig puts it, “[t]he common ground of self and world (...) [is] reality as the locus of absolute nothingness”, absolute nothingness that is, indeed, the “all-encompassing locus of reality” (Heisig 2001, 80).

As one could notice based on our formulation of the problem of self and other-relation dialectics, it is possible to wonder if Nishida did not, by means of his notion of *self-determination* of place, ultimately still conceive of his dialectics as a dialectics of self-relation. A dialectics, in other words, which has as its ultimate ground some sort of self-relationship, some kind of being which has nothing external to it and no relationship to anything external to it, by means of which it would be mediated. Which is why one could say that, ultimately, Nishida fails to provide a dialectic that truly brings self and other-dialectics together, without giving priority to one or another, even if in the form of the overarching world that determines itself by means of both self and other-dialectics<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> “Just as the universal is, at its outermost end, the individual, so is the individual, at its outermost end, the universal” (Nishida 2011, 86).

<sup>14</sup> In fact, this is also why I believe my interpretation of the relationship between Hegelian and Mahayana dialectics here is slightly different from Krummel's. While I also hold that Mahayana or here, more specifically, Nagarjunian dialectics, are different from Hegelian dialectics in the sense of formulating

### 8. Complementing Nishida with Mall's *Orthafte Ortlösigkeit*

It is with this in mind that I believe, however, it to be possible to overcome the shortcomings of Nishida's attempt at bringing self and other-relationship dialectics by resorting to Mall's concept of *orthafte Ortlösigkeit*, "situated unsituatedness", a concept one could use to think about any intercultural phenomena in general, and that Mall uses in particular to think about philosophy as an intercultural phenomenon. According to Mall (2006), *orthafte Ortlösigkeit* refers to something that, while occurring in a determinate, historical context, is able, at the same time, to go beyond that context, and to be comprehensible and practicable in other contexts than this one in which it currently takes place. What allows us to understand philosophy done in Ancient Greece and in India as being both philosophies is, in that context, the fact that, while the activity of doing philosophy takes a specific determination within a context, for instance India or Ancient Greece, there is something in this activity that is not a mere product of its context and is not reducible to it – for instance, the practice of *philosophy as a way of life*, as Hadot (2004) would put it, and,

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a non-dualism that does not presuppose a substantial unity, Krummel seems to fall short of this distinction when he claims that, in both dialectics, reality is *self-determining*. For to claim that reality *determines itself* is to fall back again into the Hegelian model of dialectics, since it is to claim that whatever happens is the result of some unified reality, some "whole" *determining itself*, and that there is *nothing outside from this self-determination*. I believe Krummel is led to that conclusion due to the fact that he assumes that, both in Hegelian and in Mahayana dialectics, the point is to grasp the "whole" in non-dualistic terms, where Hegelian dialectics aims to grasp that whole through the concept and Mahayana dialectics through non-conceptual experience. However, how can one talk about *whole*, and still claim that Mahayana dialectics must be comprehended in terms of "neither monism nor dualism", in such a way that distinguishes it from Hegelian monism? The moment one claims there is a reality, a whole that determines itself, one has already fallen back into a monistic point of view, independently of whether one grasps this whole through the concept or through experience. The epistemology might be different, but the ontology remains one of *substantial monism*, even if the *structure* of that monism is conceived dialectically (Krummel 2015, 30-48). This is why we believe that our definition of dialectics, which considers not the *whole*, but rather the *common reality* by means of which opposites relate, is better suited to understand the difference between Hegelian and Mahayana dialectics. While it is true that, as dialectics, both conceive of a *common* reality that relates opposites, in Hegelian dialectics, this common reality is thought of precisely as the *whole*, i.e., as the *self-determining reality* (which is just another name for *substance*). In Mahayana dialectics, however, the common reality *is not a whole*, but rather, is the relation between opposites that are irreducible both to each other and to the relationship itself (this would be, in fact, our understanding of "the emptiness of emptiness"), which is why it would be, such as Han cleverly notes in his *Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*, a mistake to think about emptiness as *a cause* (Han 2019).

as Hadot himself would recognize, is not exclusive to Ancient Greece, but can also be found in India and China (Hadot 2004, 139-212, 249-330). Something that, while always taking place within *some* context, is not necessarily tied to just *one* context, and can be practiced in *many different contexts*. Thus, while being, at the same time, *situated* within a historical context, it is, at the same time, something irreducible to it and not limited to it, something that goes beyond any specific situation and is, thus, a sort of *unsituatedness*.

To better understand this, let us consider the example of cooking. It is evident that cooking, whenever it takes place, must take place *at a place*. It is, thus, situated, in the sense that it must happen within a place. However, no one would be inclined to accept that, because cooking can only take place *at a place*, then it follows that it must take place at *only one place*. It is, thus, unsituated, in the sense of not being reducible to any place where cooking happens. Cooking can thus be described both as a situated unsituatedness or, conversely, as unsituated situatedness – in fact, Mall himself plays with the alternation between subject and adjective, in a way that – not coincidentally, is closely reminiscent of Nishida’s understanding of the *soku*, of the simultaneity to think the relationship between the universal and the individual. In fact, it is not coincidental either that, both in Nishida and in Mall, the very concept of place as a central role, for what is at stake for both of them is to think how a *concrete reality*, such as that of the individual, is at the same time *constitutively connected* to something that takes us beyond the contextual limitations of that reality.

How this connects, however, with our attempt of dealing with Nishida’s shortcomings in his bringing together of self and other-relation dialectics? Nishida believed that this bringing together could only be done by means of a “place” conceived as a “world”, i.e., as something that *encompasses* both self and Other. However, as I hope that has become clear this far, anything that *encompasses* already, precisely because of that, takes the form of a *self*, and thus, conceived as the basis of a dialectics, can only provide us with *self-relation* dialectics. If however, we conceive of this place not as an all-encompassing world, but rather as a *point of intersection between self and other* – in Mall’s terms, as a *Überlappung* (Mall 2006, 39-45), this difficulty seems to be overcome. Self-dialectics and other-dialectics, self and other

can only be dialectically mediated by each other if they both have a necessary relationship but cannot be reduced to each other. That can only happen, however, if they are neither reducible to their relationship, to a “common ground” as something that encompasses them both, nor to what they are apart from each other, to what they do not have in common. This is only possible, however, or so it seems to us, by understanding this relationship, this “place” in which they are both brought together, as an *orthafte Ortlösigkeit*, i.e., as a commonality that does not exist apart from that from which it is a commonality (it must be “situated” within them), but which, at the same time, goes beyond that from which it is a commonality, allowing us to move beyond the place where it is situated to another place distinct from it. In other words: to allow for a dialectical mediation between self and other-relation dialectics, the “place” within which that mediation must occur cannot be an all-encompassing place, but rather, a place that is simultaneously *within and without from self and Other* – a place, thus, that should be understood as a sort of *situated unsituatedness* or as an *unsituated situatedness* (and the ambivalence of the notion could not be more perfect for the context of our discussion).

It is this understanding of place that relates self and other that, I believe, better apprehends the fundamental idea that Nishida presents with his expression of a “determination without determinant”, and even of his idea of *soku*, of simultaneity. For when the relationship between self and other is conceived as this *orthafte Ortlösigkeit*, not only self and other are *truly* and *equally* simultaneous to each other, on the *same level*, with none of the terms encompassing the other, but also there is no *one* ground, either in the self or in the other, as the “determinant” of that relationship, and so the relationship itself is not reducible to either self or the other, so that we can call it, indeed, a “determination without determinant”. And only in this way do we conceive of self and other as dialectically related in a way that, at the same time, dialectically mediates between self-relation and other-relation dialectics. For, conceived this way, both self and other engender dialectically each other, so that there is no ultimate ground of this engendering either in the self or in the other. They both can provide a basis by means of which one can relate and transit to their opposite, without having to be understood as the single ground by means of which

this dialectical movement occurs, for they do so by means of a shared communality that is a “determination without determinant”, that is, something that is shared by the opposites without, however, having a *single principle* responsible for this shared communality.

### 9. *Dialectics as a Method for Intercultural Philosophy*

Thus, I believe that, conceiving of dialectics in this way – as a dialectic that relates self and other by mediating between self-relation and other-relation dialectics – one can provide a very useful method for doing intercultural philosophy. For, by means of this dialectic, one can conceive *ontologically* both the self and the other in such a way that does not make it *a priori* impossible to have any fruitful dialogue with a tradition different than our own. Quite the contrary, through this dialectic, one is rather led to conceive of self and other as *ontologically entangled*, while, at the same time, *irreducible to each other*, and thus, encourages the establishment of non-reductive dialogues between self and other. With this understanding of self and other provided by these dialectics, whenever we are confronted with a philosophical question, from which the tradition we belong has one understanding, and another tradition has a different understanding, we do not have to believe that, in order for dialogue to be possible, their understanding of this question has to be essentially identical to ours. On the other hand, we also do not have to believe that any attempt at comprehending their understanding of the question at hand is possible, for we see that, even though our understandings are different, they must also have something in common – even if that thing in common is only *the very question itself* – that allows us to transit from our understanding to theirs. And we do not have to understand this *common basis* as the *essence* of either of those views (and thus do not fall into the traps of identity), but rather, as point of intersection between them that neither reduces those different traditions to the point they share in common, nor is itself reducible to any of these traditions that share it. Commonality is, here, not an essence, but a “determination without determinant”. Thus, to do intercultural philosophy in that sense means to search for the (non-essential) commonalities between different traditions, in order to

understand each of them in their differences and specificity, and, through this understanding, gain new insights into the shared commonalities. It is what one shares with the other that, at same time, allows one to gain a new understanding of oneself, precisely because it is what allows one to see that one's shared communality is not one's alone, and does not have to be coupled necessarily only to one's current way of life and to one's current way of understanding this common point.

This method, I believe, is capable of addressing some of the issues that appear in some of the most well disseminated understandings of intercultural philosophy today – including that of Mall. In the next session, I will discuss how the dialectical method of doing intercultural philosophy provides answers to some of the difficulties or issues within other ways of conceiving intercultural philosophy, particularly, in Mall's and Wimmer's case.

#### 10. *Beyond Perennial Philosophy: A critique of Mall's Understanding of Orthaftige Ortlösigkeit*

Mall's concept of *orthafte Ortlösigkeit* is of course, central, to our proposed methodology, insofar as it provides a conceptual framework through which one can consequently think about *non-essential commonalities* which make intercultural philosophical dialogue possible. Yet, Mall himself, when discussing his understanding of what makes philosophy intercultural, quite often resorts to the idea of "Perennial Philosophy" (Mall 2006, 159-166). It is our understanding, however, that the idea of perennial philosophy is at odds with the very notion of *orthafte Ortlösigkeit*, for it seems to assume that there is one common essence shared by all different philosophies, even if that essence is to be located at the questions philosophy poses, and not at the answer each particular philosophy provides. Moreover, this leads us dangerously close to the assumption that what makes us capable of understanding philosophies of different cultures than ours is that we are all doing *essentially the same thing*, and thus, runs the risk of projecting identities into other ways of doing and understanding philosophy. If there are many different philosophies, this is due not only to the fact that different cultures are different instances of one and the

same way of doing philosophy, but rather, because there are *also many different ways of doing philosophy* (for instance as a way of life, in Hadotian terms, or as a theoretical discourse, as a critique of language and so on), although those different ways often *intersect* with one another. In that sense, I believe that the most appropriate understanding of *orthafte Ortlösigkeit* would not be through the idea of Perennial Philosophy, but rather through the Wittgensteinian idea of “family resemblance”. In fact, Mall himself uses this idea to explain the nature of philosophy as an intercultural phenomenon (Mall 2016, 69) – however, as I want to argue, thinking philosophy through the idea of “family resemblance” is incompatible with thinking it in terms of *one* Perennial Philosophy which defines essentially what philosophy is and that, thus, cannot just be one *commonality* between different philosophies, but rather, has to be thought of as their *essence*. The idea of family resemblance points out, quite the contrary, precisely to the fact that different members of a family share common traits with one another, but there is *no one essential trait* that has to be shared by them all. Thus, while Mall’s understanding of *orthafte Ortlösigkeit* is not always consistent with the perspective of non-essential commonalities, due to the way he associates it with the idea of Perennial Philosophy, our intercultural dialectical method provides a clear logical foundation not only to think non-essential commonalities, but to rule out any possibility of turning any of those commonalities into a sort of all-encompassing essence that we would, thus, project onto all philosophies and all ways of doing philosophy.

### 11. *Beyond Universality: A Critique of Wimmer’s Conception of Polylog*

Through our dialectical intercultural method, I believe we can also overcome some of what I believe to be the shortcomings of Wimmer’s understanding of intercultural philosophy in terms of Polylog. For, although Wimmer points out to the necessity of overcoming not only Eurocentrism, but any sort of centrisms, he still understands that the search for universality must be at the core of philosophical activity. However, it seems very difficult to separate the idea of universality from any



sort of centrism, if we understand by universality what Wimmer seems to, when he says that

philosophers from whatever regional background, tradition or cultural heritage have to forget about colonialism, racism or whatever hegemonic discriminations when they intend to do philosophy together. That is, when they want to work together with their respective concepts, methods and knowledge in order to solve questions relevant to all human beings, intending results that could be valid for all of humankind. This intent of universality is inherent to philosophy and thus to intercultural philosophy as well (Wimmer 2013, 124).

This understanding of intercultural philosophy, tied with a certain understanding of universality, seems problematic to us on several accounts. For it seems to consider that the only problems that are philosophically relevant are those problems that are shared *by all cultures and by all of humanity*. Somehow, this is not so distant from Mall's own understanding of intercultural philosophy in terms of Perennial Philosophy; and, just like it, faces similar problems. For while we can and should assume that some philosophical questions are *commonalities* shared by different philosophical traditions, if we assume that *all philosophical questions* are shared equally by all traditions, then we run the risk of conceiving of philosophy in essentialist terms. Thus, we run the risk of projecting some questions as if they necessarily had to be relevant to some philosophies, while they are not, or, conversely, concluding that some questions in those traditions are not really philosophical, because they do not belong in this "universal pool" of philosophical questions allegedly shared by all philosophical traditions. This also leads Wimmer to claim, very problematically, that, while occidental philosophers have to learn from post-colonial studies, they have to forget about racism or colonialism when doing "philosophy together"<sup>15</sup>. This is to assume that the only philosophically relevant

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<sup>15</sup> As my critique will show, it seems, however, that occidental philosophers should not only take post-colonial studies seriously, but also decolonial philosophy, such as in the works of Dussel (Dussel 2002) or Maldonado-Torres and others (Bernardino-Costa, Maldonado-Torres, Grosfoguel 2023) in order to truly strive to overcome Eurocentrism.

questions are those that do not implicate experiences that are particular to certain cultures or peoples, such as those of colonialism or racism. However, this seems to inadvertently bring back Eurocentrism all over again; for then, whatever experience is not shared by Europeans, such as the experience of colonialism, becomes philosophically irrelevant. This, however, means precisely taking away from those philosophical traditions some of the most relevant contributions they could bring to philosophical discussion today, since their philosophical stances are often closely connected to the experience of colonial oppression and the philosophical insights brought by it. To think that colonialism or racism should be forgotten when “doing philosophy together” seems to suggest the view according to which colonialism or racism aren’t philosophical issues *per se*, since they are not issues shared by all cultures and all philosophical traditions. This view however, seems to ignore, first that experiences that are not universally shared can bring deep insights into commonly shared issues, and, second, that every philosophy is not only concerned with dealing with universal problems, but also with addressing problems specific to their historical and cultural context. To demand from philosophers that they do not discuss racism and colonialism when working together is to demand that they do not address the problems and necessities of their own context, so that philosophers from colonized countries, for instance, should not concern themselves, by means of their philosophies, to provide solutions to problems specific of their cultural context and that arose due to the experience of colonialism. It is, thus, to propagate Eurocentrism, ignoring that, when Europeans talked about the “universal” in philosophy, they were always, simultaneously trying, through means of this thinking of the “universal”, solve problems that are specific to their context. Moreover, to demand from philosophers that they do not discuss racism or colonialism is, in the case that they come from contexts affected by such issues, to hinder them from showing what the insights gained from the specificity of their contexts can teach us about the commonly shared philosophical issues – such as the very issue of whether there is a true universality or not! It is because of that, I believe, that Wimmer’s conception of intercultural philosophy as a Polylog is not decentralized enough, and falls short,

with its exclusive emphasis on what is (allegedly) universal, of overcoming not only any sort of centrism, but even Eurocentrism itself.

Of course, one could argue, such as Wimmer does, that renouncing universality would imply “the fatal consequence of (...) the limitation of discussion, of criticism and argumentation to limits within the respective – and acknowledged – ‘cultures’” (Wimmer 2013, 199). This, however, seems to us to be a false dichotomy, and one that can be easily overcome by our dialectical method. For it shows that, in order for a truly intercultural and critical dialogue or polylog to be possible, one does not have to presuppose something universally shared across all different traditions, one “essence” or the “universal” that would be present in all of them. Rather, one has only to recognize the presence of shared commonalities between them, which provide background for mutual criticism and reasoned discussion around the commonly shared issues or realities in which the specificities of how each tradition deal with what is commonly shared enriches rather than restricts our understanding of such commonalities. On the other hand, our method also provides grounds for *respecting*, much in the spirit of Mall’s intercultural approach, the irreducibility and specificity of each philosophical tradition, since it also recognizes that no tradition is reducible to the commonalities they share with other traditions, and thus always have characteristics that are specific to them and no less constitutive of them than their commonalities with other traditions.

In other words, I believe our dialectical method for intercultural philosophy contributes to overcome a common prejudice in philosophy, that philosophical knowledge concerns itself only with the universal, and not with the particular<sup>16</sup>, by showing that *non-essential commonalities*, while central to intercultural dialogue, should not be taken as that which should be exclusively considered in philosophical discussions. Rather, those commonalities should be taken as that which allows us to move from them to the *specificity of each tradition*, in such a way that both contributes

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<sup>16</sup> A prejudice, we believe, that has its roots itself in a sort of Eurocentrism, that falsifies the role the universal is supposed to have not only in non-western philosophies, but in the history of so called “Western” philosophy itself, since one should not take for granted that, in that history, the universal was always taken to be more philosophically relevant than the particular, such as the debate around nominalism and realism regarding universals in Medieval Philosophy shows.

to dealing with problems specific to that tradition and provides us with *new insights into those very shared commonalities*. The dialectical understanding of non-essential commonalities provided by our method allows, thus, both for critical polylog between different traditions and recognition and respect of the specificity of each philosophical tradition and context.

## 12. Final Remarks

Intercultural Philosophy, as a way of doing philosophy that both recognizes the intercultural nature of how philosophy has been done throughout history and attempts to actively develop philosophical reflection and practice through intercultural dialogue, has long faced the problem of how to recognize the specificity of each cultural context while not falling back to a sort of relativism that renders critical dialogue impossible. I hope to have shown that, through our dialectical approach, one can do justice not only to the fact that the Other always shares something in common with ourselves, but also to the fact that whatever commonalities we share with them are never meant to suppress our differences, but rather elucidate them. Elucidation which, in its turn, sheds new light on and deepens our understanding of those very shared commonalities between ourselves and the other, allowing us to develop our philosophical perspectives through a dialogue that both promotes critical thinking and recognizes the value and the irreducibility of each cultural context and philosophical tradition<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> A further step of our work, which could not yet be taken in this paper, would be to connect the method proposed here with Dussel's analectics, in such a way that the method itself could possibly be renamed to "dianalectics", as the method of taking into consideration simultaneously both the self and the other. This, possibility, however, will have to wait for another opportunity.

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