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Čedomil Veljačić and Comparative Philosophy

Remarks on "An Introduction to the Comparative Study of Indian and European Philosophy" by Čedomil Veljačić

Abstract

This article on Čedomil Veljačić (1915–1997) and comparative philosophy, written by his daughter, represents an introductory note to the introduction to Veljačić's doctoral thesis defended at the University of Zagreb in 1962 under the title Komparativno proučavanje indijske i evropske filozofije *(*Comparative Investigation of Indian and European Philosophy*), which was never published. Today, more than fifty years after, this introduction is worth revisiting not only in order to attempt placing a bookend on Veljačić's life, but also to assess his interaction with contemporary philosophical currents.*

Keywords

comparative philosophy, comparative methodology, philosophical doxography

Čedomil Veljačić (1915–1997) appeared on the Yugoslav cultural scene in the 1950s bringing with him a breath of fresh air with his two volume *Philosophies of the East* in Croatian.[1] The book opened a new possibility of writing and discussing philosophy based on primary classical texts. It was awarded the Matica hrvatska (Matrix Croatica) literary prize. A decade later Veljačić was sent to India on an exchange fellowship to establish Slavic Studies in major Indian universities. He finally abandoned his academic career to ordain in Sri Lanka as a Buddhist monk under the name *Ñāna-jīvako*. In Buddhist tradition *Jīvako* was a Jain doctor who asked the Buddha about vegetarianism, and Veljačić was a vegetarian, inspired by Gandhi and some anthroposophist friends who had established an active vegetarian society in Zagreb. What inspired him to take *Jīvako* as his ordained name was its meaning: *Jīvako* is the Pāli rendition of what in the Slavic version would be *Živko*, someone who respects *life* (= *život*). These were also the days when Boris Pasternak was awarded the Nobel Prize for his *Doctor Zhivago*.

However, Veljačić was inspired by many giants of thought. He published in 1986 a paper on Immanuel Kant in the *Kant-Studien*, under the title "The Ethos of Knowledge in Kantian and in Buddhist Philosophy".[2] The study was

1
Čedomil Veljačić, *Filozofija istočnih naroda I–II*, Matica hrvatska, Zagreb 1958.

2
Bhikkhu Ñānajīvako, "The Ethos of Knowledge in Kantian and in Buddhist Philosophy: Remarks on Some Theses from the Standpo-

based on two Kantian theses that governed Veljačić's life as a philosopher and as a human being until its very end:

1. There are philosophies which cannot even be thought by those who do not live in accordance to their postulates.
2. The discipline of practical reason is a discipline of transcendental logics.

Karl Jaspers states that:

"Three millennia of philosophical history are on the verge of turning into one present. Manifold philosophical concepts hide within themselves a single truth. Hegel was the first to attempt to grasp this unity of thought, but he did this by reducing all of what had happened before him to an introductory level of apprenticeship and partial truth that was meant to reach its peak in his own philosophy.

Now it has become necessary to understand every individual maturation that philosophical thought reaches in each age. In this manner we will be able to grasp its constancy and not assume that we have conquered past achievements, but that we are capable to accept them as our contemporaries. Only when the whole of philosophy becomes our contemporary do we see that its present is also the manifestation of its source […]. Only then can philosophy perceive within the impermanent being that the present and its contemporariness have in their essence that what is always true."[3]

Edmund Husserl's fresh view of *epoché*, as well as Paul Tillich's 'dynamic typology' of religion, all left their indelible marks.

Veljačić's last book *A Buddhist Philosophy of Religion* was published in 1992 under his monastic name – Bhikkhu Ñānajīvako.[4] The chapter on Husserl – "The Meditating Philosopher"[5] – remains its most successful section and the most relevant one to the topic of comparative studies. Let me quote from the introductory paragraph:

"At the outset of the following analysis it may be useful to show through one case of typical misunderstanding how faithfully Husserl had followed the primal Greek intention of the complex and difficult theory of *epoché.* Karl Jaspers, independently of Husserl, in his late but very significant work for the new trends of comparative philosophy, *The Great Philosophers* (*Die Grossen Philosophen I*, Munich 1957, pp. 132–33) insists on the essential difference between ancient and mystical 'experiences in meditation' and modern methods of 'suspension' (*epoché*). In doing so he focuses on the transcendental analysis of the subject-object relationship as expounded by Martin Heidegger, one of Husserl's most eminent disciples. In order to re-enforce this very clear explanation of East-West differences, Jaspers refers to 'Buddha's doctrine of redemption by insight': 'It springs from experience in the transformation of consciousness and the stages of meditation. […] Modern science and philosophical speculation remain within our given forms of consciousness […] whereas it may be said that philosophy takes consciousness itself in hand to raise it up to higher forms through exercises in meditation.' Husserl must have been aware of the likelihood of such misunderstandings, so typical of modern science and the restrictions it imposes due to its prejudices. He was most emphatic in the introduction to his main work (Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*, section 26) stating the difficulty of introducing a science of phenomena which lies far removed from our ordinary thinking […] so extraordinarily difficult."[6]

* * *

This paper is an introduction to Veljačić's doctoral thesis defended at the University of Zagreb in 1962 under the title *Komparativno proučavanje indijske i evropske filozofije* (*Comparative Investigation of Indian and European Philosophy*), which was never published. Today, more than fifty years after, this introduction is worth revisiting not only in order to attempt placing a bookend on Veljačić's life, but also to assess his interaction with contemporary philosophical currents.

This brief summary on the course of Veljačić's life and opus may remind scholars as well as intentioned humanists that doxography has the capacity to awaken, inspire and also assess the present state of a discipline.

"An Introduction to the Comparative Study of Indian and European Philosophy" throws a very elegant gauntlet at Western cultural traditions in the form of philosophical doxography. It raises a number of caveats and itself becomes a working example of how these could be addressed and used as antidotes for maladies that are prone to befall cultural humanist traditions of any time and place.

At this juncture one cannot avoid posing an evident question: What was the spark that Veljačić ignited in the Yugoslav youth of the 1970s, on the eve of the country's fragmentation? On a greater scale, one could wonder if there is a possibility of making its perceived positive influence a global one.

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* offers this terse description of doxography:

"The term 'doxography' has come to be applied in a much larger sense than seems to have been intended by its creator Hermann Diels. […] Consequently, doxography in the narrower sense […] is: the normally very brief presentation according to theme, or subject, of contrasting […] tenets in natural philosophy […], which in itself fails to provide a decisive answer to the issue involved although it may assist you to find a way out. […] Finally, it should be pointed out that doxographic works are a sort of tools. They constitute a type of secondary literature of a fluid unstable character, both as to form and as to contents."[7]

Veljačić, by discussing early Vedic literature and its portrayal of first origins, introduced the "fluid and unstable character" of such tools and aptly clarified the concept of 'process' and duration as brought forth by Henri Bergson's *L'Évolution créatrice* and Alfred North Whitehead's discussions of process. This Veljačić did in his two volume *Crossroads of Asian Philosophies* in Croatian,[8] placing it within the discourse of early Vedic traditions. He defined comparative philosophy as an "organon" of the philosophy of culture.

The purpose of this very brief glance thrown at doxography within the above fluid perimeters leaves us with an awareness that the discipline is still somewhat holding on to the "narrow" parameters of the Ionian shores and the rigidity of "instructionalism" – as the Muslim philosopher of the eleventh century, Al-Ghazali, would have worded it – thrown along the pathways of humanity's cultural traditions. Veljačić's subtle rebuke is also felt in discussing contemporary philosophical "trends" such as positivist philosophy and dialectic materialism by stating the strength of such methods as lying in the differences that are brought to light, the dangers thus remain implied and evident.

int of European Philosophy", Kant-Studien, 77 (1986), pp. 59–83, doi: https://doi.org/10.1515/kant.1986.77.1-4.59.

3
Karl Jaspers, *Der philosophische Glaube*, Piper, München 1951, pp. 130–131.

4
Bhikkhu Ñānajīvako, *A Buddhist Philosophy of Religion*, International Translation Institute, Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, Burlingame, CA 1992.

5
Ibid., pp. 117–134.

6
Ibid., p. 117.

7
Jaap Mansfeld, "Doxography of Ancient Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/doxography-ancient/.

8
Čedomil Veljačić, *Razmeđa azijskih filozofija* I–II, Sveučilišna naklada Liber, Zagreb 1978.

The above quote from Veljačić's analysis of a misunderstanding regarding Husserl in *A Buddhist Philosophy of Religion* shed further clarity on comparative methodologies and on his life as a philosopher by the manner it introduces the concept of refraining from judgment.

It still remains to be seen whether the work of Čedomil Veljačić, which intuitively influenced the Yugoslav youth in the 1970s, can find its way into the more sober approach to this "new way of looking at things, one that contrasts at every point with the *natural attitude* of experience and thought".[9]

Veljačić reminded his readers of the "aristocratic" and even "ascetic" character of Husserl's eidetic method (the method of "seeing" essences) and that it was often criticized with a negative intention. Is it time to suspend that judgment as well?

Speaking from a humanist point of view coming from someone who is not a scholar of philosophy and its contemporary noble attempts, but who is attempting to create within the grounds of a Buddhist monastery placed in Mendocino, California (a university based on primary classical texts collected throughout the world and allotted equal space in order to serve as a constructive global humanist educational foundation), I remain an optimist.

Snježana Veljačić-Akpınar

Čedomil Veljačić i komparativna filozofija

Sažetak

Ovaj članak o Čedomilu Veljačiću (1915.–1997.) i komparativnoj filozofiji, koji je napisala njegova kćerka, predstavlja uvodnu bilješku uz uvod Veljačićeve doktorske disertacije koja je obranjena na Sveučilištu u Zagrebu 1962. godine pod naslovom Komparativno proučavanje indijske i evropske filozofije *i nikad nije objavljena. Danas, više od pedeset godina nakon toga, vrijedi nanovo podsjetiti na ovaj uvod, ne samo da bismo, na neki način, stavili podupirač za knjige na Veljačićev život, nego i da bismo razmotrili njegovu interakciju sa suvremenim filozofskim tokovima.*

Ključne riječi

komparativna filozofija, komparativna metodologija, filozofska doksografija

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Čedomil Veljačić und komparative Philosophie

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel über Čedomil Veljačić (1915–1997) und die komparative Philosophie, verfasst von seiner Tochter, stellt eine einleitende Notiz zur Einführung in Veljačić' Doktorarbeit dar, die an der Universität in Zagreb im Jahre 1962 unter dem Titel Komparativno proučavanje indijske i evropske filozofije *(*Komparative Erforschung der indischen und europäischen Philosophie*) verteidigt und niemals veröffentlicht wurde. Heute, mehr als fünfzig Jahre später, ist diese Einführung einen erneuten Rückblick wert, nicht nur um zu versuchen, eine Buchstütze an Veljačić' Leben zu legen, sondern auch um dessen Interaktion mit zeitgenössischen philosophischen Strömungen zu beurteilen.*

Schlüsselwörter

komparative Philosophie, komparative Methodologie, philosophische Doxografie

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Čedomil Veljačić et la philosophie comparée

Résumé

Cet article, qui porte sur Čedomil Veljačić (1915–1997) et sur la philosophie comparée, a été rédigé par sa fille et présente une note introductive à la thèse de doctorat de Veljačić ainsi que l'introduction de cette même thèse, défendue à l'Université de Zagreb en 1962 sous le titre de Komparativno proučavanje indijske i evropske filozofije *(*Une étude comparée entre philosophie indienne et européenne*), mais jamais publiée. Aujourd'hui, plus de cinquante ans plus tard, il convient de rappeler la valeur de cette introduction, non pas uniquement dans le but de parachever les livres sur la vie de Veljačić, mais également pour observer comment cette introduction entre en interaction avec les courants philosophiques contemporains.*

Mots-clés

philosophie comparée, méthodologie comparée, doxographie philosophique

9
J. Mansfeld, "Doxography of Ancient Philosophy".