

**Gadfly of Continental Philosophy:  
On Robert Bernasconi's Critique of Philosophical Eurocentrism**

BRET W. DAVIS

Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, USA

For publication in a 2017 special issue of

*Comparative and Continental Philosophy*, edited by Bret W. Davis

Abstract:

This article examines the critique of philosophical Eurocentrism developed over the past two and a half decades by Robert Bernasconi. The restriction of the moniker “philosophy” to the Western tradition, and the exclusion of non-Western traditions from the field, became the standard view only after the late eighteenth century. Bernasconi critically analyzes this restriction and exclusion and makes a compelling case for its philosophical illegitimacy. After showing how Bernasconi convincingly repudiates the identification—asserted most explicitly by Continental philosophers such as Hegel, Husserl, Levinas, and most recently Rodolphe Gasché—of philosophy with Europe, the present article critically reflects on both the significance and the limits of Bernasconi’s own predominantly “immanent critique” of philosophical Eurocentrism, and ends by calling on philosophers to engage more thoroughly in studies of and dialogues with non-Western traditions of philosophy.

Keywords:

Robert Bernasconi, Eurocentrism, Continental philosophy, Rodolphe Gasché, Levinas, immanent critique

In addition to his often groundbreaking and always illuminating treatments of major European philosophers, over the last quarter of a century Robert Bernasconi has pioneered an exposition of,

and critical reflection on, the ethnocentrism and racism that has pervaded, and continues to pervade, Western philosophy in general and Continental philosophy in particular. Bernasconi has persistently revealed the extent to which ethnocentrism and racism are implicated in the philosophies of not only the usual suspects, such as Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, but also, paradoxically, those figures to whom many turn for their ethical and political moorings, such as Locke, Kant, and the philosopher who most deeply informs Bernasconi's own ethical sensibilities, Levinas. In this article I focus my attention mainly on Bernasconi's critique of the ethnocentrism of Western philosophy, and specifically his critique of Eurocentric definitions of philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

There are others who have preceded or accompanied Bernasconi in this critical endeavor to expose the ethnocentrism of Western philosophy and to thereby expose us to Others and to other traditions of philosophical thought that have been excluded from our philosophy curricula, cannon, conferences, and publication venues. Yet Bernasconi's voice rings louder than most in the hallways of institutions such as Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP) on account of his impeccable credentials as a Continental philosopher. Because he is an eminent insider, his clarion calls to open the doors to the outside are all the more powerful and—in the best sense—irritating. Don't be fooled by his veneer as a mild mannered Englishman! As a philosopher in the lineage of Socrates, Bernasconi unsettles us, challenges us to be more self-critical, and thereby keeps us on the move toward greater wisdom and justice. It is for this reason that I call him the Gadfly of Continental philosophy.

### **The Paradoxical Parochialism of “Philosophy Proper”**

Bernasconi not only challenges us to revise or at least complicate our views of many of our most venerated philosophers, he also encourages us to question our definition—our delimitations—of the discipline of philosophy itself. In “Almost Always More Than Philosophy Proper,” a programmatic essay written for an issue of *Research in Phenomenology* devoted to the topic of “the future of phenomenology,” Bernasconi laments that “until recently phenomenology has tended to restrict its possibilities by accepting the widespread identification of philosophy with

---

<sup>1</sup> On his contributions to critical race theory, see the articles by Zeynep Direk and Charles Mills in this issue.

Western philosophy,” and “has yet to face the challenge ... of whether it can open itself to a plurality of traditions” (Bernasconi 2000, 1, 7). He also suggests that phenomenology is in fact especially able to contribute to this opening up of Western philosophy to the traditions and experiences of Others, insofar as “phenomenology opens onto the excess beyond philosophy from which philosophy draws” (Bernasconi 2000, 6). As he writes elsewhere, “once it is recognized that all philosophies draw on prephilosophical experience, the old dream of a scientific philosophy is *ausgeträumt*, it is exhausted” (Bernasconi 1997a, 191). The “ideas of pre-philosophical and non-philosophical experience” as expounded by post-Husserlian phenomenologists such as Heidegger, Levinas, and, I am sure he would add, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, “open Continental philosophy to the particular value of critiques of Western philosophy written from Africa” and, he would add, other non-Western places (Bernasconi 1997a, 192).

Especially since Hegel, non-Western traditions of thought have been relegated to the realm of “religion” or, at best, designated as proto- or quasi-philosophical in comparison with “philosophy proper,” which is purportedly found only in the West. The phrase “philosophy proper” in fact has tended to allow “one school of philosophy to claim possession of the field,” and has been used *within* the West, for example by Analytic philosophers to exclude or at least marginalize Continental philosophy, as well as to distinguish the West from, and assert its superiority over, the non-West. Yet this phrase comes to have an ironic ring insofar as “a philosophy has lost touch with philosophizing when it becomes the established philosophy or, worse still, the philosophy of the establishment” (Bernasconi 2000, 6–7). According to Bernasconi, just as hermeneutics reminds us of the sources of tradition, phenomenology reminds us of the experiential sources on which we always draw, consciously or unconsciously, when making our rational arguments. “In the face of ‘philosophy proper,’ phenomenology calls for the constant renewal of philosophy” (Bernasconi 2000, 6). Phenomenology at its best, in other words, has served as a gadfly to established traditions of Western philosophy, and, given its propensity to open up to other experiences and the experiences of Others, it may now help call into question the establishment’s definition of philosophy as Western.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising, in this regard, that since the 1920s phenomenology has been avidly appropriated and developed by the Japanese.

In “Philosophy’s Paradoxical Parochialism: The Reinvention of Philosophy as Greek,” Bernasconi points out that the dogma—which still largely shapes our philosophy departments, curricula, and conference programs—that “philosophy proper” begins in ancient Greece and was developed solely in the Western tradition, was actually formulated in the late eighteenth century, when it quite abruptly replaced the longstanding recognition that the ancient Greeks had drawn on Egyptian and other Eastern sources and that different yet recognizably philosophical thinking can be found in India, China, and elsewhere. “What is one to make,” Bernasconi provocatively asks, “of the apparent tension between the alleged universality of reason and the fact that its upholders are so intent on localizing its historical instantiation?” This is what he calls “the paradox of philosophy’s parochialism” (Bernasconi 1997b, 215–216).

Bernasconi concludes his essay, “Heidegger and the Invention of the Western Philosophical Tradition,” with the statement:

It is necessary to expose the tension between, on the one hand, the belief in the universality of reason, truth, and philosophy, and, on the other hand, the parochialism, the specificity of the geographical location of the peoples whose philosophy is alone heard in the vast majority of European and North American philosophy departments. (Bernasconi 1995a, 252)

It could be added: Even were one to maintain that logic—understood as the set of fundamental rules or patterns of rational argumentation—is universal (which is itself a controversial claim that many comparative philosophers would not accept), it cannot be denied that the phenomenological and hermeneutical sources on which philosophical arguments necessarily draw for their content are far more richly varied than those found in the West alone, and so the neglect or refusal to include non-Western cultures and traditions in the field of philosophy is a impoverishing omission as well as an illegitimate exclusion.

### **Disidentifying Philosophy and Europe**

I wish that someone had convinced Bernasconi to write a review of Rodolphe Gasché’s *Europe, or the Infinite Task*, since this book is one of the latest and certainly among the most sophisticated attempts to argue that “European philosophy” is a tautology. I single out this book in part because it is written by an eminent Continental philosopher whose justly celebrated work and whose generous personality I otherwise greatly admire, and in part because it provides a

stark contrast to Bernasconi's work. Orienting himself from Husserl's claim that "Europe is philosophy: the idea of Europe is the idea of philosophy" (Gasché 2009, 17), Gasché argues that it is not just rational—as opposed to mythical—thought that distinguishes and defines Western philosophy, but specifically *self-critical* rational thought. He writes:

Whether or not one holds that this undeniable phenomenon of self-criticism, with the Enlightenment as one of its most prominent historical expressions, has gone far enough, or too far (for indeed, Europe's practice of critically putting itself into question is also a regular subject of lament), such self-criticism is something quite unique that sets Europe apart. Indeed, this culture of reflection and critical self-referentiality allows European discourses to bring violations of Europe's own proclaimed standards to light, just as it allows, in principle, all other voices and opinions to be heard. (Gasché 2009, 7)

And yet, the voices given a hearing in Gasché's text and copious endnotes are almost exclusively Western voices.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere is a non-Western tradition of thought discussed.<sup>4</sup> Is it true that no other traditions have been self-critical? What about the birth of Buddhism as a critical departure from what we now call Hinduism, and what about the great debates both between and within the various schools of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions?<sup>5</sup> What about the critical discussions among the "hundred schools" of ancient Chinese philosophy and the subsequent developments and debates among different philosophers and schools in China and in Japan?<sup>6</sup> And what about other parts of the world, such as Africa and Latin America, where pre-colonial, colonial, and

---

<sup>3</sup> As far as I could tell, the only non-Western authors Gasché cites are one Japanese phenomenologist and two Korean scholars writing on Heidegger and Derrida, each of whom he quotes or critiques in passing (Gasché 2009, 33, 364n3, 394n46).

<sup>4</sup> Franklin Perkins also points out this lacuna in his insightful review article: "no attempt is given [by Gasché] to survey other cultures in order to show that they lack philosophy; the only evidence given is a second hand report of an unidentified Englishman residing in some African country, who comments that the locals take criticism as a personal insult (Gasché 2009, 349)" (Perkins 2011, 38). In response to "the claim that Europe has the 'unique feature of critical self-evaluation' (Gasché 2009, 6)," Perkins, himself an expert in classical Chinese philosophy as well as in early modern Western philosophy, avers: "All the cultures with which I am familiar have engaged in critical self-evaluation" (Perkins 2011, 41), and he provides examples from the Indian and Chinese traditions.

<sup>5</sup> See Gupta 2012, King 1999, Siderits 2007, and Garfield and Edelglass 2009.

<sup>6</sup> See Graham 1989, Chan 1963, and Heisig, Kasulis and Maraldo 2011.

post-colonial philosophers have engaged and continue to engage in modes of philosophical reflection that cannot be reduced to mere offshoots of the Western tradition?<sup>7</sup>

I do not doubt that Western culture and philosophy have especially excelled in many ways, just as other traditions have especially excelled in other ways. But how could one even begin to make a claim to the uniqueness and superiority of the Western tradition without engaging in a serious study of non-Western traditions? Why not stop at the claim that, in the West, and particularly in the figures of twentieth-century European philosophy Gasché discusses, the concept of “Europe” has *at its best* indicated the “infinite task” of the philosophical pursuit of a universality that does justice to singularities? That claim alone, together with the depth of research and rigor of argumentation with which Gasché supports it, gives us plenty of food for thought and discussion. Why go on to claim, without any attempt to examine other traditions, that “it is *only* in Greece that thought became defined as such,” and that “*Only* in Europe does the concept of universality entail the demand for a responsible self-justification and hence a constitutive openness to every other”? (Gasché 2009, 341, emphasis added). Of course a strictly European concept can be found only in Europe. But are there perhaps analogous concepts to be found in other places, and, even more importantly, different ways of thinking that may challenge us to rethink our understanding of such concepts as universality?<sup>8</sup>

How can one even begin to have this conversation unless one listens to other voices and reads other texts, *at least* as they have been translated into a European idiom and transplanted into a Western academic setting? How can one assert the uniqueness and superiority of something without critically comparing it to other things? This seems to me to be more ironic that the supposed irony that “all critique of Europe must ultimately seek its resources in the theory and practice of self-questioning that is itself characteristic of European ‘identity’” (Gasché 2009, 7).

---

<sup>7</sup> See Eze 1998, Masolo 1994, Mendieta 2003, and Vallega 2014. For an anthology that provides an orientation to the various non-Western traditions of philosophy, see Garfield and Edelglass 2011. For a good selection of other relevant sources, see Bernasconi 2003a, 578–580.

<sup>8</sup> The philosopher-sinologist François Jullien provocatively pursues such questions in Jullien 2014; see also Jullien 2000, and Hall and Ames 1995. For one African (Akan) philosopher’s approach to such questions, see Wiredu 1996.

Surely philosophers rooted in other traditions can contribute to critiques of Europe that do not draw solely on European resources, even while, like the Kyoto School philosophers in Japan, they are often more than willing to learn from the West even as they critically respond to it and develop their own thought by drawing on non-Western as well as Western resources (see Davis 2014a, and Davis, Schroeder and Wirth 2011). Indeed, unless and until Western philosophers begin to seriously engage with non-Western traditions, “there will always be a suspicion,” as Bernasconi puts it, “that in spite of the pretensions of Western philosophy toward universalism, for the most part Western philosophers will tend to be more provincial in their interests than, for example, many African, Chinese, Indian or Japanese philosophers, who often have mastery of more than one tradition” (Bernasconi 2003a, 578).

### **Negotiating the Double Bind of Inclusion/Exclusion**

The most straightforward solution to the problem of the heretofore exclusion of non-Western traditions from the discipline of philosophy would seem to be the introduction of non-Western texts and ideas into our philosophy textbooks, classrooms, and conference halls. Bernasconi ends his article, “Ethnicity, Culture, and Philosophy,” with the hopeful suggestion that “the study of philosophy in the universities can be redesigned to offer greater opportunity for studying different traditions” (Bernasconi 2003a, 578). And yet, as Bernasconi himself insightfully points out, this solution is not that simple. In fact, the inclusion of non-Western traditions within the category of philosophy presents us with a dilemma or, as Bernasconi frequently puts it, a “double bind”: other traditions are either *included and distorted* or they are *excluded and dismissed*.<sup>9</sup> For example,

---

<sup>9</sup> Hegel combines these, both distorting other traditions by including them in his teleologically Eurocentric narrative of the march of the history of Spirit from East to West, and dismissing them from the domain of philosophy proper. However, Bernasconi writes, “in spite of this, Hegel was more open to the possibility of Indian philosophy, and more ready to look at the latest research about it, than many of us Western philosophers are even today” (Bernasconi 2003b, 46). Indeed, at times Hegel came close to recognizing the double bind of including versus excluding non-Western traditions in the category of philosophy, such as when he wrote the following in his review of Wilhelm von Humboldt’s essay on the *Bhagavad Gita*: “A word of our language gives us *our* determinate representation of such and such an object and thereby not that of another people, that not only has another language but also other representations.” “Unfortunately,” Bernasconi comments, “Hegel did not apply these considerations to the

when African philosophy takes Western philosophy as its model, then it seems to make no distinctive contribution and so effectively disappears, but when its specificity is emphasized then its credentials to be considered genuine philosophy are put in question and it is dismissed either as religion or as wisdom literature. (Bernasconi 2003a, 572).

A parallel double bind exists in the case of deciding whether to include non-Western traditions in the category of “religion.” Bernasconi writes:

We seem to be faced with a choice between two violences: on the one hand the violence of imposing the category “religion” on practices (and perhaps also beliefs) even though those practices and beliefs do not readily fit the model of religion and are thereby distorted, misjudged, and found wanting in the process, and on the other hand, the violence of refusing the term religion to such practices because that denial can also be regarded as demeaning so long as the still dominant framework of the Western tradition remains intact. (Bernasconi 2009, 222).

Kant claimed that there can be only one religion and, predictably, it was found exclusively in Christianity (Bernasconi 2009, 215). Analogously, philosophy has been thought to be found either only, or at least most purely and properly, in the West. If today we find it more appropriate on the whole to include non-Western traditions in, rather than exclude them from, the categories of philosophy and religion, we must also recognize that there is no quick and easy way out of the double bind: there is a violence of inclusion as well as of violence of exclusion. We must find a path through the horns of this dilemma, and this requires what Bernasconi calls “a constant process of negotiation” (Bernasconi 2009, 223).

Perhaps, as Bernasconi argues in the case of *religions*, we should learn to speak principally in the plural of *philosophies*, where what is meant is not just that there are many specific philosophies within the single genus philosophy, but that the genus, the category of philosophy is itself pluralized; in other words, the different traditions bring with them their own conceptions of what it means to philosophize. “Philosophy” in the singular would then be defined only as the dialogue and debate between these difference philosophies, each with its own suggestion of what it means to do philosophy, and, for that matter, what it means to engage in dialogue and debate. If on the one hand this radical openness to philosophical pluralism does run

---

question of how the term ‘philosophy’ might be translated into Sanskrit, which might have led him to question the form as well as the boundaries of his history of philosophy” (Bernasconi 2003b, 41).



the risk of fracturing the discipline into factional relativism, multiplying the problem we already suffer with the Continental-Analytic divide, on the other hand preemptively closing the doors by way of unilaterally and monologically decreeing a definition of philosophy does more than run the risk of dogmatic and exclusionary absolutism. There is no easy way to fuse our philosophical horizons; there is only the insistent and patient practice of dialogue, which is as much about recognizing alterities as it is about reaching agreements, and which at times entails acknowledging that we cannot understand what the Other is saying. Even so, Bernasconi writes, the statement “‘You don’t know what I’m talking about,’ closes the conversation only if the listener wants to control what is said. It can also elicit further response” and thus reinitiate, rather than bring to an end, the process and practice of dialogue (Bernasconi 1997a, 191; see also Bernasconi 1995b, 192–193).

Henceforth in our philosophical discourses and discussions, we must allow non-Western traditions to contribute not just new concepts, theses, narratives, descriptions and arguments, but also new conceptions of the philosophical endeavor itself. This will appear both new and old to the Western philosophical tradition, which has, after all, repeatedly redefined itself: from the ancient Greeks to twentieth century philosophers such as James, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Deleuze, the very definition of philosophy has been almost incessantly disputed and transformed.<sup>10</sup> Why should not other, non-Western voices be allowed into this dialogue and debate? To be sure, they may challenge previous definitions in ways yet unimagined.<sup>11</sup> So much the better. “Let a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend,” and let no one, not Chairman Mao and not any of our department chairs, impose from above an orthodoxy on this dialogue about what it means to practice philosophy.

### **A Levinasian Critique of Levinas**

In the remainder of this article I would like to reflect on, and raise a question about, Bernasconi’s own modus operandi of doing philosophy. As I have said, for a quarter of a century as a tireless

---

<sup>10</sup> For an anthology of texts that reveal the diversity of definitions of “philosophy” throughout the Western tradition, see Elberfeld 2006.

<sup>11</sup> For example, some may even call for a more holistic practice than the exclusively cerebral intellection practiced in modern Western-style universities. See Davis 2013a.

gadfly he has worked to open up Continental philosophy from within to the outside. He has been aided in this endeavor by, for example, Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics and appeals to "another beginning" of thinking,<sup>12</sup> and above all by Levinas' ethics of alterity. Nevertheless, or rather for that very reason, to my mind one of Bernasconi's most important and impressive articles is one in which he carries out what could be called an *immanent critique* of Levinas. Bernasconi shows how Levinas refuses to extend his unprecedented ethical regard for the face of the Other to an appreciation of the alterity of the Other's ethnicity. "The idea of the West," he writes, "seems to be what protects Levinas from an encounter between cultures at the level of alterity" (Bernasconi 2005, 26).

Levinas in effect mimics Husserl's claim (taken up also, as we have seen, by Gasché) that the West has had a privileged access to the universal, or at least a monopoly on grasping what it means to pursue the "infinite task" of realizing the universal. Levinas claims that the imperialism of Western culture can be overcome only by what he calls "the generosity of Western thought," which is "able to understand the particular cultures, that never understood themselves" (Levinas 1996, 58; see Bernasconi 2005, 14). The particularity of other cultures can purportedly be understood only within the horizon of universality discovered by Europe. Levinas claims that "It is Europe which, alongside of its atrocities, invented the idea of 'deuropeanization;' that is a victory for european generosity." He then sticks his other foot in his mouth: "For me, certainly, the Bible is the model of excellence; but I say that while knowing nothing of Buddhism" (quoted in Bernasconi 2005, 16). Then why say it? Why even think it? Does a statement of ignorance justify dogmatic religio-centrism? What gives Levinas the ability, much less the right, to claim the superiority of his own religious tradition over one that, by his own confession, he knows nothing about?

In several interviews Levinas makes such shockingly ignorant and violently exclusive statements as: "I often say, although it is a dangerous thing to say publically, that humanity

---

<sup>12</sup> I will have to defer to another occasion a treatment of Bernasconi's many illuminating works on Heidegger, from which I have learned much. In the present context, see especially Bernasconi 1995a, 1995c and 1995d. The one point on which I disagree somewhat with Bernasconi concerns the question of the extent to which Heidegger remained incorrigibly Eurocentric (or more specifically German-centric) versus the extent to which he was at times genuinely interested in engaging in, or at least preparing for, dialogue with East Asian thought. After his most ethnocentric period in the 1930s and early 1940s, Heidegger increasingly understands his dialogue with the Greeks as a preparation for what he calls "the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world." See Davis 2013b and 2016.

consists of the Bible and the Greeks. All the rest can be translated: all the rest—all the exotic—is dance” (quoted in Bernasconi 2005, 17). The problem, as Bernasconi points out, is not just that Levinas violently abstracts the contentless face of the Other from the “alterity-content” with which the Other identifies, but also the great irony that Levinas’ own negotiation of the relation between Judaism and Greek philosophy has much to teach us about the double bind, that is to say, about “the twin dangers” of “segregation and integration” or even the impossible “choice between annihilation and assimilation” (Bernasconi 2005, 20). Bernasconi’s point is not to debunk and dismiss Levinas. Rather, he tells us at the outset,

my purpose here is to pose Levinasian questions to Levinas in an effort to develop his thought in a way different from that which can be found in his writings. I shall attempt to do so by focusing attention on the Other as ethnically other in a way that Levinas refuses most strenuously at the very moments when he comes closest to inviting it. (Bernasconi 2005, 6)<sup>13</sup>

This is surely a brilliant and instructive example of philosophizing in the mode of immanent critique.

### **Beyond Immanent Critique**

And yet, Bernasconi himself points out certain limits of, and problems with, restricting the way in which we call into question the Eurocentrism of philosophy to that of immanent critique. He sharply criticizes, for example, Derrida and deconstruction in this regard. “Even deconstruction,” he writes, “which challenges the notions of both the origin and unity of the tradition of Western philosophy ... never ceases to return to it, as if it could not bear to depart from it” (Bernasconi 1997b, 213; see also Bernasconi 1997a, 185). Let me at this point take up the stinger of the gadfly and ask what I fear may be an ungrateful and overly demanding question: Could something similar be said of Bernasconi himself? In other words, does Bernasconi’s critique of

---

<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere Bernasconi writes in regard to Levinas’ Eurocentric slurs: “I have argued that, in spite of such statements of Levinas’s personal attitudes, his philosophy can, after some modification, still provide a basis for cross-cultural encounter” (Bernasconi 1997a, 193n8). I agree that Levinas’ philosophy can contribute much to an ethics of cross-cultural encounter, but I do not think that his Eurocentrism is confined to statements in interviews that reflect merely his “personal attitude.” Indeed Bernasconi has done more than anyone to show how this Eurocentrism affects aspects of Levinas’ philosophical thought itself. For an attempt to bring Levinas into the kind of cross-cultural philosophical dialogue that he himself refused to engage in, see Davis 2014b.

the ethnocentrism and racism of Western philosophy remain in the main an immanent critique? If so, or to the extent that this is so, could all that he has done to open up Western philosophy to other traditions be appropriated back into the claim of Husserl, Gasché, and others that only the West can effectively call into question the West, that philosophical criticism of Eurocentrism is only ever self-criticism?

Now, Bernasconi is surely right that “One cannot say that African philosophy has already taken so much from European philosophy that its critique of the latter is, or at least is indistinguishable from, an internal critique” (Bernasconi 1997a, 192). And if one were to follow his references to African philosophers and their texts, one could undoubtedly find there many ideas and ways of thinking that derive in whole or in part from African traditions. Still, my question is whether any of these ideas and ways of thinking have found their way into the conceptual resources and modus of Bernasconi’s own philosophizing. How has his openness to other traditions changed his own philosophical concepts and conception of philosophy?

Perhaps it has done so in respects that escaped my attention. But let me assume for the moment that Bernasconi’s modus operandi has in fact remained for the most part that of immanent critique, and allow me to be even more presumptuous and attempt to anticipate some responses that Bernasconi might make to this charge. To begin with, he might appeal to *finitude and facticity* and say: “I was born, raised, and educated as a white, male, Westerner, and I was awakened from my dogmatic slumber by some of my students in Memphis only after I had already become what I am, a Continental philosopher (see Bernasconi 2003c, 22n47). This is the tradition in which I work, even if my work is largely dedicated now to opening up that tradition from the inside to Others and to their other traditions that have been excluded from it.”<sup>14</sup> Or he might appeal to *specialization and vocation* and say: “Although I recognize the limits of immanent critique, that defines my contribution to a collective effort. By carrying out immanent

---

<sup>14</sup> By contrast, it is true that many noteworthy comparative philosophers were thrown into a factual situation that enabled and encouraged them to become grounded in two or more cultures, traditions, and languages. One thinks for example of J. N. Mohanty, expert in both Husserlian phenomenology and in traditional Indian philosophy (see Mohanty 2001). A few Westerners have received training in both Western and non-Western philosophies and languages, and so have been able to approach the dialogue between these traditions from both sides (see, for example, Halbfass 1988). There have also been a few Westerners who awoke from their Eurocentric slumber only after having established a career and specialization in areas of Western philosophy, and yet who have boldly sought to learn from and to write about non-Western philosophers and traditions (see, for example, Dallmayr 1996 and 1998).

critiques of the Western tradition I try to make way for others to complement this with external critiques and with the introduction of new ideas and ways of thinking from other traditions.” I strongly suspect he would also appeal to an attitude of *deference and deferral* and say: “In the case of African philosophy—the non-Western set of traditions in which I am most interested—it is most important for African philosophers to speak on their own behalf, from out of their experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and colonization, and I would run the risk of furthering, rather than countering, the history of colonization were I to presume to speak on their behalf.”

To be sure, no one can or should even try to do everything; the non-Eurocentric philosophy of the future must be more collaborative than the discipline is today, and to begin with each one of us must escape from the tendency to presume that what one does is the only important thing that is to be done. We must all recognize our facticity, find our vocation, be deferential toward the facticity and vocation of others, and find ways to learn from and collaborate with one another. And so, each of the imagined responses given above is at least partially compelling, and together they surely constitute a good defense of Bernasconi’s practice of a mainly immanent critique of the Eurocentrism of Western philosophy. Indeed, as I have stressed throughout this essay, his work in this regard is extraordinarily compelling and salutary, and I among many others am very grateful for it.

Nevertheless, I suspect that Bernasconi himself would not be fully satisfied with my responses on his behalf. At the outset of “Africa’s Challenge to Continental Philosophy,” one of the articles in which he does venture to discuss the views of some contemporary African philosophers on the meaning of “African philosophy,” Bernasconi proclaims that, “if it is foolhardy on my part to engage with African philosophy, it would be even more indefensible to ignore it” (Bernasconi 1997a, 183). Indeed, do not Western philosophers need to do what non-Western philosophers have long been doing, namely, do we not need to thoroughly engage with other traditions, letting them make their claims to truth and goodness—rather than just to cultural difference—such that we take a chance on losing ourselves, on philosophical conversion, or at least on altering or hybridizing our Western identities in the process? Husserl claimed that, while all non-Western peoples will have to Europeanize themselves, “we [Europeans], if we understand ourselves properly, will never, for example, Indianize ourselves” (Husserl 1969, 320). I beg to differ.

## References

- Bernasconi, Robert. 1995a. Heidegger and the Invention of the Western Philosophical Tradition. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 26/3: 240–255.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 1995b. “You don’t know what I’m talking about”: Alterity and the Hermeneutic Ideal. In *The Specter of Relativism*, ed. Lawrence K. Schmidt, 178–194. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 1995c. “I Will Tell You Who You Are,” Heidegger on Greco-German Destiny and Amerikanismus. In *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire*, ed. Babette E. Babich, 301–313. Dordrecht, Kluwer.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 1995d. Heidegger and the Invention of the Western Philosophical Tradition”; and “Heidegger’s Other Sins of Omission: His Exclusion of Asian Thought from the Origins of Occidental Metaphysics and His Denial of the Possibility of Christian Philosophy,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69/2: 333–350.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 1997a. African Philosophy’s Challenge to Continental Philosophy. In *Postcolonial African Philosophy*, ed. Emmanuel Eze, 183–196. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 1997b. Philosophy’s Paradoxical Parochialism: The Reinvention of Philosophy as Greek. In *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Benita Parry and Judith Squires, 212–226. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 2000. Almost Always More than Philosophy Proper. *Research in Phenomenology* 30: 1–11.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 2003a. Ethnicity, Culture, and Philosophy. In *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Nicholas Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James, second expanded edition, 567–581. Oxford, Blackwell.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 2003b. With What Must the History of Philosophy Begin? Hegel’s Role in the Debate on the Place of India within the History of Philosophy. In *Hegel’s History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, ed. David A. Duquette, 35–49. Albany: SUNY Press.

- Bernasconi, Robert. 2003c. "Will the Real Kant Please Stand Up?" The Challenge of Enlightenment Racism to the Study of the History of Philosophy. *Radical Philosophy* 117: 13–22.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 2005. Who is my Neighbor? Who is the Other? Questioning "the Generosity of Western Thought." In *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments*, vol. 4, ed. Claire Katz with Lara Trout, 5–30. London: Routledge.
- Bernasconi, Robert. 2009. Must We Avoid Speaking of Religion: The Truths of Religions. *Research in Phenomenology* 39/2: 204–223.
- Chan, Wing-Tsit (trans., ed.). 1963. *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dallmayr, Fred. 1996. *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Dallmayr, Fred. 1998. *Alternative Visions: Paths in the Global Village*. Lanham: Roman and Littlefield.
- Davis, Bret W. 2013a. Psychosomatic Practice and Kyoto School Philosophies of Zen. *Journal of Religious Philosophy* (Taiwan) 64: 25–40.
- Davis, Bret W. 2013b. Heidegger's Orientations: The Step Back on the Way to Dialogue with the East. In *Heidegger-Jahrbuch 7: Heidegger und das ostasiatische Denken*, ed. Alfred Denker et al., 153–80. Freiburg/Munich: Alber Verlag.
- Davis, Bret W. 2014a. The Kyoto School. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kyoto-school/>.
- Davis, Bret, W. 2014b. Ethical and Religious Alterity: Nishida after Levinas. In *Kitarō Nishida in der Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Rolf Elberfeld and Yōko Arisaka, 313–341. Freiburg/Munich: Alber Verlag.
- Davis, Bret W. 2016. Haidegā no dōtei: sonzaishi-teki jiminzoku-chūshinshugi kara tōzai-taiwa he no tojō de [Heidegger on the Way from Onto-Historical Ethnocentrism to East-West Dialogue], trans. Sakazume Yūta. *Ningen Sonzai-ron* [Human Ontology] (Japan), forthcoming in 2016.

- Davis, Bret W., Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth (eds.). 2011. *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Elberfeld, Rolf (ed.). 2006. *Was ist Philosophie? Programmatische Texte von Platon bis Derrida*. Stuttgart: Reclam.
- Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi (ed.). 1998. *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Garfield, Jay and William Edelglass (eds.). 2009. *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garfield, Jay and William Edelglass. 2011. *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gasché, Rodolphe. 2009. *Europe, or the Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Graham, A. C. 1989. *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Gupta, Bina. 2012. *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.
- Halbfass, Wilhelm. 1988. *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Hall, David L. and Roger T. Ames. 1995. *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture*. Albany: SUNY.
- Heisig, James W., Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo (eds.). 2011. *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1969. *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, ed. Walter Biemel. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Jullien, François. 2000. *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Ancient Greece*, trans. Sophie Hawkes. New York: Zone Books.
- Jullien, François. 2014. *On the Universal, the Uniform, the Common, and Dialogue Between Cultures*, trans. Michael Richardson and Kyzysztof Fijalkowski. Malden, MA: Polity.



- King, Richard. 1999. *Indian Philosophy*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Levinas, Emmanuel 1996. *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Masolo, D. A. 1994. *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mendieta, Eduardo (ed.). 2003. *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mohanty, J. N. 2001. *Indian Philosophy*, ed. Bina Gupta. New Dehli: Oxford University Press.
- Perkins, Franklin. 2011. Europe and the Question of Philosophy: A Response to Rodolfe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task. Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 3/1: 34–43.
- Siderits, Mark. 2007. *Buddhism as Philosophy*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Vallega, Alejandro A. 2014. *Latin American Philosophy: From Identity to Radical Exteriority*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. 1996. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.