

Rising Sun and Setting Sun

Raimon Panikkar

It is more than a century since what we call the ‘history of religions’¹ was discovered and has been studied. But only recently have we realized that the ‘geography of religions’ is just as important. East and West are essential geopolitical categories, determined by cultural, historical and even religious differences: an Indian and a Swedish Catholic (both of them members of a minority) display notable religious differences, as great as those that separate an Indonesian from a Saudi Muslim (both members of a majority). The ‘geography of religions’ cannot be ignored. Differences exist but simplifications must be avoided: we have to go beyond the cliché according to which the Orient is mystical and the West pragmatic. Logical thought is no more eastern than western. There is scholastic philosophy in the East as well as the West, magic and rationalism are found everywhere. But as human beings are intrinsically earth-bound beings, even though they are more than ‘of this world’, East and West are categories that are not only geographical and historical but also anthropological. There is an East and a West in each of us. That is why it is possible for us to understand each other.

Although we have known since the Greeks that the earth is round, we carry on talking about East and West as two objective reference points – thus displaying our ethnocentrism. East and West are not simply two geographical, historical and/or cultural categories: they are above all two powerful human metaphors. There is inside each one of us an East, a ‘place’ where the sun rises, and a West, another ‘place’ where it sets – a ‘place’ where ideas and intuitions arise and a ‘place’ where our symbols and concepts reside. But it is undeniable that what we call East seems to hold a particular fascination for the dawn and West for the dusk. Dawn is not yet light (but awaits it) and dusk is still light (but no longer expects it). We need only quote as examples hymns, from the *Rig-Veda* to *Uṣas*, to the dawn that opens the way for the Sun’s Chariot and the very many examples of western literature on night, from Homer to Novalis, T. S. Eliot, Leopardi and many others, without mentioning the Latins (numerous well-known hymns beginning ‘*Nox erat*’). In western philosophy, two forms of knowledge were recognized: *cognitio matutina* (knowledge

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illuminated by a light that comes from outside) and *cognitio vespertina* (seeing things by virtue of a light within them). The first needs illumination, the second reflection. 'Morning knowledge' requires us to be attentive and to open our eyes to what presents itself to us. 'Evening knowledge' requires us to examine and scrutinize the objects we have before us. By this I do not mean that the East looks solely to the heavens and the West the earth. The heavens are round too. But it seems clear that the East has been more interested in the heavenly kingdom than earthly paths, whereas the West is more interested in what it finds before it and what it can control and use in some way or other. Since the Egyptians the cross has been the symbol of the union between horizontal and vertical.

We find confirmation of this hypothesis in the different 'reception' of one of the *logia* spoken by a man from the eastern Mediterranean but received (interpreted) by exegetes from the 'Far West'. I am referring to the message emphatically repeated by Jesus of Nazareth that 'the Kingdom of God is within us' (*entos*), which does not come with 'ostentation' even though it comes from outside. But the West wishes to build the 'kingdom' on the outside and it embarked on conquering the earthly kingdom and studying its secrets. It is in our hearts that the whole world lives, insist the Upaniṣads. Everywhere eastern texts speak to us of the value of immanence; they tell us that preserving inner serenity is more important than everything that makes us lose it, that divinity is to be found deep within ourselves, that our most real identity is the inner world, whether we call it *brahman*, *nirvāṇa*, *tao*, *kingdom* or a thousand other names. The third verse of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas clearly states that 'the kingdom is within us and without', echoing St Peter when he speaks of 'the morning star that rises in our hearts'.

The Abrahamic tradition (except for mysticism, which cannot forget immanence) so stresses transcendence that God is almost a synonym for the Transcendent. We breathe a different air with the upaniṣadic metaphor of the 'city of *brahman*' within us and the 'cave of the heart' where the whole of reality resides. This difference could be expressed in these words attributed to St Teresa of Avila: 'that life above is the true life'. She does not say life 'below' even though she then speaks of the inner castle; but castles were built on the tops of hills. We cannot ignore the force of metaphors. The predominance of sight, which is characteristic of the Greeks, privileges the heavens as the site of the divine. The predominance of hearing, which is characteristic of India, privileges the heart as the dwelling of divinity.

I am not saying we have to forget what is below, spurn 'secularity' and all the material structures of reality; neither is it a matter of advocating 'eastern interiority'. We have here Rhenish mysticism (of interiority) and Christian monachism (of the desert), which allow us to avoid oversimplification. We must learn from 'others' without ceasing to be 'ourselves'. Our times urgently need a reconciliation and integration between the above and the below (to quote the Gospel of Thomas yet again). The 'eastern' interpretation of a gospel text that dismays us by the rough way Jesus answers those members of his family who were looking for him, because they were seeking him on 'the outside' (*exô*), is also significant.

These brief thoughts serve to highlight the contrast. On one hand (the eastern), true reality is inner, authentic values are invisible to the intellect alone unless it is accompanied by the spirit, true culture (to paraphrase Cicero), care of the *anima*,

what is valuable is what cannot be seen, hope belongs to the realm of the invisible. On the other hand (the western), the real is what counts and what counts is what people value (what they count), what people do not value is useless unless we impose it despotically from above, a hope that is not awaited is not hope. These are two facets of the same reality. Simple objectivity does not exhaust the real, nor does pure objectivity. God is not the absolute Object; creation is also real. *Brahman* is not the absolute Subject; nor is the *tvam* (you) of the *tat-tvam-asi* an illusion. And here we must avoid falling again into both dualist and monist interpretations – as if reality were simply dialectical. Thus the symbiosis between East and West could be the hope of the world. We must not interpret interiority as a non-exteriority, or vice versa. Interiority and exteriority are not contradictory; we could even say that they are conditioned one by the other: without the outside it would be impossible to speak of the inside, and what is internal presupposes what is external. The outside is not an illusion or mere appearance, but nor is the inside a mere subjective consolation for our unsatisfied desires. It should be quite obvious that interiority is not a cultivation of the inner that is more or less focused selfishly on oneself. It is an interiority that is related to its exteriority. One does not exist without the other. This interiority is both cause and effect of exteriority. It is an inner state that ‘reflects’ the outer and at the same time conditions it by virtue of a cosmic harmony that is both powerful and fragile. ‘Only the most complete sincerity (*cheng*) can effect any change whatever’, says Chinese wisdom, but in its turn the outer state, our own and the world’s, conditions our inner one. And yet there are differences. Particularly of forms of thought. An example will clarify what I mean.

The almost unavoidable question the West, under the influence of technocracy, is asking today is this: harmony between the inner and the outer (on all levels) is a sublime ideal; but in case of conflict or just divergence, who decides? Who commands? Putting the question in this way means that we have not left dialectic behind, as we shall see. ‘Virtue is maintaining universal harmony’, wrote Zhuang-zi.

This where the East, seen in its best light, has something to contribute. *Advaita*, or a-dualist, intuition would be the response; it could be the East’s major contribution – though it does not belong exclusively to the East. It belongs to human beings per se. Think for instance of the intuition of the Trinity, which is incompatible with a dialectical approach to reality.

Who commands? In the Trinity no one does. Who decides? With *advaita* intuition there is no need to command. Every decision (as the very word indicates) is a breaking away, a cutting off – which in the last resort forces one to opt for a monism or a dualism (however attenuated). A-dualist intuition does not divide the polarity of reality, which is neither one nor dual. A single pole (the one that might command) is not a pole without the other. Knowledge without love does not comprehend this; it has to reduce things to a *unity* – in order to understand it. Love without knowledge does not grasp it either. Love reaches for *union* – without ever attaining it, since in that case the tension that is vital for love would disappear. Only loving knowledge or knowing love – which is what *advaita* is – finds *harmony*. When the pianist concentrating on his piano listens to the violinist and the violinist concentrating on his instrument listens to the pianist, they do not need a conductor. If we are isolated individuals, the command of the majority may be the least of all evils. But to ensure

that the majority does not overwhelm the minority, it has to recognize an unquantifiable something that transcends it – which is neither the unit of the majority nor the duality of the minority: the loving intuition of *advaita* is required. The political consequences are clear. We should not forget that true wisdom is eminently practical. Here is an instance of the urgent need for a symbiosis between East and West.

I have mentioned wisdom. We might ask whether wisdom is more eastern than western.

The immediate response seems to say that wisdom is neither eastern nor western. Some western readers may interpret this to mean that wisdom is universal. The reply shows us a two-sided aspect of human thinking that could act as a starting-point for describing East and West. The first aspect relates to the form and the second to the content of thought itself. And here we reach the two foundation stones of the modern West that are not as fundamental in the traditional East – if I may be forgiven the oversimplification.

The first is *dialectical thinking* as the single form of thought. This way of thinking says: yes *or* no; and there is no intermediate term – without going into the problem of the ‘excluded third’. It is postulated that reality must obey the principle of non-contradiction interpreted ontologically. Parmenides is the father of western philosophy. Starting from this assumption, wisdom can only be universal, given that the concept of wisdom must be ideally univocal or at least analogous – with a (formal) ‘*primum analogatum*’ that unites the different concepts. We ought to know what wisdom is if we want to talk about it, and this definition has to be universal; that is it must be valid for everything that claims to be ‘wisdom’. The reply will then be clear: those who aspire to wisdom and satisfy this definition will be accepted into the fraternity. And as we have found instances in both hemispheres, we are forced to admit that, in saying that wisdom is neither eastern nor western, we are stating that it is universal.

And indeed a (conceptual) definition of wisdom must be universal. But is (real) wisdom identifiable with a concept?

Here we touch on a crucial point: western thought is basically conceptual, while eastern thought instead is symbolic. It is probably with Socrates in the fifth century BC (and I do not say ‘common era’ because it is not ‘common’ for most of the non-westernized civilizations) that the West discovered the concept as a result of the mental operation known as abstraction. There are many horses and many elephants in the realm of our sense experience. We distinguish the first of these from the second by their shape, their *morphé*, which for Plato is the same as their essence, what was later called ‘specific difference’ – thus confirming the culture of difference as belonging to a being’s identity. It is part of the horse’s essence that it is not an elephant. The horse’s essence is unique, but it exists only in the different examples of horses. Horse does not exist, it is a formal entity common to the various individuals. Horse is an abstraction that allows us to talk about it after extracting (abstracting) from it all the distinctive features. It is the concept of horse that allows us to perform algebraic operations with our intellect. What puzzles us in this case is that up to a certain point actual horses obey these laws of abstract thinking – even though the individual actual horse does not know it. With empirical beings these operations are relatively simple, but things get more complicated when we are dealing with

another type of reality such as good, virtue and beauty – as Plato's masterly examples demonstrate. Plato's brilliant contribution lies in reversing the terms: ideas of horse, virtue and justice are real and things are nothing but participations, instances or embodiments of those ideas. We approach those ideas via concepts. There is no doubt that the concept has been the central instrument of philosophy in the West to the extent that very often philosophy is presented as a conceptual algebra about the ultimate questions: a succession of concepts. Concepts claim to be objective insofar as, once the premises on which they based are accepted, they are valid for any issue. In this sense every concept possesses an objective intelligibility.

On the other hand, without dismissing conceptual knowledge, the East bases itself above all on symbolic recognition. The concept is valid for everyone once the rules of the game have been accepted. Those rules are logic and it is believed that they are written into our thinking (*a priori*) or accepted by us pragmatically. But the symbol is only a symbol for those who recognize it as such. The symbol is one insofar as it symbolizes, and it symbolizes to the extent that we discover what is symbolized in the symbol itself – without it referring, as in the case of the sign, to the signified as something actual outside the symbol. In our time the confusion between concept and symbol has been a fatal one.

Let us take an example that involves almost the whole of the last millennium of Christian history. Christian faith, as an act of salvation, implies an attitude of the entire person, though it also has an intellectual formulation. The first formulations were called 'the apostles' *symbol*' and not a mere conceptual doctrine. Such professions of faith were called *credos* – 'giving one's heart'; putting one's heart into what one believes (though Indo-European scholars may disagree). In a word, symbolic knowledge cannot be confused with conceptual knowledge. Hence the importance of the metaphor. Faith is expressed in symbols not concepts. Helping to avoid confusing the Christian faith with a doctrine is perhaps the best contribution the East could make to a certain Christianity – without underestimating the importance and function of doctrines.

Metaphorical thinking is one of the keys to understanding a large part of the East. Metaphorical thought is often less precise but frequently truer; that is, it is closer to reality than conceptual thought. When someone thinks he has learnt a foreign language but does not understand its witticisms, he is still a beginner. A language is not the words but the sense of reality carried by that language. Literal translations may not be wrong but they are not 'translations', they are merely transpositions. Non-literal translations render what the translator has understood, often to the embarrassment of those who know the original language in depth. No one is satisfied, and translators feel humiliated despite their laudable work. Each word does not have only one meaning, it has a resonance (the *dhvani* of Sanskrit poetry). Symbolic language cannot be merely objective. A symbol is not a symbol if the subject does not perceive it as such. A song is a song only when it is sung – and is consciously listened to. This means that a word says something only when it is assimilated and someone experiences (positively or negatively) its message. In both the East and the West traditional texts used to be spoken (or recited) in order to be able to speak to us.

The collateral effects of the loss of symbolic knowledge destabilize 'certainty' as

an ideal that modern western philosophy has accustomed us to. The result is three-fold.

First, no interpretation is precise and such an ideal is erroneous. Truth should not be confused with precision, a category that belongs in the realm of science. All interpretations are exegesis and all translators engage in hermeneutics. Every text is polysemic – apart from texts in formal logic and, by extension, scientific ones. It is through dialogue with the text itself that we draw (and even drag) the sense from it, even if the author's intention was not exactly that. Consequently the study of languages is not a luxury. And another consequence is that a voice should be raised against the linguistic genocide that occurred in the late lamented 20th century, during which more than 5000 living languages were allowed to die.²

Second, no interpretation, either in the East or in the West, is so objective that it can be formulated in propositions outside their context.

Third, the fact that we cannot state with apodictic certainty what is eastern and what western in a text of wisdom helps us to overcome the near-pathological obsession with certainty (inherited from Descartes) that modern humans are subject to. Is it not true that a large part of present-day society's anxiety and stress has its roots in the desperate search for certainty? And what is this based on? Thus the dialectical dilemma reappears: either certainty (rationality) or uncertainty (irrationality) – whereas it is precisely wisdom that invites us to experience contingency and overcome the dilemma through the *advaita* intuition of the Trinity.

I also find it important to emphasize the first foundation stone. I have already said that the basis of western culture is the principle of non-contradiction. It was from the Greeks onwards that most of western culture accepted the principle of Parmenides – despite the resurgence of what I shall call the principle of Heraclitus, which raises its head now and again. If Being and thinking are one and same thing, the laws of thought are also valid for Being. We are reluctant to think that, at the same time and in the same aspect, a thing might be and not be. Each being is in itself and for itself unique, alone. It is destined, 'condemned', to be itself and nothing else. No confusion is possible. Each 'being' is; this being-ness belongs to it as a property, directly. If we did not accept that, we would block thought. The principle of non-contradiction is not only the principle of thought in general but also the essential structure of the limited and finite being. A 'being' has limits because it is finite and it is finite precisely by virtue of the principle of non-contradiction. If the principle were not valid for some being in particular, it would follow that it would be impossible to state anything precise about it, thus anything definite, anything exact and univocal: it would be impossible to even conceive of this being. However, we would have to exclude the sphere of the infinite.

A large part of the East, on the other hand, has been enthusiastic about the quest for the principle of identity: A is A. But what is this A that is identical to A? Where should we find a predicate that can be completely identified with the subject? Not a single predicate as such. Unless maybe the subject through which we can experience the identity is not its own self. But who am I? My body cannot exhaustively define my being, any more than my spirit or any other predicate can. It is impossible to find a predicate that can be completely identified with me. The I is identical to itself only if it is no longer its finite, limited I but the absolute. It is only in the identification of

the *ātman* with the *brahman* that there is perfect identity, but then that *ātman* is no longer me, it is indeed *brahman*. Essence and existence, say the scholastics, find their identity only in God. True identity excludes the finite world. Then thought is blocked; its sphere is that of the alternative 'either-or', while for identity it is 'both-and'.

If the principle of non-contradiction predominates, then thought has the primary part to play, in the discovery of reality as well. And more than that, thought informs us about the different levels of reality. It cannot pass through the gates of the Infinite, but it can go as far as the threshold and, from there, going from the top to the bottom, discover the different degrees of reality. In other words truth has the primacy here, and that truth will be only *one*, because it *cannot* be otherwise, that is, it is unthinkable that it should be polyvalent. This is the great scandal of religious and also cultural pluralism – the basis of tolerance and peace. Certainly, truth is not plural; but it is pluralist. But if truth is one for the East, there are nevertheless several degrees of reality precisely because it is *reality* that *realizes*, that has different effects on my thinking. A certain conception that still prevails in the West might be represented as a pyramid of being, with God (Truth) at its apex. Truth is exclusively one because in the end it is the result of the judgement determined by the principle of non-contradiction (since this thought process is essential in order to attain ontological truth). An unthinkable thing does not exist. On the other hand, 'beings' are many because each one has its own existence, striking my thought in its own way, and because each one *is* in that it is not the other.

Furthermore, if it is the principle of identity that predominates, it immediately follows that there cannot be degrees of reality. If there were even two, they could not both really be, because reality is exclusively one. Variety belongs to the realm of thought and thought is the organ of truth. So there will be several degrees of reality in accordance with the depth of our speculative ability. The perceptible world may be true but not *real*.

Here we touch on the key that allows us to go beyond the misunderstanding between a large part of eastern, and especially Buddhist, thinking and most of western, especially Abrahamic, thinking. The latter is a philosophy of Being, the former one of Emptiness (*Ūṇyatâ*), which should not be confused with nihilism. As long as we do not reach this depth (Christianity's *kenôsis*) we will not get beyond this misunderstanding whose consequences are not only philosophical but also political.

But let us leave this methodological problem to one side, even though we needed to mention it in order to tackle the second foundation stone on which modernity rests: the *claim to universality*.

Is wisdom universal? Yes, the West replies, although it agrees there is a variety of interpretations. For instance think of 'global ethics' or 'the Declaration of Human Rights'. Yes and no, says the East on the other hand. One of the characteristics of modern culture is its claim to universality. 'Truth must be so for everyone'; 'the criterion for morality is that it should be universalizable'; 'modern science is universal', and other similar phrases are all irrefutable dogma for the western mindset – forgetting that such statements result from a monocultural extrapolation from its own categories. It is true that there is in human beings something like an instinct to universalize their convictions, but this is the consequence of analytical thought –

which is so characteristic of the West. We analyse a particular case, there are more and more examples and then we generalize – that is, we give this case a universal validity. Analytical thought has no means other than extrapolation for arriving at a universal formulation. But the universal, what is catholic in its original sense, is neither the sum of the particular nor the formal extrapolation of the concept ('man', for example, is a simple abstraction). The universal is obtained by *intrapolation* – as we might say in a play on words. That is, through deepening a particular experience, which means we can come into contact with the whole of reality in the singularity of a concrete experience. The universal is not obtained by generalization or abstraction but through profound experience of the concrete – as the word itself suggests ('concrete' comes from *concreescere* 'to grow together'), it is growing along with the 'thing' experienced, participating in the very gestation of the thing, which is obtained solely through love, that is to say, if we have gone beyond the subject/object dichotomy.

Let us not depart from our question: wisdom is universal in the profound experience of a concrete wisdom. In it 'wisdom' is discovered as, in a beloved being, the whole of humanity is discovered or in a flower all of beauty, and in beauty all the glory of the Universe – which does not prevent us from being aware too of other facets of reality, including negative ones.

In a word, every wisdom is universal when we experience it in its profound concreteness and it is particular in its language and interpretation. To use a rather academic jargon, I would say wisdom is universal as a concept but not as a symbol. This explains the much-debated question of what has been called 'the transcendent unity of religions', that is, whether all religions say the same thing or are truly different. It is clear that religions *do not say* the same thing and their respective doctrines are different and frequently incompatible. But it is clear as well that those who have experienced reality profoundly in a concrete case, mystics for instance, do not perceive this incompatibility: they have attained experience of the substance, so to speak, and they discover that under the respective clothing is concealed the very body of reality – which many traditions call the body of God, Christ, Buddha or the world, although we should not confuse these different metaphors.

This is not the moment to undertake a critique of most of the intuitions of ancient wisdoms; similarly, not everything is negative in modernity or ambivalent in post-modernity. But it is hard to deny that, socially and politically, the world has taken a wrong turning that will lead to a socio-political catastrophe unless there is cultural *metanoia*. It may be that wisdom, both eastern and western, can help us in this task.

For a long time the function of genuine wisdom has been to 'save' humanity; thus it appears saving knowledge – where salvation means plenitude, peace, happiness, self-fulfilment and other 'homeomorphic equivalents'. Philosophy, taking for this word its meaning of both 'love of wisdom' and 'wisdom of love' (interpreted in the objective and subjective sense of the genitive), has a redemptive function; and this function can only be realized insofar as experience of reality has not divided itself off – in 'praxis' on one hand and 'theory' on the other – from humanity's existential path towards its plenitude. *Human* praxis is not merely action, since humans are intellectual beings; and theory cannot be merely speculation, since humans are corporeal beings. Philosophy is the companion consciousness all the way along that path.

In this profound and traditional sense, wisdom is neither eastern nor western – it

is human. East and West are polysemic words irreducible to a single concept. Any attempt to reduce it to a unity is condemned to be strictly formal and abstract. Formal 'thought' permits only operations of deduction, induction – and perhaps statistics. It has no windows onto reality, as Leibniz would say – or rather the windows have thick panes that magnify and show details that otherwise would not be seen, but also distort reality. Pythagoras's theorem is deduced from the nature of a right-angled triangle; but an egg is not 'deduced' from a hen and neither is what the emperor Aśoka did deduced from the period of his life before his conversion; it is not sufficient to study the biological nature of the 'Sixth Patriarch' to know everything he did and said and still less to understand him. To extrapolate the laws of logical thinking (with the permission of Parmenides and Hegel) to Being is already to make a logical error – unless one a-critically identifies Thought with Being.

I feel obliged to express these dense ideas if we wish at least to mitigate the chronic misunderstanding between East and West. Some books on philosophy, even recent ones, state that there is no 'thought' beyond the Suez Canal. And indeed, even today, most books on philosophy leave out (and here it could be said, 'Olympically') any reference that goes beyond *Magna Graecia*. They probably have a 'reason' if by 'thought' they mean the ability to use an instrument (reason) that allows people to predict properties and/or events in order to 'control' them better. In other time zones (this side of Suez too) *thought* means something else. Hence the importance, in my view, of this issue of *Diogenes*, though fortunately it is not alone.

Having talked about East and West, I feel it is my duty not only to recall something that has been forgotten but also to 'right a wrong' that is far, far more important than the chivalrous echoes of the West's 'Golden Ages'. I am referring to the last millennium's great black page: Africa³ – which refuses to be imprisoned in our East–West parameters. 'African Wisdom' is in no way inferior to the other two, it has too long been ignored, not to say reviled and ridiculed, because it did not follow the canons of a narrow academicism. It is not my topic, but I believe I owe it to justice at least to mention it.

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Translated from the Spanish by Jacqueline Rastoin

Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

Notes

1. The author has written about this question in a number of his publications. Here he gives an overview of his thinking as a tribute to *Diogenes* for its contribution to harmony between cultures. *Diogenes* has published the following articles by Raimon Panikkar: 'Common Patterns of Eastern and Western Scholasticism', no. 83, 1973; and 'Is the Notion of Human Rights a Western Concept?', no. 120, 1982 (editor's note).
2. *Diogenes* has devoted two issues to the topic of endangered languages: *Cultural Heritage: Endangered Languages*, no. 153, 1991, and *Endangered Languages II: Africa*, no. 161, 1993.
3. *Diogenes* has devoted many articles to Africa and its thought. Among others, see no. 184, 1998: *Africa: Crossed Perspectives, Multiple Gazes*.