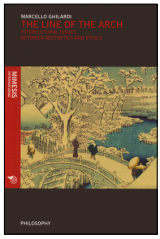

Marcello Ghilardi, ***The Line of the Arch: Intercultural Issues Between Aesthetics and Ethics***

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The Line of the Arch does not only illustrate the value and necessity of comparative philosophy as a field of study, but also, and perhaps more pertinently, shows the value and necessity of intercultural thinking as a philosophical practice. Indeed, much as Edmund Husserl founded phenomenology that became a profound philosophical movement and would influence fields independent of academic philosophy, Ghilardi's text in my mind, has the potential to be the catalyst that finally propels intercultural philosophy towards the realm of becoming a full-fledged movement of its own with the same significance as phenomenology if not even more so.

That is quite an emphatic statement to make, but when we considers the enormity of the statement that Ghilardi is making with his text in the context of being in the Western world, we can see why we would give this text a vote of overwhelming confidence. Ghilardi asserts that no culture is fully autonomous or insulated from the influences of other cultures (11). Indeed, a culture cannot find themselves in a

completely fixed set of circumstances because such a contracted notion of reality will almost certainly assure the death of any culture (which, in fact, grows organically in its communication with other cultures). But, what about countries that promote multiculturalism or a band of nation states that tries to enact what Ghilardi terms a "trans-cultural universalism" in order to avoid this insulation? In the case of the former, Ghilardi regards multiculturalism as passive and, to a degree, almost apathetic in its approach. He views it as a kind of political management based on the fact that a multiplicity of cultures can reside within a particular region (11). The kind of trans-cultural approach in the case of the latter problematically attempts to negate existing disparities among cultures that arise because of their differing contexts, and further tries to establish a common ground that all of these cultures share and work therefrom. To Ghilardi, the trans-cultural approach still conceives culture as a static notion (which is why it is content to establish a common ground that will never hold) rather than as a process of exchanging intellectual resources whose end result is a transformative advancement of human thinking as intercultural thought espouses.

Where intercultural thinking differs so sharply from the two aforementioned notions of culture is that it is predicated on interconnectedness. Ghilardi sees intercultural thinking as a means to shift the paradigm of culture: that is to say, it is no longer considered to be an autonomous entity but a relational one that sees itself in a process of dialogue with other cultures, becomes in turn influential to all parties involved, and ultimately fosters a relationship based on the reciprocity of ideas and practices (11–14). It is from this point that the most fascinating and prevalent ideas of the text arises. An example of this insight can be found both in the existential and ethical dimension of translation. When we are engaged in the act of translation, we are encountering what is other from the familiar confines of our culture and attempting to understand them on their side of the discourse, from the position of our own context. Translation allows us to get out of our monolingual conception of the world by encountering different meanings of words made by different cultures and by doing so, we can come to recognize the ultimate pluralism of truth.

Ghilardi further testifies for the intercultural pluralism of our philosophical discourse through analyzing language as symbols. Symbols take on a new form with every encounter someone has with them and when we open ourselves to different symbols in various cultural contexts, we can cultivate a more comprehensive worldview. Ghilardi uses a phrase in English, "I hear the sound of the bell." Translated into Japanese, we have「鐘の音が聞こえる」which can be transliterated as "The sound of the bell is heard." This shows how different an English speaking culture in the West and the Japanese speaking culture in the East are in relation to their conceptions of the self (44).

A central tenet of Western civilization is the notion of the single individual. The single individual is imbued with an ego that is driven by its insatiable desire for its own self-fulfillment. Ghilardi contrasts this Western notion of the self with that of Zen Buddhism. The Zen tradition denies the existence of the self as a substantial ego or an ontological subject of permanence and deems it the cause of all suffering. It is convinced that the true self is one that recognizes its own impermanence and formlessness. Once this apprehension takes hold of us, we experience an awakening to our self-awareness (自覚). With the perfect illustration of the dichotomy between the Zen and the Western understanding of the self, Ghilardi explains their relationship through an image of an ocean and waves (45). While the waves may be individuated, the ocean is complete and the waves are just the parts that make up the whole, namely the ocean. While we can respect each wave as a thing in itself, we must never impose upon it a sense of substantiality that makes it independent of the ocean (as the Western notion of the self is prone to do). Instead, as a Zen Buddhist would suggest, we must see that the true self is precisely nothing but an interdependence of all individual sentient beings.

This intercultural understanding of self allows us to step outside of our monolingual worldview and apprehend the plurality of truth about ourselves and the world through the interworking relationship of cultures and languages. An act of translation, especially in relation to our notion of self, demonstrates a vital aspect of intercultural philosophy because the whole point of it as an intercultural practice is to reach the goal of dialogue through working out various symbols within different cultural contexts (56–7). The end result of this dialogue is not a new systematic way of thinking that negates all differences, nor is it the establishment of categories as it pertains to the disparities of cultures. Rather, it is to build the bridges to different cultural perspectives and find ourselves as the gateways to worldviews that ultimately have a transformative power in the ways we view ourselves and our given reality, the worldviews that show our intimate relativity to each of our different cultural viewpoints without doing injustice to their essential pluralism.

I would recommend this text to scholars in the field of aesthetics, philosophy of language, culture, religion, and even to political philosophers. For the wide breadth of issues the text covers, those who read this book will find even more questions, equally pertinent in their fields that are well outside of their scope. How can we use intercultural philosophy to better inform our politics and political infrastructures? What progress could we make within ourselves and within our nations as a whole, by being actively engaged in a series of intercultural dialogues? If there is an ethical and existential dimension to translation as it relates to intercultural philosophy, what immoral behavior and negative existential attitudes could arise from shirking the responsibilities that translation demands? These questions are in the trajectory

of what Ghilardi's text offers with a soul of brevity. Given the Trump candidacy and the Islamophobia (among many other ungrounded fears) it has spawned here in my cultural milieu, Ghilardi's text seems to shine with an insight that intercultural philosophy is not just a subfield of philosophy but an existential and ethical imperative, should we ever wish to avoid moral and intellectual poverty in the near future.

John Altmann
New Hampshire, U.S.A.