by Prof. Dr. Choi Woo-Won
Tuesday, 19 October 2010 12:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 21 April 2011 09:56

In the history of philosophy, we can clearly see that the new dimension of world civilization has begun with the fundamental transformation of Western metaphysics under the influence of the old Asian spiritual awakenings of Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam.

This fact signifies the fusion of Eastern and Western civilizations and the birth of a new world civilization. The possibility of overcoming the danger of the "Illusions" and "Seinsvergessenheit" menacing the techno-scientific civilization has been obtained.

The future education should realize this possibility and open a new dimension of existence. Through the more enhanced education, we will be led into the dimension of the true Being where the philosophy, art, and religion are unified.

1. Birth of a New Civilization

The serious problems menacing the future of mankind result not from the lack of technologies, but from that of mind. The solutions are just beside us, and surely in us, but our mental eyes do not see them. The various civilizations have accumulated knowledges and wisdoms able to cure the misery and unhappiness. But we do not share them together to save and encourage each other. That is why the transformation of philosophy and new education is needed. If the future education is so successful as to make people fully sympathize with the Awakening and teaching of the great Masters, a new higher dimension of existence will be realized.

Today, the word "Global Village" is frequently used, reflecting the fact that the numerous civilizations, religions, and cultures are interacting closely to weave a more and more intimate relationship. In such a situation, philosophy should be able to give an answer to the question how to encounter the more and more complicated world.

We can live neither the present nor the future by depending on the closed thoughts of the age of isolation. It was natural for men of an age of isolation to regard as "normal" only their own culture and religion, despising the others as "barbaric" or "savage". But, we should no longer take such a closed attitude, living in an age of open society. Our future demands that we should comprehend other cultures and religions, and harmonize with them.

It means that we should overcome the superficial uniform Globalism prevalent today in order to advance into a higher dimension of multilateral Glocalism where the characteristics and merits of each civilization can be exchanged and respected. This is the very reason why we judge that the Western civilization which has been developed under the strong influence of Identity Philosophy cannot lead the new age of Glocalism. [1]

Man's living attitude and behavior toward the world have been formed differently according to the various educational systems of the civilizations and ages. When we study the dominant philosophical theories of those civilizations or ages, we can know what kinds of ideas have led those educational systems, what types of men have been formed, and to what directions those societies have been driven. Philosophy is the code of civilizations and ages.

In this context, the fundamental transformation of Western metaphysics in H. Bergson is very significant. He rightly pointed out the fact that the history of Western philosophy, from its origin, was dominated by the hidden illusions concerning the Being. This fundamental problem has made the history of Western philosophy a series of endless debates and refutations rotating in a confined circle of hidden faults. The obstinate thick wall of confusions separating the Western philosophy from the true Being broke down by the metaphysics of *durée pure*. H. Bergson indicated that the reality of the Being should be deciphered not in space, but in time. We should grasp the reality as the process, mobility itself, and the process is to be perceived in its active interpenetration between past and present. This philosophy of Being advances to coincide with the essence of life. Bergson prescribes to the Western philosophy to return to the origin of misconceptions and faults in the ancient Greek age of 2600 years ago, especially to the school of Elea, and recommence after correcting them. In the philosophy of M. Heidegger deeply influenced by Bergson, the same ideas are expressed in different vocabularies like *Sein und Zeit, Holzwege, Seinsvergessenheit, Heimatlosigkeit, Fundamental Ontologie, etc*
.

The fact that we can see the deep influence of Buddhism on this metaphysical transformation of H. Bergson has many important implications for this paper. [2] This transformation means the birth of a new civilization by the fusion of Eastern and Western civilizations. The bridge of rescue is open to the stray techno-scientific civilization menaced by inhumanity and total collapse. In the global age, each civilization will contribute to the humanity with its merits developed during long history. The Western civilization has brightened the world with science and democracy, and the great Awakening of the Being which has permeated in Asian cultures from ancient times will open a road to the true world community. The light emanating from the high dimension of the Being will illuminate our problematic field of knowledge and education.

2. Overcoming the Philosophical Illusions

The considerations on this transformation of philosophy make us notice that the education has been deformed by the influence of the hidden illusions. We should be able to see the misconceptions and false directions guiding the deformed education. In the present techno-scientific society, the most wide-spread misconceptions dominating the ordinary way of thinking are to be summed up as positivism. Actually the ordinary education is under the influence of the positivism. The crucial problem is that, as the final product of *raîson moderne*, the positivism inherits its very superficiality and the uniformity that are to close the way to the Being. In this unhappy one-dimensional state of mind, the original unity of philosophy, art, and religion is broken, and they will be represented in mutual isolation. Under the influence of this false philosophy, the education is to be misled to reproduce the false relations and false attitudes in life.

If there are hidden illusions in the basis of the metaphysics of the Being, naturally, through wrong education, they will cause the oblivion of the true reality, or the inversion of value, which will arrive finally at deforming, or oppressing the life. In the history of the world, we can find many such cases where the hidden unconscious illusions and dogmas have dominated the totality in the name of religion or rationality. In effect, a well organized interest group which could legislate the dogmas has dominated and totalized the society by its uniform principles, sacrificing the majority of the people.

In this point, we cannot help raising the questions about the fundamental character of the Western civilization and its historical development. Seen from the aspect of the metaphysics and the ontology, it has repeated the history of illusions, oblivions, and inversions, in spite of the bright success in techno-scientific field. The ironical crisis of today's techno-scientific civilization in which even the survival of mankind is menaced by its own scientific achievements is coming from this double aspect of the Western civilization. At first sight, this phenomenon may seem self-contradictory. But the self-contradiction is only apparent. We should be able to see how the scientific civilization is estranged from the realization of the true Being through the philosophical misunderstandings derived from those illusions. The rationalism, the intellectualism, and the logos-centrism, misled by those illusions, could not escape the closed circuit of uniformity and superficiality, incapable of penetrating into the essence of the Being. Those forms of the Philosophy of Identity, captured by its strong tendency of absolute deduction or unlimited reduction, could not accept the heterogeneous othernesses of the world. Their metaphysical fault made it impossible for them to enter into the true meaning of life, at the same time closing the way to the community of mankind. In this respect, the western rationalism was transformed surreptitiously into the instrument of exclusion and domination of otherness. The so called Western modern reason declared itself as the ideal model of the evolution of all civilizations, underestimating other civilizations as the savages, barbarous, or undeveloped. Such an error of extremely linear interpretation of history was a natural result of the modern rationalism.

The unconscious tendency of the absolute deduction, the monistic reduction, or the total uniformization makes the Philosophy of Identity fall into the dichotomical way of thinking. The world affairs are divided by two sides, one within the boundary of the definition, and the other outside the boundary of the definition. According to the Identity Principle, the latter should be excluded, expelled, dominated, or annihilated as heretics, or irrationals. The principle, or the ideology of the western medieval society is a good example of the mistake of the Philosophy of Identity. Its ideal was to integrate absolutely the religion, the politics, the law, the economy, the arts, the culture, and the morality into one closed coherent circuit, while excommunicating and extinguishing the others which exist outside that circuit as heretics. The medieval society was a perfect model of the totalitarian society. Such a historical fault did not stop with the end of the medieval age. In modern philosophy, the totalization of knowledge reappeared in the form of Cartesian rationalism, mechanism, dialectic, communism, positivism, etc... And our contemporary techno-scientific society is seriously exposed to the danger of one-dimensional uniformity. Lyotard describes this danger of totalization as "terror against life" [3] . Fundamentally, it is the false conception of the Being, hidden in the root of the Philosophy of Identity, which is distorting the life world in various ways.

The history of philosophy shows that the Western traditional rationalism was distant from the verity of the reality. Today, we see that the philosophies severely criticized as irrational until the beginning of 20th century give us the deeper understanding of the world. As Bergson rightly indicated, the paradigm of the rationalism, being molded on the inert matter, cannot be the guiding conceptions in our study of the Being and life world. The sympathy, co-existence, and harmony with the other civilizations and religions, in short, with otherness, are possible when we open our eyes into the true meaning of the Being and Life. But the traditional Western philosophy, lacking the vision of the essence and whole of the real world, has been confined to the obstinate habit of uniform thinking, which made it closed in the established superficial preconceptions.

Today, the positivism, most influential in ordinary life among the various forms of modern philosophies, regards the type of scientific knowledge as the ideal model of knowledge. It is not difficult to see that positivism is the inert prolongation of the modern reason. Such a uniform thinking, best shown in the Logical Positivism of Vienna Circle, is a case of the happy illusion and self-oblivion, which menace the techno-scientific civilization. The superficiality of positivism makes people blind to the inner realities of the world. It is the vulnerable soil on which the various dangers, psychological, social, or political, can grow.

Generally, deceived by the concept of pure objectivity, the modern reason insisted on the dichotomy of intellect and emotion, objectivity and subjectivity, concept and intuition, giving the

full value of reality only to the former and at the same time underestimating and neglecting the latter. The intellect, the objectivity, and the concept thus defined could not approach the reality of the Being, nor could be conscious of their own geneses from the activity of the life. This means that the modern reason could not read at all the contents of the processes of experience. The discussion of modern philosophy on experience could not arrive even at the elementary explanation of the representation and perception. The rationalism, empiricism, Kantian constructionism, dialectic, positivism, etc., could not escape from this fault. In these philosophies, the basic concepts like the Being, meaning, experience, knowledge, science, etc., are misunderstood. We cannot help being astonished to see that such false conceptions and paradigms have led education as the basis of knowledge. It is natural that such conceptions have reproduced false attitudes and deformed relations in social life.

The future education should recommence with the new philosophy of the Being. We should completely read again the contents and meaning of experience as the origin of science and religion. Experience is an indivisibly integrated field of interaction between subject and object. In this indivisible whole field, subject and object interpenetrate. Preoccupied with the superficial dualism of objectivity and subjectivity, the immature *raîson moderne* made confrontation and conflict between science and religion. In this level of mind, science is not a true science, religion not a true religion. Here, the old Asian cultural tradition that gives warning to the technique solely for technique should be estimated. In this respect, the Islam tradition in which there is no trouble between science and religion is a good example of the great spirit of integration to the whole.

This spirit of integration coming from the great awakenings of Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam will be the new philosophical basis of the future education. Inheriting this great open mind, the future generations will be able to share together all the merits developed in the different civilizations, encouraging each other. This education will open a road to the true world community. The world will advance toward a new ideal of the unity of philosophy, art, and religion. We call it new only in the sense that we attain our original self after a long history of oblivion and wandering. We will discuss this fact.

3. Unity of the Verity, Beauty, and Divinity

In the philosophy of Being, the original unity of the verity, beauty, and divinity will be attained. The awakening of verity will come with great emotion from the deepest part of our self. This emotion of highest beauty and divinity will reveal us that the essence, meaning, and purpose of life are love. The true Being underlying all our conceptions and valuations is love itself.

It is proven that the experiences and awakenings which have generated the open religions are similar. In the form of ecstasy, there emerged the following awakenings that between the universe and me there is an inseparable connection, that my existence is possible only with the participation of the universe, that all things of the universe interpenetrate each other, that all living beings, in spite of their different forms, have the same value, and finally that the ultimate nature of the Being and Life is charity and love. If it is true that all things arise by universal interaction, the essence of our life is derived from that of the universe, and the religious ecstasy will mean the ultimate dimension of the becoming oneness with universe. The phrases like the union of Heaven, Earth, and Man, or the union with God have been used to express this dimension.

The way of seeking after the verity of Being begins by concentrating on ourselves to descend gradually into the profundity of unconsciousness. Through longtime hard effort, passing one by one the gates of the unconscious world, our consciousness approaches our true self.

All our past, instead of disappearing to nothingness, is preserved in our unconsciousness. Among the past memories, only those small parts that can give aid to the present situation float to the conscious level. The other greater parts remain submerged in unconsciousness.

According to Buddhism, our happiness or unhappiness is due, not only to our own actions after birth, but to our own past doings traced back to a proximate or remote past births. Buddhism calls these actions and doings “Karma”. Under our consciousness, there is a storehouse of unconsciousness named “Alaya Consciousness” where all Karma is accumulated. The Alaya Consciousness preserves all past memories, desires, psychic impetus, and vital energy, melted and spread in our body. [4]

We are apt to think that this Alaya Consciousness which is bound to our finite body is our true self. Buddhism teaches us to free ourselves from this illusion. It preaches us to go much further, crossing the thick strata of Alaya Consciousness, to attain the ultimate verity of our true self, ‘□□□□’ (*the verity is the same with the Buddha's nature*).

Our ordinary intellectual activities relying on the routine conceptions and languages cannot make us transcend the Alaya Consciousness latent in subconsciousness from time immemorial. As long as we wander in the confusion and illusion of the Alaya Consciousness, we will remain harassed by anguish and anxiety resulting from our vain desires.

Buddhism encourages us to overcome ourselves. The verity of Being, though neither visible nor audible because of the many folded thick strata of confusions and desires, can be felt anyway, even if faintly, in our heart, through its vibration from the deepest part of our self. Even in our ordinary life, there are some special occasions to contact directly the world of Being. When we are deeply moved by human relations, music, literature, arts, or religion, we are actually at the entrance of the world of Being. Though we do not know the fact, we are, for a short period, in a state of Buddhahood. Such occasions can be the starting point of our seeking after truth.

Here, we should be awakened to the true meaning of love. When we love someone truly, the love reaches the entire world, embracing all the existences of the universe. Through the intermediary of a particular love, we are led into the universal love. At the beginning, our love may be attracted by the beauty and charm of a particular individual. But, if it becomes deep and true, this love will not make us remain in the particular dimension. It will open for us the gate of the universal love which has been ready to receive us from the beginning. No matter what it may be called, the transcendental God, or inner Awakening, this universal love is the essence, meaning, and purpose of the Being and Life.

Buddhism tells us that, when we attain to the ultimate awakening, our true self and the universe will be unified as one verity. The ordinary conceptual thinking which opposes me against others, subject against object will be replaced by the direct intuition of the oneness of universe. The nature of the universe being that of my mind, all of the universe will be unified in the ultimate verity of '□□□□' (*the verity is the same with Buddha's nature*). This awakening naturally makes us go forward to practice the universal love. The awakening itself implies the practice of love.

If we love someone truly, we do not hesitate to give her or him anything we have, even if it demands our sacrifice. We can understand why the Saints of Divine Love have gone the way of maximum self-sacrifice, mortification. To embrace all existences, to save them, the Saints decided to give all things they have, even their lives. Naturally, that way meant the death of ego, desertion of all desires. Their souls wore the minimum cloth of matter for the existence on earth. Like the candle which illuminates the world by firing its body, they practiced the Divine Love.

After a long period of mortification, when the Great Awakening came to them with religious ecstasy, they found themselves in the inexplicable ultimate dimension of divinity. It is the highest dimension of beauty and divinity, kept in the heart of our soul as the essence of our existence. As the origin of all values, it tells us what the true meaning of beauty is. In this mystic dimension of infinity, they found themselves to be in oneness of the Being. The expressions like

the union of Heaven, Earth, and Man, union of Atman and Brahman, and union with God refer to this same ultimate dimension. It teaches us the way of universal love, i.e. Divine Love.

Religion, art, and philosophy coincide in the ultimate dimension of the Being. Their aim and duty is to share the light and voice of this dimension with the people. They have the mission to lead the people to the Elysium of World Community. We know that the Asian cultures have grown on the basis of this spirituality. Our Asian Community has the mission for the World Community.

Footnote

[1] We have discussed this issue in the 1st international conference of the Asian Philosophical Association. See "The Philosophy of Asian Community", *The Vision of the Asian Community: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Asian Philosophical Association* (Istanbul: Fatih University Press, 2005), pp. 10-15.

[2] About this influence of Buddhism on H. Bergson, see "Epistemology for a Harmonized World Order", *Ideals of the Asian Community: Aspirations for a Harmonized World Order: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference of the Asian Philosophical Association* (Istanbul: Fatih University Press, 2008), pp. 7-13.

[3] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne*, Les Edition de Minuit, 1979, p.8

[4] Except the doctrine of samsara, the Buddhist theory of Alaya Consciousness is so similar to Bergson's theory of memory that we can see how deeply Bergson was influenced by Buddhism. Based on this theory of memory, Bergson developed his philosophy of evolution creatively.

Prof. Dr. Choi Woo-Won

Education

Ph.D. Universite de Paris I (Pantheon Sorbonne), Philosophy, 1993, France
MA. Seoul National University, Philosophy, 1980, Korea
BA Seoul National University, Philosophy, 1978, Korea
Kyunggi High School, 1971-1974

Experience

Common President of the Asian Philosophical Association, 2005-Present Co-Director of the Korea Solidarity for Anti-Corruption, 2006 -Present President of the DaeDong Philosophical Association, 2004-2007
Sisterhood Contract with Kobe University, Japan, 2000
Sisterhood Contract with Universite de Nice Sophia-Antipolis, France, 1988 Invited to Paris by the French Government, 1984-1986
Professor of Philosophy, Pusan National University, 1983-Present