Traditions and Civilizations: Another Approach to Understanding Human History

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Introduction

The following paper addresses two concerns with contemporary comparative civilization studies. The first is with how civilizations are to be compared. Since comparisons are products of the human intellect and occur within the axiomatic framework of historical times and places, one must be critically aware of the definitions of "civilization" in particular, and of "human nature" in general, that are implicit in these definitions. Definitions of values, rights, responsibilities, facts, truths in the sciences, religions, social institutions, arts and humanities are ultimately understandable only if one understands the contexts within which they occur.

The second concern is with the necessity of incorporating into such comparisons advances made in genetic researches and evolutionary biology—advances which relate not only human beings everywhere to one another, but also human beings to all life forms.

I. Definitions

Tradition. We use the term "tradition" in a broader sense than the word "civilization." Tradition expresses fundamental contexts for viewing the world and these contexts may include a number of different civilizations. For example, Persian, Greek, and European, or Moslem, Jewish, and Christian orientations and civilizations might be viewed as aspects of a common tradition, i.e., a tradition which emphasizes the priority of the experienced object world over the relativity of the experiencing subject. Tradition entails processes and patterns of thinking so basic that the underlying assumptions can be considered axiomatic. These axioms or presuppositions frame the worldviews upon which a tradition relies. They explain and separate mental events from natural events, or conceptions from perceptions within different experience/language continua. For example, in the case of the two creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, human beings are created in the divine image and distinct from the other animals. For Aristotle, the creating deity is pure "thought" and places this pure "thinking capacity" as mind into human beings where "... it alone is divine, because physical activity has noth-
ing whatever to do with the activity of Reason". It is this "soul" which enables human beings to understand and judge the world. The Hindu Vedic Rishi would also clearly distinguish soul or self from body:

Know thou the self (atman) as riding in a chariot. The body as the chariot. Know thou the intellect (buddhi) as the chariot-driver, And the mind as the reins. The senses, they say, are the horses; The objects of sense, what they range over. The self combined with senses and mind wise men call "the enjoyer."

In these examples, it is some axiomatic view of soul that separates the intellect from physical nature and so identifies the contexts within which the human intellect functions in the institutions, arts, philosophies, religions, and sciences of a tradition.

We do not prove axioms, we use axioms to prove other statements. Aristotle believed that there are certain statements and truths that are so true that they can not be proven, but they do not need to be proven because they are so true. These are the fundamental definitions or axioms around which we identify and explain experience. An axiom is like a knife in that by its very nature, it severs the relevant from the irrelevant, the accepted dogma from the heresy, the true from the false. To pose any significant question is to pose it within sets of assumptions that define the language used and that determine both the possibilities for the posing of the question as well as the possibilities for answering it. For example, theories of the origins and justifications of slavery are as varied as the traditions within which slavery occurs. The same applies to class and gender distinctions, as well as economic and political systems.

**Imitation.** The words "imitate" and "imitation" come from the same Latin root as the English words "image" and to "imagine." The term imitation is understood here in three related but different senses. The first is a biological sense in that every living organism is a general composite image of the genetic recipes of its progenitors. This commonality is most obvious in terms of the structures and organs of animals, as Geoffrey St. Hilaire, professor of zoology at the Paris Museum of Natural History, suggested early in the 19th Century:

Nature tends to repeat the same organs in the same number and in the same relations, and varies to infinity only their form... From this standpoint there are no different animals. One fact alone dominates: it is as if a single being were appearing. It is an abstract being, residing in Animality, which is tangible to our senses under diverse forms.
Today, we can illustrate this point in the commonality, across phyla, of the genetic code in a number of developmental or metabolic pathways. In modern evolutionary biology, this "animality" is extended to all living organisms and is expressed in the relationship of phenotype within genotype. This does not deny uniqueness; rather, uniqueness results from the nature of a given genetic recipe and the space and time context in which the recipe is instantiated. Whether we are speaking of protozoa or people, this uniqueness occurs within the given genetic image which is its possibility, whereas how the organism functions is a combination of this given and its circumstances in space and time. Thus, every organism is a combination of the possibility of its given nature, and the various possibilities for acting and re-acting within its place and time. According to Ernst Mayr, this is a two-stage process involving DNA:

1) The most spectacular and—until the 1940s—totally unexpected finding is that the genetic material, now known to consist of DNA, does not itself participate in building the body of a new individual but merely serves as a blueprint, as a set of instructions, designated as the "genetic program"
2) The code, with the help of which the program is translated into the individual organisms, is identical throughout the living world, from the lowest microorganism to the highest plants and animals.

The second meaning of "imitation" relates to the degree that an organism can be said to accept or reject, or avoid, choose, or determine in any sense, its actions and behavior. We would define this as "conscious" imitation—what Ernst Mayr calls "mind"—which he does not, as we do not, consider a strictly human phenomenon:

As far as the words "life" and "mind" are concerned, they merely refer to reifications of activities and have no separate existence as entities. "Mind" refers not to an object but to mental activity and since mental activities occur through much of the animal kingdom (depending on how we define 'mental'), one can say that mind occurs whenever organisms are found that can be shown to have mental processes.

We would define awareness, animal or human, as the innate "capacity to imitate," i.e., the capacity of living organisms, consciously or unconsciously, to select, map and/or reproduce patterns and processes in their environments and act accordingly. The molecular biologist, Friedrich Cramer, argues that the human ability to conceptualize and symbolize, i.e., to consciously imitate conceptually and symbolically,
enables us to create the environments within which we develop physically and mentally:

...we are able to turn our wishes directly from genetic realities into "genetic traits." Though not those recorded in the double helix, nonetheless they represent knowledge, abilities, instruments, customs, traditions, and moral prescriptions; they are set down and passed on through education, libraries, colloquial speech, social norms and political systems.®

The third definition of imitation, when applied to human awareness, means that every interpretation, explanation, conception in a group's or an individual's conceiving, interpreting, and explaining is an imitation of nature and that the explanation itself cannot be separated from that which is explained. Thus the possibility of "explaining" cannot be captured in one of our explanations. This insight represents one of the most radical changes in understanding our theorizing in the sciences. Lawrence Leshan and Henry Margenau suggest that:

Today, science is beginning to view the nature of consciousness quite differently. Classifying and organizing the world are seen as human activities. What we can observe of reality is our own organization of it. Reality is a compound like water, with consciousness one of the elements. But we can never hope to know what the compound would be without consciousness.®

We want to emphasize that we are using "imitation" rather than "abstraction" because we feel that "imitation" is more universally applicable in that it draws no definite line between perception and conception. "Abstraction" is usually used in a strictly conceptual sense to indicate that essences of the abstracted entities have been identified. And one may well forget that human theories and concepts of nature are a matter of imitation. In this third and human sense, the imitations within a tradition, particularly initially, tend to reflect its axiomatic separation of mental events from physical events. We are living today in a time of increasing intermingling and intermixing of traditions, with an increasing awareness that the particular emphases of a tradition do not eliminate the value of other assumptions more characteristic of other traditions. For example, much of the past century's physics and biology has gone from a static to a process view of nature.

**Reflexive self-awareness.** "To flex" means "to bend," and "reflexive" means "directed and/or turned back upon itself." It is in this sense
that one speaks of attempts to think about one's thoughts as reflection, i.e., as in reflecting upon an impression and/or idea. Reflexive self-awareness is used here to connect "tradition" and "imitation" as related aspects of human thinking. We prefer "reflexive self-awareness" to "consciousness" because of the highly diverse and conflicting uses of consciousness in contemporary philosophy and science.

However, like consciousness, which means "with knowledge," we would use "reflexive self-awareness" to refer to the possibility of awareness as it is expressed in possibilities for awareness ---though not necessarily in an awareness of which one is aware. With this idea one can approach Paleolithic cave painting as the possibility of imitating animals in the environment onto the walls of caves. And it is reflexive self-awareness which is reflected in awareness of the processes of imitating in systems of imitations. For example, many Eastern logics incorporate steps that express this insight in "double negation" or "indescribability levels" in logical reasoning. In the Jaina logic of "points of view," all statements about objects and events are made from a point of view, while the object or event remains indescribable.

The Buddhist Catuskoti logic contains four steps: the first affirms (S is P), the second negates (S is not P), the third both affirms and negates (S is both P and not P), and the fourth negates both affirmation and negation (S is neither P nor not P). The point is that the possibility of awareness is not reducible to any particular state of affirmation or negation, or both, or neither. The Greek Skeptics, on the other hand, "withhold judgment until all doubt is removed," and at the same time, challenge the criteria that might be said to "remove doubt."

Reflexive self-awareness is a remarkable synthesis of individual and collective awareness in which the individual is mentally and physically an image of the collective, and the collective is a mental and physical image of the individual. Reflexive self-awareness is also an evolving awareness whether seen as an aspect of an individual or as an aspect of the collective group to which an individual belongs. In the individual, it begins at birth with physical and limited neurological/mental responses, and develops into conceptualization of stimuli and responses. It goes from being hungry, etc., to an awareness of and interpretation of "hunger," from responding to internal and external stimuli to the imitation of stimuli and responses in images in art, literature, religion, and science. In the collective, it holds the group or society together, and is expressed in philosophies, sciences, religions, and their corresponding institutions.
II. Three Traditions

In June, 1989, at the ISCSC Conference held at the University of California, Berkeley, Professor Shu-li Ji, who at that time was associated with the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, delivered a paper. He proposed that it is a Eurocentric assumption that equates science in general to what we might call the "natural sciences of the Greeks and other Europeans." And he proposed that different cultures and traditions in the East arising contemporaneously with the early Greeks in the Axial Age developed different sciences which then progressed even as the physical sciences of the West did. Thus, when one speaks of the progress of the sciences this should also imply more than just the natural sciences of the West.

We should like to combine Professor Shu-li Ji's position with the idea of "development" found in the 4th Century BCE Chuang Tzu, where at the end of chapter on "Perfect Happiness," Chuang Tzu clearly links evolution of human beings to natural processes: "All things come from the originate process of Nature and return to the originate process of Nature."

Following Chuang Tzu's outline, we would suggest that it is possible to distinguish and understand different traditions in terms of the emphases that have historically characterized the separating of minding from naturing in the mental imitations within these traditions. We would stress, however, that a tradition, as the term is used here represents a primary emphasis. Often within a tradition, those who differ with this emphasis tend to be regarded as its heretics, outsiders, and enemies.

The human mental capacity for imitation would seem to emerge from that continuum which we call nature, or more appropriately perhaps, "naturing." And this capacity for mental imitation which creates our intellectual lives even as we exploit and develop it, we would call "minding." The totality, then, from which human reflexive self-awareness emerges is a "naturing/minding continuum." It is the emerging of this minding capacity and the forms that it takes that we would suggest provide the parameters of the different traditions within which civilizations in their conceptual imitations of nature in general and human nature in particular, map and change the natural world.

One illustration of such conceptual imitations is to be found in a tradition's religions, which, in reflecting the axioms of the tradition, are pantheistic, polytheistic, animistic, monotheistic, or henotheistic. In turn, it is one of the major functions of a tradition's deities to explain the way or ways in which it is assumed the original separation of minding
from naturing, as the phenomenon of reflexive self-awareness, occurred.

Whether this separation, which is fundamental to the human capacity for imitating in symbols and concepts, is a historical fiction like the social contract, a metaphor, or an actual event, is irrelevant here. As a theory and methodology, it can provide a philosophical basis for comparing traditions—their religions, sciences, philosophies.

We would illustrate this approach briefly with examples taken from three traditions within which different civilizations have developed and within which reflexive self-awareness has been expressed through centuries: 1) a thingist or object tradition, which emphasizes self and world as a collection of things and objects with specific and generally physical identities; 2) a consciousness or mentalist tradition which emphasizes world and self as primarily consciousness or consciousness and objects of consciousness; 3) a process tradition which emphasizes self and world as interrelating processes and processing. That these three traditions overlap is clear, and within any one of them the elements of the other can be found, for the human intellect would seem to function in common ways no matter where one encounters it. Frequently, however, different elements in a tradition will be seen as irrelevant or even heretical.

Tradition 1: The World as Thing and Object. Within this tradition, the basic emphasis is upon the world and human experience of it as a collection of objects occupying space. The terms "reality" (from the Latin res meaning thing) and "existence" (Latin stare, Greek histasthai to stand) both reflect this view. The Pre-Socratic philosopher and mathematician, Zeno of Elea, makes this point quite clear when he claims that if one adds one thing to a second thing and this second thing is not increased thereby, and if one subtracts this thing from the second thing and the second is not diminished thereby, then this first thing is "nothing" and so could not be said to "exist." And for the same reason, two different objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time and two similar objects are never the same, for each individual object "carries its own identity," that is, "is what it is."

This approach places a special emphasis upon the senses, especially the tactile sense, in its definitions of matter and physical nature. Most discrepancies and disagreements can be explained by some physical dichotomy between the real and the apparent, or essence and appearance. Since things occupy space and carry their own identities, their
inter-relationships can also be viewed as things, e.g., causality and time.

Thales of Miletus (6th Century BCE) would be an excellent illustration of this tradition, for he is supposed to have maintained that: "The first principle and basic nature of all things is water." The question "What are things really?" and its various answers provided the content for ensuing arguments in the thingist tradition over the basic nature of things - is reality one or many, apparent or real, constant or changing? The context for succeeding historical discussions of reality was expressed by Parmenides at the end of the 6th Century BCE: "...our decision must be made in these terms: Is or Is Not. Surely by now we agree that it is necessary to reject the unthinkable, unsayable path as untrue and to affirm the alternative as the path of reality and truth." 12

Things are static and have clear boundaries. If an object changes, then its identity has changed and one has another thing—or the change is apparent but not real. Matter is conserved and "something" and "nothing" are clearly and absolutely defined primarily with reference to "in space." Linguistically, there is a stress on noun forms and the named and namable. Knowledge refers to things, the conditions of things, and their names. Time, space, the elements of nature are things and in most cases as they are imitated in symbols, technologies, and institutions. These symbols, technologies, and institutions are viewed as objects real in their own right. There is a historical tendency in the tradition to reduce appearances to essences which can be expressed only abstractly—but these abstractions in religion, science, and philosophy represent things at higher levels, including matter, gods, heavens, hells.

A truth will be a correspondence of statement to thing. If there are beliefs in gods in this tradition, these gods will be divine "things" and/or the "source" of the world of things, e.g. Genesis and the idea of creating by naming. The most important heresy in the monotheistic religions which develop within this "thingist" tradition is that of pantheism, which turns the deity and the world into common processes by dissolving the absolute and dichotomous identity which separates creator from createe.

An interesting thing/object problem was posed in the 9th Century CE by the Medieval theologian, John Scotus Erigena, who admitted that God was omnipotent but not omniscient because one sort of knowledge was denied him—what Erigena called the source of God's "divine ignorance" i.e., God might know that he is but not what he is, for He is not a thing or an object. "God does not know what He is, because He is not a what... Deus itaque nescit se, quid est, quia non est quid. This igno-
For this his works were banned and placed upon the Index of forbidden books.

The nature of things and the nature of existence will correspond, and "objective" taxonomy and causal connectives will be fundamental to all branches of knowledge. Mental events will be reflections of things captured and reasoned about by a rational and/or empirical soul. Science here will be the study of things, using what the physicist Erwin Schrödinger called the "principle of objectification" which lets us assume that we as observers can "...step with our own person back into the part of an onlooker who does not belong to the world, which by this very procedure becomes an objective world." This principle permits a pursuit of the ultimate things which one might call reality which does not change. Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* suggested that the original impetus for the existence of Plato's Eidos came as a response to the Heraclitean idea that the world was in a state of flux:

These thinkers...were convinced about the truth of the Heraclitean arguments which state that all sensible things are always in a state of flux, so that if there is to be a science or knowledge of anything, there must exist apart from the sensible things some other natures which are permanent, for there can be no science of things which are in a state of flux.

This is a tradition within which answers precede questions and values are "thing-related." Within it, the context of evolving reflective self-awareness will be the world of things. As Aristotle suggested in the *Metaphysics*: "...it appears that knowledge and sensation and opinion and thought are always of other objects, and only incidentally of themselves." Aristotelian categorical and Stoic prepositional logics as well as modern symbolic logics serve both as tools for relating truth values and will themselves be considered as rational system "things." In the tradition, both reason and sensation are assumed to correspond to the object world.

In this tradition, the critical approach to the self-reflexive imitation continuum starts with the identity principle and its expression in the correspondence theory of truth, i.e., the correspondence of name and statement with the reality of the object world. If the religion is monotheistic, then any disagreement over the nature of the deity or over the nature of the one reality, may be seen as an attack upon the deity who not only made all things the way they are, but also created the world by naming it. Such a disagreement, for example, is central in the case of the heliocentric vs. the geocentric universe controversy. The theological
faculty of the University of Paris in 1277 protested in its criticism of both the sciences and philosophy:

It is deplorable that the faculty of theology, which is called the republic of sole truth and understanding, should have to speak the language of the philosophers...the pernicious men who sought to reduce the ineffable mysteries of the Trinity, transubstantiation, and other theological truths to our understanding...and presume to formulate them according to certain natural and philosophical and logical reasons, seeking to include with the rules of nature what is above all nature.

It is easy to see why in this thingist context, the changing of views is so often fraught with misunderstanding and violence for if there is but one reality and that is the creation of the one and only deity, then when two individuals disagree, they cannot both be right, though both may be wrong. If the sun circles the earth, to suggest otherwise is false and perhaps even heretical---what Petrarch in the 13th Century called the work of fools:

There are fools who seek to understand the secrets of nature and the far more difficult secrets of God, with supercilious pride, instead of accepting them in humble faith. They cannot approach them let alone reach them. Those fools imagine they can grasp the heavens with their hands. Moreover, they are content with their erroneous opinion and actually imagine to have grasped the truth. Not even the telling words addressed by the Apostle to the Romans are able to deflect them from their lunacy. "Who knows the secrets of God? Who is a party to his counsels?"

The limitations of this perspective as it relates self-reflexive awareness to conceptual imitation of the object world were recognized by the Greek and Roman Skeptic philosophers, Sextus Empiricus and Agrippa who, while not rejecting this objectivist view, grasped the relativity it entails. The Skeptics believed that one should always inquire (skepsis) into what one claimed to know, and withhold judgment (epoche) until one had certainty beyond doubt. Agrippa, for example offered five ‘tropes’ which he believed furthered inquiry and led to withholding judgment:

1) Discrepancy, that is disagreement, variety of view, different opinions on the matter at hand; 2) Infinite regress of criteria, the true truth, real real, certain certainty, atoms claiming they are atoms in statements that are atoms, and so on; 3) Relativity to cultures, individuals, times, places, and so forth, of every observation, statement, proof, test, and so on; 4) Hypothesis which is the unquestioned assumption
of some position as a starting point for a sequence that in all its extensions and applications remains based on unquestioned dogma; 5) Circular Reasoning which uses that which is being asserted as proof of the assertion. 19

**Tradition 2: World as Consciousness.** Within this tradition, the emphasis is upon the possibility and nature of consciousness and awareness of the world, as distinct from the mental and natural events of which it is aware. Here consciousness is conserved and is in no way limited to either a particular center of sensation and conception nor particular objects of sensation and conception. An example of this distinction is the decision of the Vedic God, Indra, to inquire into the nature of his own consciousness. He studies under the sage, Prajapati, and at the end of 36 years is told that if he wants to understand the "Self" he is to glance at himself in a pan of clear water or into a mirror. Indra does so and since he is attired as befits the king of gods, he is most impressed. However, as he thinks about his mirror image, he realizes that if he were ill or ugly, etc., the mirror would also reflect this. He returns to Prajapati with his question "what is consciousness?" and asks it anew. Ultimately he learns that that which is the possibility of the "looking" is never the seen. Just as the possibility of explaining is none of its explanations. 20

The fundamental questions in this tradition were/are what is the nature and function of human "consciousness" and "knowledge," and how are these processes possible? The Sage in the Kena Upanisad asks:

By whom impelled soars forth the mind projected?
By whom enjoined goes forth the earliest breathing?
By whom impelled this speech do people utter?
(and answers)
It is conceived of by him by whom It is not conceived of.
He by whom It is conceived of, knows it not.
It is not understood by those who say they understand It.
It is understood by those who say they understand It not. 21

When there are disagreements among members of the tradition, they will be disagreements over the nature of consciousness and its relationship to the objects of consciousness. Is it one as in cosmic consciousness or individual and many as in the Jaina Jiva? It is within this tradition of course that one might place the Indian idea of transmigration and karma as well as the idea of liberation - whether as individual Jiva or Purusa, Atman, or as collective Brahman.

Here social relationships are defined by the quality of conscious-
ness which the individual possesses—as in the caste system where, at least originally, one's caste was determined by the karma acquired in previous states of consciousness and not by a particular physical state. Ultimately the difference between human and animal is also a matter of level and quality of consciousness as human and animal bodies can be interchangeable in the rebirth system. Here developing reflexive self-awareness is a matter of discovering internal states of awareness which transcend the material contexts of body awareness.

Institutions and knowledge stress consciousness, even when systems, like the Jain and Samkhya, also posit a corresponding physical world. It is consciousness that attains liberation and an end to rebirth. For example, the physical elements of nature—which for the Greeks were things, for the Chinese processes—these for the Jain relate to the situations and contexts of consciousness (not objects per se). The non-conscious world, or Ajiva consists of five substances: time (kala), space (akasa), physical processes (pudgala which is both uniting and separating), motion (dharma), and rest (adharma)—with Jiva itself as a sixth element.

Another example of the emphasis upon consciousness is Samkara's theory of superimposition of meaning and identity within and upon the empirical world. Awareness of such superimposition then enables the enlightened Advaita Vedantin to discover the more important action of the universality of Brahman, or cosmic consciousness which is the source of the superimposing:

...the producer of the notion of the Ego (i.e. the internal organ) is superimposed on the interior Self, which in reality is the witness of all the modifications of the internal organ, and vice versa, the interior Self which is the witness of everything is superimposed on the internal organ, the senses, and so on. In this way there goes on this natural beginning—and endless superimposition, which appears in the form of wrong conception, is the cause of individual souls appearing as agents and enjoyers (of the results of their actions), and is observed by every one.

The deities and spirits in this tradition are related to levels of consciousness, which on one level is polytheistic, believing in many gods who are associated with the different aspects of human experience; however, on another level it is monistic, realizing that all deities are but manifestations of one consciousness or Brahman. The gods too, like human beings, can in some religions be subject to transmigration and rebirth.
In this tradition the critical approach to the self-reflexive imitating—imitation continuum starts with the possibility that consciousness is not conserved. This is not necessarily a denial of consciousness, but rather a view of imitating as a finite aspect of a finite human being—a process for coping with suffering and the relativity of life and death as aspects of the human condition. Two of the best known propositions of Buddhism are certainly the assertion of anatta (no self) and anicca (no constant, unchanging essence).

The Buddha in the proclamation of the idea of "no self" did not deny the validity of sense experiences; in fact, the individual is a synthesis of five aggregates or skandhas which are the senses coupled with the feelings, consciousness awareness, dispositions, and body. These possibilities for awareness do not require a non-situational owner of awareness which would then be yet another possibility for awareness.

Nagarjuna, the great Buddhist philosopher of the 2nd Century CE, refined a four part reasoning technique, the Tetralemma (catuskoti), which by focusing attention on different stages or possible aspects of awareness would both indicate possibility for awareness as well as the limitations of these possibilities. At its first level, this technique affirms a possibility or state of affairs; then at a second level, it negates this affirmation. At a third level, reflecting upon the first two levels, both affirmation and negation are simultaneously affirmed. Finally, to go beyond all three levels and beyond affirmation and negation, as well as any illusion of "self," all three levels are denied simultaneously. In each of these stages or levels, a progression in the understanding of the individual occurs so that one goes beyond any either/or...i.e. all imitations.

1) Everything or anything is so or thus; 2) everything or anything is not so or not thus; 3) everything or anything is so and not so or thus and not thus; 4) everything and anything is neither so or thus, and neither not so or not thus.

Another critical possibility is that of the Lokyata, or Carvakian materialists who see consciousness as mere sensation; all else, including inference, would be fantasy or illusion.

**Tradition 3: World as Inter-related Process Continuum.** The world as an inter-related process continuum is one in which all is in motion and flux—a series of continua which manifest infinite aspects which are a synthesis of mental and natural events. Naming is more important than names, because names are relative to a synthesis of the possibility of naming and the possibility for being named. The Chinese philosopher.
Hsun Tzu (3rd Century BCE) suggested that while names are not arbitrary, their meaning is a matter of convention and related to their usage. For this reason, Confucius and Confucian philosophers in general were concerned with rectification of names. Because names and categories are applied in and to changing situations, they tend to reflect these changing states in their application. The world changes, even as one observes the world process, and the observer, as process, is also changing.

A very interesting illustration of this dynamic process view is to be found when one identifies the five basic elements in early Chinese physical theory: fire, metal, earth, water, wood. These are processes, not elements: water is soaking and descending, fire is heating and rising, wood is bending and flexing, metal is melting and molding, and earth is planting and harvesting.

One of the Chinese expressions for nature as process is zi plus ran which in translation is a combination of this plus thus and can mean "self creating." This view is close to Nagarjuna's use of tathata, which is translated as thusness. And thusness is then coupled with sunyata, or emptiness and in Madhymika Buddhism and in Chinese, Chan/Zen. Hsun Tzu suggests that the individual seeking the "Way" but not having yet attained it should take "emptiness" and "stillness" to be his guides.

In this tradition, evolving reflexive self-awareness occurs in an aesthetic process concerned with harmony, social interacting, and appreciation of nature---of which the observer is an aspect. But one of the most important characteristics of this observer aspect is that it couples observation with perspective. An illustration of this perspective, which links minding and naturing, is found in the response of Wang Yang Ming, the Neo-Confucian philosopher in the late 15th Century CE, when he was asked by a disciple whether nature, like human beings, had innate knowledge:

The Teacher said, "The innate knowledge of man is the same as that of plants and trees, tiles and stones. Without the innate knowledge inherent in man, there cannot be plants and trees, tiles and stones. This is not true of them only. Even Heaven and Earth cannot exist without the innate knowledge that is inherent in man. For at bottom Heaven, Earth, the myriad things, and man form one body. The point at which this unity is manifested in its most refined and excellent form is the clear intelligence of the human mind. Wind, rain, dew, thunder, sun and moon, stars, animals and plants, mountains and rivers, earth and stones are essentially one body with man. It is for this reason that
such things as the grains and animals can nourish man and that such things as medicine and minerals can heal diseases. Since they share the same material force, they enter into one another."

In another passage in the *Chuang Tzu*, he discusses both the "coming of distinctions into the world" and at the same time raises the question as to whether there really is any fixed state where distinctions have an absolute value:

The knowledge of the ancients was perfect. How perfect? At first, they did not yet know that there were things. This is the most perfect knowledge; nothing can be added. Next, they knew that there were things, but did not yet make distinctions between them. Next they made distinctions between them, but they did not yet pass judgments upon them. When judgments were passed, *Tao* was destroyed. With the destruction of *Tao* individual preferences came into being. Are there really construction and destruction? Is there really no construction and no destruction?28

According to the Doctrine of the Mean, that common principle which connects both the natural and social worlds, is the principle of sincerity:

Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their nature, they can then fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, they can then fully develop the nature of things. If they can fully develop the nature of things, they can then assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth. If they can assist in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth, they can thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth. ...

Sincerity is the beginning and the end of things. Without sincerity there would be nothing. ...The way of Heaven and Earth may be completely described in one sentence.---They are without any doubleness, and so they produce things in an unfathomable way.29

Language meaning in a process tradition is essentially verb based, and because to name is to render static in some symbolic sense, names are often considered a matter of convention and not correspondents to things. This is reflected, we think, in the Confucian concern with the rectification of names and the suggestion of the Chan Buddhist master I-Hsuan of the 8th Century CE "Kill the Buddha if you happen to meet him.9 Kill a patriarch or an arhat if you happen to meet him." The point here being that one would then confuse some individual or thing for the greater whole which is not the Buddha but "Buddha Nature."
In this tradition, the critical approach to the self-reflexive imitating-imitation continuum starts with the possibility of verbally expressing the principle of the process. One illustration of this is the use of the Yin/Yang symbol to illustrate that no such clear or absolute distinctions are possible in a process view. Another excellent illustration is found in the opening passages of the Tao te Ching which suggest that the "Nature" that can be "natured"---i.e., turned into specific knowledges of nature as in the sciences---is not the constant "Naturing Process" within which sciences occur (our translation and interpretation).

And suggest that the Name that can be named---i.e., the mind or thinking that can be turned into specific concepts as in explaining/explanations, defining/definitions, naming/names, interpreting/interpretations, is not the constant "Minding Process" within which thoughts and names occur (our translation and interpretation). Here words, as the Confucian and Taoist Philosophers Hsun Tzu and Chuang Tzu, suggested, are a matter of convention. The Confucian worldview is very much concerned with the rectification of names.

III. Paradoxes.

Critical analysis of any discussion of nature or human nature involves a number of paradoxes. Those which would seem to us to be particularly relevant to understanding a tradition are those which result from attempts within it to interrelate different aspects of human experience. The following list is not exhaustive, but serves to emphasize the difference among the traditions which we have discussed:

1) The human intellect as "mind" can be viewed both as an aspect of nature and experience and perspective upon nature and experience.
2) Thus intellect is both ordering intelligence in the world and is a product of an intelligible world order.
3) The intellect is both the source of conceptual imitating and a product of imitations.
4) It reflects both the possibility of reflexive self-awareness in "nature" as well as possibilities for reflexive self-awareness in the interpretations, systems and institutions we create and within which we define ourselves and societies.
5) Each of these paradoxes occurs both in individuals and in social collectives.
6) Knowledge and understanding are positive and negative--positive in the sense of finite inclusion and focus upon the known in a limited situation, and negative as an awareness of experiences and interpretations excluded and ignored.20
Each of these paradoxes is a continuum within which knowledge as imitation consists of syntheses of these dual aspects, while understanding of imitating processes provides perspectives upon these syntheses. Imitations in a tradition are then attempts within it to relate extremes on these paradoxical continua while awareness of imitating facilitates the questioning of the tradition’s imitations. For example, the philosophical problem of the relationship of universals to particulars in a thingist tradition will deal with universals and particulars as things possessing their own identities. In a consciousness tradition, universals and particulars will apply to the relationship of universal and particular consciousness or states of consciousness or some variation thereof.

In a process tradition, universals and particulars will refer to universal and particular processes both of nature and of human society. So, when one is relating universals and particulars, it is necessary to understand the tradition within which this relating occurs as well as how the origins and limits of such relating are defined. For example, does one assume the intellect is a creation of the gods, an aspect of nature, or the source of both gods and nature?

A most important and puzzling aspect of these mind/nature paradoxes, is that reflexive self-awareness as the possibility of imitating also has the capacity to see the limitations of a tradition’s axioms as these are expressed in its possibilities for awareness in religion, science, and philosophy. This is a historical process which provides checks upon a tradition within the tradition. These checks, which are expressed in the reasoning of the Stoics, the Skeptics, the Buddhist Catuskoti, and the Jaina Saptabhangi among others, should make this developing possibility central to any comparative study of civilizations. We would go so far as to suggest that this critical process is fundamental to the survival of the intellect, individually and collectively in a tradition, and thus ultimately fundamental to the survival of the nature/mind synthesis represented by human nature.

IV. Conclusions.

Clearly none of these traditions is a pure state, nor ever was so. However, it is interesting to see how many contemporary questions and problems both arise and are answered in these frames of reference. For example, we would see the conflict between the West and China over human rights as a tradition conflict - a process tradition in which "responsibility" in social process is fundamental, whereas "human rights" like possessions are seen as "things" defined in a thingist tradi-
tion. The one tradition has problems with human rights, the other with human responsibility.

On the other hand, we believe that modern physical sciences, including biology, have jumped traditions and are far closer to the process tradition, while the creationist as well as the social scientist with a behavioristic or Freudian bent are still working within a thingist framework. The current "creation/evolution" debate includes a conflict between thingist and process philosophies. While the evolutionary biologists understands species and subspecies in evolutionary lineages, the creationist sees them as objects whose static essences result from the divine mind.

And it was no accident that from the 1950s to the 1990s, there was a fascination with the problems of consciousness which sent thousands of individuals to India to "find themselves," while meditation techniques and gurus flooded the thingist traditions of the West. So dangerous did this seem to thingist theology at one point that Pope John Paul and the Vatican issued a warning against Eastern meditation.

Perhaps the time has come to accelerate our traditional border crossings. As the physicist Michael Faraday wrote:

In our conceptions and reasoning regarding the forces of nature, we perpetually make use of symbols which, when they possess a high representative value, we dignify with the name of theories. ... Such conceptions have their advantages and their disadvantages; they afford peaceful lodging to the intellect for a time, but they also circumscribe it, and by and by, when the mind has grown too large for its lodging, it often finds difficulty in breaking down the walls of what has become a prison instead of its home.

The problem, as we see it, with our shrinking world and expanding world commerce is that it is imperative we understand the traditional contexts within which we make our decisions. So far, we suspect, the thingist orientation of capitalism will stress profits and not the responsibility and empathy which must come if we see ourselves as members of a family where humanity and nature together form a whole. Equally important is the creation of a world in which human consciousness as reflective self-awareness is educated universally so that individuals are both free and enlightened. So as we develop a global economy it is essential that we start with certain understandings as to the limitations of all our imitations.

For our Society, the comparative study of civilization must include comparative study of ways in which groups historically have accom-
modated, tolerated, encouraged, and limited reflexive self-awareness. This comes most clearly to the fore when individuals question not only a society’s justifications for its laws, economic systems, taboos, and castes, but also the justification of its justifications. Unfortunately we are too often more interested in product than process, concerned more with explanations than with the nature of and possibility of explaining. We forget that religions, philosophies, political systems, and the arts and sciences arise as a result of the reflexive self-awareness of the individual within the collective and that this is where choice and responsibility occur.

Notes
2. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnanb, Charles Moore: A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy, Princeton University, 1973, p 45
5. -----, p. 74
11. Phillip Wheelwright:, p.44
12. Ibid., p. 97 (Parmenides’ position was opposed to that of Heraclitus of Ephesus, 6th Century BCE, who claimed that the world as we know it is like fire, constantly changing. We cannot "step into the same river twice" and by implication what we claim to know is relative to a moment and place.)


17. *Ibid* p. 194-5


25. Prof. Shu-li Ji, *op.cit*

26. Watson/*Hsun Tzu*, p. 128


28. Feng Yu-lan, *Chuang Tzu* p. 46-7

29. Wing-tsit Chan, p 107-9
