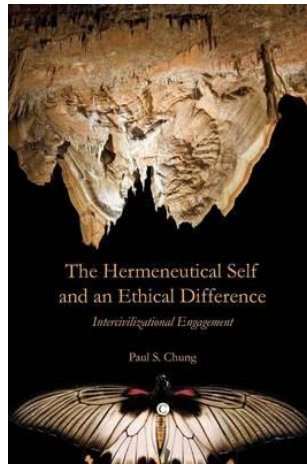


Dana TABREA¹¹

A Global Hermeneutics. The Cave and the Butterfly¹²

(Review to *The hermeneutical Self and an Ethical Difference. Intercivilizational Engagement* by Paul S. Chung, James Clarke and Co., Cambridge, 2012, 287p)



Abstract Paul S. Chung's all-encompassing hermeneutical project is relevant for the historical inquiry into hermeneutics, and for the comparing of different hermeneutical approaches, coming from the Western as well as from the Eastern traditions (on the one hand, from Schleiermacher to Gadamer, and on the other hand considering Confucianism and Daoism). And mostly it is a plea for a global hermeneutics as a consequence of and need for *intercivilizational engagement*.

Keywords: ethics, hermeneutics, intercivilizational reconstruction, global hermeneutics, Plato, Zhuangzi

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The book under review here is structured into four parts as it follows: Part I is focused on the Western philosophical tradition and the development of hermeneutics as a theory (authors such as Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer are brought into discussion) with the purpose of finding the bridge across the theory of interpretation and ethics (the moral concept of virtue is analyzed at this point). Part II reveals the relationship between the hermeneutical self and moral theory (Foucault and Gadamer are considered, but a comparative undertaking is also assumed between the West and the East – some possible dialogues between Confucius and Aristotle or between Aquinas are created). Part III connects the theory of interpretation with the theory of communication, and even considers the aesthetical dimension of postmodern ethics. Finally, Part IV is the most relevant to the issue I am concerned of here – an intercivilizational reconstruction, beyond an inquiry enclosing both hermeneutics and ethics, as well as the Western and the Eastern traditions.

The author insists upon the possibility of an intercivilizational dialogue with the intention of constructing an ethical-hermeneutical theory by which to bridge the gap between the West and the East by examining various theories of interpretation in terms of ethical self, on the one hand, and of self-cultivation on the other hand. The great number and density of complex religious traditions makes a very generic concept out of the globalization of hermeneutics. The main issue that the author has in mind – a comparative religious study of ethical hermeneutics focused upon a dialectics of enlightenment between the East, specifically East Asia, and the West – conflicts the real possibility of complete systematization of the religious traditions under discussion.

A global hermeneutics represents the background of the comparative religious study that Chung undertakes with the purpose of bringing upfront the topic of the dialogue among civilizations. The intercivilizational reconstruction based upon what the author names a *global-critical inquiry* establishes its main goal: the link between the Western dialectics of enlightenment and Neo-Confucian hermeneutics and ethical self. Following this line of thought, the author makes use of two distinct metaphors: 1. Plato's metaphor of the cave; 2. Zhuangzi's metaphor of the butterfly. The two metaphors are meant to mediate some „cross-cultural encounter for a hermeneutic of intertextuality through assuming the human subject as

hermeneutical self and moral integrity". First, the Confucian theory of ethical hermeneutics is elaborated while Zhu Xi's analogical hermeneutics is brought into dialogue with Gadamer and Aristotle's notion of analogy. Second, Wang's discursive hermeneutics of elimination is reinterpreted within the frame of thought of Heidegger's notion of Dao as original saying.

The comparison between Plato's analogy of the cave and Zhuangzi's story about the butterfly dream serves for the entire comparative religious study of interpretation and morality in an intercivilizational framework. The myth of the cave, that can be considered the basis of the Western dialectic of enlightenment, illustrates the human condition as a difficult journey from the state of prisoner to that of the enlightened, from shadows to light. The sun symbolizes the light and the illumination brought to the human being when it comes across the truth. Zhuangzi used to live in China around Plato's time. He is one of the main pupils of Laozi. He used to tell his dream about the butterfly: the dream was about him being a butterfly and the special enjoyment that this felt that he forgot who he really was; he forgot that he was Zhuangzi. He began to question this: Did Zhuangzi dream about the butterfly? Or was it that the butterfly dreamt of Zhuangzi? Human consciousness, he thought, and rationality are not enough when it comes to understanding the truth. One could reach reality as a whole by the recognition of the otherness of the self. This otherness can be referred to as the unconscious, nature, or the others. Anyhow, the metaphor of the butterfly, differently from the one of the cave suggests that liberation and enlightenment resides within the individual and not outside him or her.