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De-construction as a Non-Substantialistic Turn in the Process of Phronesis

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Prelude

- ¶1. The studies of what the mission of philosophy is continue, century after century. Entering the field of philosophical Being, we will attempt in this paper to interpret the concept of wisdom in ancient Greek, especially the Greek philosopher Heraclitus' thoughts about the relation between life and death. By comparing it with the contemporary idea of *différance* from Jacques Derrida, we interpret the deconstruction by the concept of power—the power that exists between life and death, between practice and wisdom, and between construction and deconstruction. If deconstruction can be one starting point from which to approach a non-substantialistic turn for the mission of philosophy, the non-substantial turn will also come from the death of substantial interpretation. Deconstruction gives us the death of the substantial approach. And also because of this work of death, deconstruction is the non-substantialistic possibility. In order to enter the field of philosophy, we need to find a door to get Being together with philosophical life. So, the concept of deconstruction gives us this new door to the process of *phronesis*. Through this process of *phronesis*, we change substantialist interpretations of other philosophers by deconstruction, but we also give birth to a new substantialist interpretation of the world. Our philosophical Being is a kind of force of life from our own Being. When we encounter the field, there will be a duo between the Being of ourselves and the Being of the other, which sings by deconstruction in order to approach a better turn to the world.

I. Phronesis: a process between *poesis* and *prosthesis*

- ¶2. In contemporary western philosophies, there are many kinds of theories discussing what philosophy actually is. Following the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's thoughts, there is one limit of the philosophical spirit during all these thousands of years, he said: "...there was too much desire to do philosophy to wonder what it was, except as a stylistic exercise."[\[1\]](#) Following the traces of western philosophy since Greek times, as in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*,[\[2\]](#) we note that philosophical studies began first with physics, the investigation of natural things, then turned to metaphysical studies about substance. In Greek, the term or *sophia*, has the sense of manual ability, knowledge, science, and practical wisdom.[\[3\]](#) After thousands of years, the effort of philosophers changed and turned out to be the love of wisdom by losing one important part, practice. This understanding created and developed our traditional mission of philosophy. Here we try to interpret first the relation between "wisdom" in its sense as practical wisdom and the work of philosophy.
- ¶3. In Greek *phronesis* means: prudence, the realization of goodness by one oriented intelligence.[\[4\]](#) *Phronesis* is an action of thinking or perception by the intellect, the sentiment, or the intelligence of one thing. In this paper, we want to develop the concept of phronesis by a dual approach: *prosthesis* (: addition or application) and *poesis*, : production.[\[5\]](#) First of all, let us go back to Aristotle's phronesis or prudence, meaning a kind of practical intellect [\[6\]](#) and also a kind of practical intellect to be applied to the realization of goodness.[\[7\]](#) If we consider philosophy as the love of wisdom, we may also approach the Greek meaning of wisdom in its practical sense by application. The activity of getting wisdom from abstract knowledge, through a new approach of getting meanings during the thinking of dual-actions, involving production and application, becomes wisdom.
- ¶4. Now we trace wisdom back to two processes: production *poesis* and application or addition *prosthesis*. The concept of *poesis* means a realization, or a creation of an external work of the artist. For Aristotle, as for the ancient philosophers, goodness is also the end; the same science of philosophy functions like a kind of theoretical science of first principles and causes. But there is also another kind of poetic science , which proposes the realization of external work from the cause.[\[8\]](#) In Book A, 7, Aristotle interpreted *praxis* as opposite to production *poesis* [\[9\]](#).

- ¶5. If we understand *phronesis* to be practical wisdom, for the mission of philosophy during these centuries, there were many philosophers who understood that so-called philosophy should be a labor of searching for substance in the world. In Greek, means the love of science, the love of research, and the love of the practice of art, or of intellectual culture itself.^[10] Following these senses, we are not too far away from the love of the practical spirit during the process of our approach to philosophy, and philosophy itself is the realization of this kind of love. In Greek, means desire of the senses, or love, and means to ask or to interrogate.^[11] So we may also interpret that the work of philosophy as love of practice through asking and interrogating.
- ¶6. We now use *phronesis* in order to cut off traditional habits of treating philosophy as a search for the concept of substance. But we need also another attitude to continue this job. There is a process in this loving activity of *phronesis*, and inside the process, human beings use their talents of asking and interrogating to approach the productions of others, then again use the action of asking to establish the application. In the process of philosophy, people love the practice by asking and people ask what something is by being with the thing; assuming a position beside this object, they have a relation between the production and the application. No matter how this thing is now, one person should first have an effective relation with it and then should be with it in his way. The concept *prosthesis* is the application or the addition; here is the entry of the human being to the relation with the thing. We may only think that for Aristotle, the nature of philosophy is a form of the science of *phronesis* itself, the science of practice itself. And to practice with something means to have a cyclical relation between production and application. So, the way to love practical wisdom is to have a relationship with some practical thing as production, then to apply our power as another being by addition of some point of view to the thing. As all artists usually do, lovers of wisdom should follow their hearts. *Praxis* is opposed to production, so if a human being chooses to enter the field of some production, as a worker in philosophy, he or she should aspire to be with the one total field containing this production, not to grasp its answer or truth inside. Only in this way, can *phronesis*, as the realization of philosophy, be the entry into the action of thinking.
- ¶7. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "Wisdom is one thing. It is to know the thought by which all things through all are guided."^[12] Now, if we think about the word "wisdom" by following *phronesis*, as practical wisdom, this can guide us to philosophy, showing what we should do to enter its field. Heraclitus also said about life, "The bow is called life, but its work is death."^[13] By replacing the two words in Greek, he played a game with the words life and bow, we can interpret the ancient Greek, , as bow or as life. In Heraclitus' thought, the bow is life, and when the music is played we need to let the force of the bow encounter the force of the lyre, and the power of the music comes out only when two forces come to be one totality. The power can only be grasped by the work of the bow-by its death. So, the birth of the music is the death of the bow. Here it is a production; like music there must be

also some application of the musician; hence, *phronesis*, since practical wisdom is a process between production and application. On this matter, the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "Men do not understand how that which is torn in different directions comes into accord with itself-harmony in contrariety, as in the case of the bow and the lyre." [14]

- ¶8. *Phronesis* is a field, because the production and the interpreting subject before this production need to get together as a whole totality; the power of *phronesis* exists only when the force of production and the force of the application disappear. When the power emerges, the philosopher and the object of his or her thinking die. After we rethink what this Greek thinker said, we get another point of view, that of opposition:

Opposition brings men together, and out of discord comes fairest harmony, and all things have their birth in strife. And one and the same thing are the living and the dead, the waking and sleeping, the young and the old; the former change and are the latter, the latter change in turn and are the former. [15]

- ¶9. So the process of *phronesis* must have dual activities: production and application. As in the process of the practice of music, there must be production of the musical melody, but at the same moment, the application of the musician, who enables the production to exist. Between the production and the application, we get one circle. Since the practical role of philosophy presents this circle, we may think that this ancient Greek thinking can give us more philosophical energy, only this practical love can teach us how to approach both sides: the production of others and the application of our own application. In Greek, prosthesis means an addition, as well as application. So with the addition of the interpreter, the production gets its new life, but gets it through the death of the production. So we may think that, a production is called life, but its work is death. Only when it dies, do we have then another birth in the process of *phronesis*.

II. The Practice in the *différance*

- ¶10. It is very important for contemporary philosophical studies to start again from the action of practice, as we have already spent a long time chasing the absolute truth, or the essence of a thing. By tracing back to the special realization of the goodness as truth, one sees that western philosophy has a very long history of such interpretations, but what we are trying to do here is interpret philosophy by the concept of de-construction.

- ¶11. In the French philosopher Jacques Derrida's theory, the new word *différance* represents something which cannot be heard, but can be seen in the text. *différance* has two senses in English: to defer and to differ with. The concept implies a mistake inside of the sign: Derrida tried to interpret the meaning of openness during the activities of writing.[\[16\]](#) We can let the sign defer its general linguistic sense, and then by using our application, we will differ with the sense. Inside of the *différance*, we widen the sense by letting the sign defer the sense. The presentation of this sign lets us finish our process of practice. So, the different meanings come from the activity of deferring and from differing with its sense.
- ¶12. If contemporary reflection in philosophy focuses on the pursuit of differences, then I believe the main door to the concept *phronesis* is our activity of *différer* and *différance*. Contemporary linguistics and de-constructing theories help us re-think what philosophical interpretation is, not in the search for substance or essence, but in hearing the original sense inside of the sign, and then to differ with it. This is called to get differences from the production. And within the application from the production, people will get their new production. The death of an old production gives the world a new production.
- ¶13. Here we quote a point of view of Derrida about the outside of a production. The text runs:

How to conceive what is outside a text? That which is more or less than a text's own, proper margin? For example, what is other than the text of western metaphysics? It is certain that the trace which 'quickly vanishes in the destiny of Being (and) which unfolds...as Western metaphysics' escapes every determination, every name it might receive in the metaphysical text. It is sheltered, and therefore dissimulated, in these names. It does not appear in them as the trace 'trace' itself. But this is because it could never appear as such.
[\[17\]](#)

That there is no essence of *différance*, it is that which not only could never be appropriated in the as such of its name or its appearing, but also that which threatens the authority of the as such in general, of the presence of the thing itself in its essence. That there is not a proper essence of *différance* at this point, implies that there is neither a Being nor truth of the play of writing such as it negates *différance*.[\[18\]](#)

- ¶14. Since substantialism has a long history in the history of philosophy, for Derrida what actually are the margins of philosophy? It is not a question of substantialistic thinking; it is an activity without name where new interpretations of old philosophical productions exist in the process of practice. The real process of *phronesis* leads us to a philosophical activity, the traditional activities lead us to ask about the essences. There are already too many philosophical texts in asking about substance and essence, but if you do not inquire into them, you will not get their life. Perhaps the death of substantialism will give birth to the life of this ancient question. Derrida used the verbs defer and differ with, and we can try this interpretations in order to understand an ancient Greek philosophy. To love wisdom (*phronesis*) for the Greeks means to have a practical activity, and between a production which defers and the application in which we differ with the production, we get *phronesis*. We get *phronesis* by the birth of difference. The realization of the process is to follow the Greek spirit that death is birth, the turning point of "non" thinking is from the death of "yes." What is the central concept or idea of philosophy? There is none. So, when we want to ask, we should listen first, and when we want to de-construct something, we should listen to the existence first. By an action of cutting philosophical texts, we get the new birth of philosophy. The attitude that we need is to let senses exist and non-exist. Then new life will come.

III. The Power of Deconstruction

- ¶15. This part of the paper will now enter our question about the non-substantialistic turn. By following our spirit as Heraclitus, we find the death of substantialism gives us the birth of it. So when we want to have an answer to a question about substance, we need to de-construct the substance of another's answer. De-construction is a turn from substantialistic to non-substantialistic thinking. Inside the process of *phronesis*, we trace back the Greek meaning of philosophy in totality, and inside the new process of what philosophy is, people start to re-think again by de-constructing the philosophical sign as our noble term like "substance." So how can the concept of de-construction lead us to a non-substantialistic turn? Let us review once again some F. Nietzsche's pertinent remarks.

We are to recognize that all that comes into being must be ready for a sorrowful end; we are forced to look into the terrors of the individual existence-yet we are not to become rigid with fear: a metaphysical comfort tears us momentarily from the bustle of the changing figures. We are really for a brief moment primordial being itself, feeling its raging desire for existence and joy in existence; the struggle, the pain, the destruction of phenomena, now appear necessary to us, in view of the excess of countless forms of existence which force and push one another into life, in view of the exuberant fertility of the universal will.[\[19\]](#)

- ¶16. In the process of philosophical studies perhaps we should focus on philosophers like Heraclitus and Nietzsche. For Nietzsche the power comes from the dual spirit between Dionysus and Apollo. For Heraclitus, the real logos is not a search for essence; rather, logos searches for one dual totality of One between life and death. Only if the dual forces become One is power realized. Power is the impulse between life and death, and it gives us a practical possibility. Our deconstruction also needs this power; the two directions of the deferring sense of the original sense of a sign, and the differing possibility of our different interpretation for the sign.
- ¶17. For the development of contemporary philosophy, we believe that only this practical activity of philosophy can open new life for old substantialistic desire. Deconstruction means the death of the former (we prefer the word "former" to the original) sense, and also the birth of the new possibility. "Duo" means at the same moment to sing together, as the dual processes think together. The production and the application, the force of bow and the force of lyre, they all turn out to be one impulse at a very specific moment. Inside the new impulse, deconstruction is our new turning point. Inside the field of music, the birth of music exists at the same time with the death of the old impulse of bow. The deconstruction of the impulse of the bow gives its life to the new birth of music. If we do not want to sacrifice the impulse of the bow, we can have it as usual, but we cannot get our music.
- ¶18. The power to deconstruct presents to us the practical activity of philosophy; when we face philosophical texts, instead of trying to find the substance or essential sense of the sentences, power comes from the forces of others' interpretations, but gives birth to our own interpretation. In this way, philosophy means to renew an interpreter's energy. Otherwise, we will be afraid to interpret our own being-Being with the text-by letting the other interpretations die.
- ¶19. So the will to deconstruction needs the difference of the interpretation. If we can develop what Nietzsche said, deconstruction will move in the opposite direction from the strong part to the weak part, and vice versa. The will to power interprets within the Being of deconstruction. Following Heraclitus, we have to continue Nietzsche's idea, that we de-construct in order to construct something. So the point of departure of *phronesis* is focused on deconstruction;[\[20\]](#) the starting key point of deconstruction is power, when interpreters want to kill the text, not to find the answer of the text, and philosophers earn back their freedom from the history of philosophy. This will to deconstruction is another turning point from substantialism in the old philosophical tradition.

Postlude: The Power and the Turn

- ¶20. In order to search for the truth of thinking, philosophers tried very hard to do their jobs during these thousands of years. Here in this paper, we would like to suggest reflection on philosophy as a dual totality. Substantialist points of views have always had entries to the door of a world of philosophy, but they forget to give directions to let people get out of this house. The house of philosophy with a direction mark like deconstruction can always let interpreters go inside the house and change the spirit of the house by their contemporary force. With deconstruction, philosophy has no fear to enter and to face other people's force, but gets encouragement to sing differently from the dual forces. The will to this power to deconstruct is the new possibility of the birth of practical wisdom; with this kind of love, our flame of philosophy will not easily die.

END NOTES

1. Gilles Deleuze, *What is Philosophy?*, London: Verso (1994), 1.
2. Aristotele, *La Metaphysique*, Paris: Librairie Philosophie J. VRIN (1986).
3. A Bailly, *Abrege du dictionnaire Grec Francais*, Paris: Librairie Hachette (2001), 796.
4. Aristotele, *La Metaphysique*, Paris: Librairie Philosophie J. VRIN (1986), 1000b 4, 1078 b 15; 309.
5. ibid., 301, 306Cf. Cristal H. Huang, *On the Relation between Prosthesis and Poiesis in the Process of Interpretation*, *Soochow Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 1(1) 1996, 223-239. **prosthesis/ prosquesiV: application or addition. V. jronh: le retranchement, l'abstraction, in English: retrenchment. poiesis/(((((((la realization, la création d'une oeuvre extérieur à l'artiste. ???????? Please clarify the second part of this citation (in Red). Is this a quote or is it a publication???**
6. ibid., B, 4, 1000 b4, 94-95 Cf. Note 4, "Au sens rigoureux, la jronh ??c'est la prudence; l'intellect pratique, propre à l'homme et appliqué à la réalisation du bien."

- [7.](#) *ibid.*, Vol. II, M 4, 1078, b15, 210-211 "...la conséquence des arguments d'Héraclite sur la vérité des choses, arguments qui les persuadèrent, et suivant lesquels toutes les choses sensibles sont dans un flux perpétuel, de sorte que s'il y a science et connaissance de quelque chose, il doit exister d'autres réalités en dehors des natures sensibles, des réalités permanentes, car il n'y a pas de science de ce qui est en perpétuel écoulement."
- [8.](#) *ibid.*, Vol.I, Book A 2, 982 b10, 8-9 Cf. Note 12, "La science poétique est celle qui se propose la réalisation d'une oeuvre extérieure à l'agent."
- [9.](#) *ibid.*, 34-35.
- [10.](#) A Bailly, *Abrege du dictionnaire Grec Francais* , Paris: Librairie Hachette (2001), 934.
- [11.](#) *ibid.*, 364.
- [12.](#) Charles Bakewell, *Source Book in Ancient Philosophy*, New York: Gordian Press (1973), 30.
- [13.](#) *ibid.*, 31.
- [14.](#) *ibid.*, 31.
- [15.](#) *ibid.*, 31.
- [16.](#) Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* , translated by Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1982), 3-27.
- [17.](#) *ibid.*, 25.
- [18.](#) *ibid.*, 25-26.
- [19.](#) Friedrich Nietzsche , *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, New York: The Modern Library (1968), 105.

20. Lik K. Tong, [Power, Will and Interpretation](#), *Philosophical Revue (Taiwan: Yie-Chuang Edition)*, 4 1993, 26-40 Following Prof. Tong's point of view to the relation between the interpretation and the will to power, here we reinterpret a departure point of the reflection of philosophy, it is the will to deconstruction.

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