Hannah Arendt used the term in discussing social evil, is what the West in total ends up with, not just the fascist totalitarianism of the past. The banal worldview has the tendency to foster ignorance and prejudice against anyone different than oneself. This, for Jung, is the major cause of the so-called clash of civilizations and the major stumbling block for a peaceful and harmonious world in the age of globalization.

In place of the myopic modernist reading of history and social relations among humans and with nonhumans, Jung proposes a worldview of transversality. In finding a remedy for our troubled world he sees the key in building a bridge between East and West and between Eurocentric modernity and other civilizations, particularly in the East. He argues passionately that we no longer need to be forced into erroneous choices between competing civilizations or to become parochial by Sinicizing Asia or Africanizing Africa. “To ignore or denigrate the non-West ... is to abandon the treasure chest of many geophilosophical ideas and thus jeopardize the survival of humanity and the sustainability of the earth in the future,” he warns. Whatever else we might do in this age of interconnectedness, we no longer need to be bound by partial universality. He advises that we should aim to transcend the limitations imposed by neglecting or obliterating the other.

His recipe for finding this transversal middle between civilizations lies in the disenchantment with the West and the illusion of modernity and “the reclamation of truth ... by way of planetary [or cosmopolitan] thinking that is no longer Eurocentric but the result of correlating laterally the multiple sociocultural lifeworlds as the decentered sites of truth.”

The idea of transversality is an outcome of Jung’s life-long search for the truth of human existence as an existential phenomenologist and comparative philosopher. He always compares different natures or characteristics and finds a commonality that bridges gaps between them while acknowledging their differences: the East and West, Orientals and Occidentals, Wang Yang-min and Martin Heidegger, man and woman, the established and the marginal, speaking and writing, phonic language and ideographic language. He does this better than any other contemporary thinker in comparative philosophy, and phenomenology, because he is a transversal savant par excellence crossing many cultural borders in his own life, and hence becoming well versed in many lifeworlds.

For him, writing is a carnal enjoyment (jouissance), or satori, as he put it in critiquing Roland Barthes’s Empire of Signs. More importantly, as a philosopher he believes that writing is his way of fulfilling the philosopher’s duty to be a “civil servant of humanit[y].” In this respect, he is a Confucian, rather a Wang Yang-ming scholar through and through. He emphasizes in a clear voice that “the ultimate function of philosophy is tested in the manner in which it serves, albeit indirectly, to sustain and enhance human existence.”

Particularly in times of crisis for humanity and the earth, Jung believes the philosopher has to face the challenges bestowed upon him. To tackle the danger facing humanity and the earth, Jung argues that we need a new ontology. He cites his favorite mentor Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “there-being” of intercorporeality. Only this, he asserts, including this book, “opens up the uninterrupted flow of cultural dialogue based on difference or, in the terminology of Heidegger, Difference as Under-schied, which may be neither refined nor erased, neither assimilated nor annihilated, but negotiated and compromised [com/promised].” In other words, as he puts it, it is like “a lateral movement of digging a new hole instead of digging the same hole deeper and deeper with no exit in sight.”

He repeatedly refers to “the famous wooden statue of Buddha at a Zen temple in Kyoto whose face marks the dawn of ‘enlightenment’ (satori) or signals the beginning of a new regime of knowing and morals” (pictured). He interprets it as symbolizing a new beginning in thought and practice by saying that “from the crack in the middle of the old face in the Buddha’s statute, there emerges an interstitial, liminal face that signifies new transformations.” And he adds, “since the new face emerges from the middle, it also symbolizes and intimate community of human beings co-existing with other beings in harmony.”

“establishes and secures the firm foothold in such fundamentals for erecting the edifice of geophilosophy as if the earth really matters.”

Jung’s use of words [or ideograms] as a philosophical tool in this book and many others in recent years can be understood if I paraphrase his definition of transversality as a kind of “passport that allows us to cross borders between diverse cultures, enter the zone of intersections, and discover cross-cultural connections in pursuit of truth.”

What he wants from his readers is “an open and unending dialogue as an end itself.” His work, “In the Internet age, more than ever before, we need existential phenomenologists like Jung who remind us of the importance of embracing others in the flesh if we are to form a real
which East Asian culture has something to offer to the West. Following Erazim Kohák, he asks us to “recover first the moral sense of nature.”

In his transversal philosophy, ecosophy is “a ‘postmodern adventure’, insofar as it attempts to interrupt or deconstruct anthropocentric modernity and its principal conditions, all enframed in disembodied reason and translated into science and technology to fuel the engines of industrial civilization in the name of progress.”

Two words that summarize Jung’s philosophical interest and mission are, in his own syllogism, “homopiety” and “geopiety.” He strongly believes that “for the preservation of the earth and humanity, we should become ‘caretakers’ [more properly ‘caregivers’], not ‘right takers.’ ” He advances the heteronomic ethics of putting others first over self. Ecosophy, corporeal feminism and postmodern ethics are coeval for Jung. All three culminate in a heteronomic ethic of caring as responsibility. This is because “caring, which is always tender and involves corporeal and spiritual intimacy, is the ethical site of feminine distinction.” The first other experienced by an infant is the mother and the family. Other humans and non-human objects are experienced later in extended social relations. Thus, it is legitimate to regard the “other” beyond the self as an “altarity” worthy of piety and even worship if we mimic his joyful play with the word alterity in the spirit of James Joyce and Heidegger. Only by dint of the other’s benevolent care (i.e., mother) do human beings become independent and autonomous. Jung believes that this first phenomenological experience of humans as embodied beings should be the foundational principle of humanity from now on.

Jung also reminds us of the fact that this first and all other encounters between the I and others are mediated by the body — starting with the way an infant comes into contact with the mother through his/her body. His idea of tactility (or diatactics in social relations) has significant implications for today’s hyper-technological social environment: we have to contact others physically to form intimate social relations between peoples. It is in sufficient to just look at others from a distance.

In the Internet age, more than ever before, we need existential phenomenologists like Jung who remind us of the importance of embracing others in the flesh if we are to form a real and intimate community of human beings co-existing with other beings in harmony and peace on the earth. As a scholar cum activist, Jung is truly committed to making a better world. His eyes are always focused on the marginal, and his heart lies with the weak and the suffering.

Is the political theorist “priestly” or “jesterly”? Is political theory about theoria or phronēsis? Is political science like a hard science or about practical knowledge? On these age-old controversies, Jung sides unambiguously with the latter positions, which used to be pushed aside as anachronistic in the age of scientific discovery and modernization.

In his numerous publications over five decades, Jung has never flinched in taking compassionate positions on these issues, as this volume’s collection of articles attest. This unerring consistency as a jesterly philosopher in the original sense is what makes him an eternally youthful intellect, or sunbi in Korean. At no time did he ever stop writing and singing out loud for the needy and the disadvantaged. In the final analysis, as he puts it, “the synaesthesia of the human sensorium is synchronized with the harmony of music.” With the synaesthetic idea of transversality, he transforms himself from a philosopher to a writer, to a choreographer, to a musician and vice versa. True to the sunbi or sinic culture of his birthplace, he praises the poet singing in harmony with other beings. In doing so, he has become a poet-philosopher hymning verses with a musical or even erotic tone.

It is suitable to end this review with Jung’s favorite phrase from Zhang Zai since it captures the origin and gist of his philosophical writings more than any other quote he refers to: “Heaven is my father, and earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I find[s] an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions.”

In these times more than ever before, we are in dire need of recovering our piety towards humanity, other beings and the earth itself. Jung’s book deserves an accolade and acclamation from all those intellectuals and practitioners who are deeply concerned with the fate of humanity and the sustainability of the earth.

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