

A Methodological Framework for Cross-Tradition Understanding and Constructive Engagement

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The purpose of this paper is to present and explain a meta-philosophical methodological framework of how to look at seemingly competing approaches for the sake of cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement in our carrying out philosophical inquiries in a global context.¹ I intend to use this presentation and explanation as one way to explore the issue of how cross-tradition² understanding and constructive engagement is possible.

¹ Though some of the conceptual/explanatory resources (primarily those to be introduced in the first two sections) of this framework appear in my previous article [Bo Mou (2001), "An Analysis of the Structure of Philosophical Methodology – In View of Comparative Methodology," in *Two Roads to Wisdom – Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions*, edited by Bo Mou (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2001), pp. 337–364], what is given in the central portion of this paper is a substantial development, especially the part on the adequacy conditions for methodological guiding principles in view of the constructive-engagement approach in cross-tradition understanding. Earlier versions of (some of) the basic ideas of this paper (either in the form of this paper *per se* or as part of a more extensive paper on some other topic) were presented at the following conference/panel meetings: (1) the 9th East-West Philosophers' Conference (Hawaii, USA, 1 June 2005), (2) the international conference on "Searle's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement" (as part of the presentation paper) [co-sponsored by the International Society for Comparative Studies of Chinese and Western Philosophy (ISCWP), Division of Humanities of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and the APA's Committee on International Cooperation] (Hong Kong, 14 June 2005), (3) the ISCWP's panel session at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division 2005 Meeting (New York City, USA, 28 December 2005), (4) the 10th Symposium of Confucianism/Buddhism Communication and Philosophy of Culture (sponsored by Department of Philosophy, Huaan University, Taipei, ROC, 17 March 2007), and (5) San Jose State University Philosophy Alumni 2007 Conference (San Jose, USA, 5 May 2007). I am grateful to the audiences at the above meetings and Weimin Sun, who is commentator on my paper at the above third meeting, for their helpful comments and criticism.

² I use 'cross-tradition' here instead of 'cross-cultural' for the sake of due coverage in the current philosophical context. For one thing, 'traditions' here can mean either philosophical traditions or cultural traditions. For another thing, 'traditions' can mean either major philosophical traditions associated with their distinct cultural backgrounds (such as Western and Chinese philosophical traditions) or distinct sub-traditions within one major philosophical tradition (such as the analytic tradition and the continental tradition within Western philosophical tradition or the Confucian tradition and the Daoist tradition within Chinese philosophical tradition).

Before my presentation and due explanation of the suggested framework, let me first make some necessary clarification of a number of key terms that appear in the statement of the purpose of this writing. The term ‘constructive engagement’ here means a general philosophical approach that inquires into how, via reflective criticism and self-criticism, distinct modes of thinking, methodological approaches, visions, insights, substantial points of view, or conceptual/explanatory resources from different philosophical traditions, and/or from different styles/orientations of doing philosophy in a global context, can learn from each other and make joint contribution to the common philosophical enterprise and a series of commonly concerned issues or topics of philosophical significance. The foregoing constructive-engagement purpose and approach is considered as one defining character of the enterprise of comparative philosophy as the term ‘comparative philosophy’ is used in a philosophically constructive way. The suggested framework is methodological in a dual sense. First, it is directly and explicitly concerned with cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement of seemingly competing *methodological* approaches from different traditions. Second, the framework *per se* is methodological in nature: it is concerned with *how* to look at seemingly competing *methodological* approaches from different traditions. In the above second sense the suggested framework is *about philosophical methodology*; in this sense, the suggested framework is also meta-philosophical in nature. When I made such meta-philosophical remarks on philosophical methodology, I do not mean that I am able to be (or pretend to be) absolutely neutral without or beyond “any *ad hoc* philosophical point of view and origin”; in the sense of ‘meta-philosophical’ as I use the term, my meta-philosophical remarks on philosophical methodology to be delivered via the framework present a certain philosophical point of view.

In the following discussion, my strategy is this. First, in the first section, I introduce and explain some relevant conceptual and explanatory resources employed in the framework, especially the distinction between the methodological perspective and the methodological guiding principle, and make some initial methodological points. Second, in the section on two paradigm methodological perspectives, I examine two paradigm methodological perspectives, Socrates’s being-aspect-concerned perspective and Confucius’s becoming-aspect-concerned perspective, both for the purpose of highlighting their significant methodological visions and for the sake of illustration of relevant points. Third, in the section on adequacy conditions for methodological guiding principles, I suggest six meta-philosophical adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles, which constitute one core portion of the suggested methodological framework. Fourth, in the final section, I bring out three paradigm methodological-guiding-principle models, i.e., the Zhuang Zi’s, *Yin-Yang*, and Hegelian models, for the sake of illustrating the preceding six adequacy conditions and emphasizing their respective roles in the enterprise of comparative engagement as specified above.

Methodological Perspective Versus Methodological Guiding-Principle

As indicated above, the suggested methodological framework is the one concerning how to look at seemingly competing methodological approaches from distinct traditions in regard to an object of philosophical study. Given that the term ‘methodological approach’ means a way responding to how to approach an object of study, the term is a generic term to mean a number of methodological ways. In the context of philosophical inquiries, general speaking, the notion of methodological approach can, and needs to, be refined into three distinct but related notions of methodological ways for the sake of adequately characterizing three distinct but somehow related methodological ways in philosophical inquiries, i.e., methodological perspective (or perspective method), methodological instrument (or instrumental method), and methodological guiding principle (or guiding-principle method). For the sake of the purpose of this writing, in this section, I focus on conceptual and explanatory resources concerning methodological perspective and methodological guiding principle, which are needed for the suggested methodological framework, and highlight a number of relevant points.³

Roughly speaking, a methodological perspective is a way to approach an object of study that is intended to point to a certain aspect of the object and explain the aspect in terms of the characteristics of that aspect together with the minimal metaphysical commitment that there *is* that aspect of the object or that the aspect is genuinely (instead of being merely supposed to be) possessed by the object. There is a distinction between eligible and ineligible methodological perspectives concerning an object of study. If the aforementioned minimal metaphysical commitment is true, the methodological perspective is considered *eligible* in regard

³For a comprehensive discussion of the nature and status of the three distinct methodological ways, see Mou (2001), pp. 337–364. For the sake of the reader capturing their distinction in a vivid way, let me use the following ‘method’-house metaphor to illustrate the relevant points. Suppose that a person intends to approach her destination, say, a house (the object of study), which has several entrances – say, its front door, side door and roof window (a variety of aspects, dimensions or layers of the object of study). She then takes a certain path (a certain methodological perspective) to enter the house, believing that the path leads to the entrance of this side (say, the front door) or the entrance of that side (say, a side door) of the house. If a path really leads to a certain entrance of the house, the path is called ‘eligible’ one; otherwise it is called ‘ineligible’ (thus the distinction between eligible and ineligible methodological perspectives). When she takes a certain path to enter the house, she holds a certain instrument in her hand (a methodological instrument) to clear her path, say, a hatchet if the path is overgrown with brambles or a snow shovel if the path is heavily covered with snow. She also goes with a certain idea in her mind (a methodological guiding principle) that explains why she takes that path, instead of another, and guide her to have some understanding, adequate or inadequate, of the relation of that path to other paths (other methodological perspectives), if any, to the house. Surely such a guiding idea can be adequate or inadequate (adequate or inadequate methodological guiding principle): for example, if she recognizes and renders other eligible paths also eligible and thus compatible with her current path, the her guiding idea is adequate; in contrast, if she fails to recognize that and thus renders her current path exclusively eligible (the only path leading to the house), then her guiding idea is inadequate, though her current path *per se* is indeed eligible.

to that object. Otherwise, the methodological perspective is considered *ineligible* in regard to that object. Indeed, given an object of study, whether a methodological perspective is eligible or ineligible is to be determined on the basis of whether or not the aspect, dimension or layer to which the perspective in question is intended to point is really possessed by the object.

It is noted that a methodological perspective as specified above is a methodological-perspective simplex, in contrast to a methodological-perspective complex, which somehow integrates two or more perspective simplexes into one. Below, unless otherwise specified, by ‘methodological perspective’ I mean a methodological-perspective simplex.

One basic, minimal metaphysical presupposition of the suggested metaphilosophical methodological framework is this: given an object of study and given that the identity of the genuine aspect(s) of the object is thus determined (whether it is a naturally produced object in physical reality or a socially constructed object in social reality or an object of a systematic theoretic construction), there *is* the *common, objective* object of study linguistically or semantically addressed in the mutual understanding and constructive engagement. This minimal metaphysical presupposition actually consists of three sub-presuppositions: (1) given an object of study, the object has its *objective* character in a certain sense so that the “anything goes” version of conceptual relativism cannot go; (2) given an object of study, the object possesses its genuine multiple aspects, or all these aspects are genuinely possessed by the same, common object so that various agent-speakers who point to these different aspects actually talk about the same object; (3) an agent-speaker who talks about the same common object can linguistically or semantically (say, via a certain communication link) reach the common object as a whole, whether or not she is currently able to epistemologically reach all the aspects of the object. People have, or would have when being allowed to think for a while, their pre-theoretic understandings that (would) confirm the three claims or even consider them as platitudes. As any system has to stop somewhere, the framework to be presented here proceeds with its resorting to our reasonable pre-theoretic understandings in these three connections.⁴

A methodological guiding principle is a way concerning a certain methodological perspective (or a group of perspectives) in regard to an object of study, which is, or should be, presupposed by the agent who takes that perspective (or one or more among the group of the perspectives) for the sake of guiding and regulating how the perspective should be evaluated (its status and its due relation with other perspectives) and used (how to choose among the group of perspectives), and how the purpose and focus that the perspective serves should be set. There is the distinction between adequate and

⁴But, indeed, it is both philosophically interesting and significant to raise and explore the three corresponding reflectively-worthy issues for the sake of establishing a due metaphysical/semantic foundation for the suggested methodological framework: (1) how it is possible for us to have the common *objective* object of study without running into the radical relativism; (2) how it is possible for us to have the common object of study that genuinely possess its multiple aspects; (3) how it is possible for the agent-speaker to linguistically reach the object as a whole, whether or not she is currently able to epistemologically reach all the aspects of the object. I explore those issues somewhere else.

inadequate methodological guiding principles concerning methodological perspective(s) in regard to an object of study; as indicated at the outset, in the last section, I will suggest six sorts of adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles.

For the purpose of cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement, it is especially philosophically interesting, relevant or even crucial to have an adequate methodological guiding principle, which the agent is expected to presuppose in evaluating the status and nature of the eligible methodological perspectives, applying her methodological perspective, and looking at the relation between her current working perspective and the other perspectives.

Generally speaking, on the one hand, the merit, status, and function of a methodological perspective *per se* can be evaluated independently of certain methodological guiding principles which the agent might presuppose in her actual application of the perspective. The reflective practice *per se* of taking a certain methodological perspective as a working perspective implies neither that one loses sight of other genuine aspects of the object nor that one ignores or rejects other eligible perspectives in one's background thinking.

On the other hand, it does matter whether one's taking a certain methodological perspective is regulated by an adequate or inadequate guiding principle, especially for the sake of constructive engagement of seemingly competing approaches. When one's application of an eligible methodological perspective as part of one's reflective practice is guided by some adequate guiding principle and contributes to adequate understanding of the object of study, one's application of that perspective would be philosophically constructive.

In the following sections, with the foregoing conceptual and explanatory resources and distinctions, I first explain two paradigm methodological perspectives from the Western and Chinese philosophical traditions to illustrate the above general understanding of the nature and status of a methodological perspective; I then suggest six adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles and bring out three paradigm methodological-guiding-principle models to illustrate the adequacy conditions.

Two Paradigm Methodological Perspectives

In this section, I present two seemingly competing methodological perspectives, respectively from the Western and Chinese philosophical traditions, as two paradigm methodological-perspective models to serve three purposes: (1) to illustrate the foregoing conceptual and explanatory resources and the above general characterization of the methodological-perspective dimension of a methodological approach; (2) to provide effective methodological-perspective samples for the sake of illustration of the point of the next section concerning how to look at the relation between seemingly competing methodological perspectives through adequate methodological guiding principles; (3) to bring out two significant methodological perspectives as effective methodological-perspective paradigms in comparative engagement. One of them is a Socrates style being-aspect-concerned methodological

perspective as suggested and illustrated through Socrates's characterization of those important things in the human life like virtue, justice and piety in some earlier Plato dialogues. The other is a Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned methodological perspective as suggested and illustrated through Confucius's characterization of those important things in one's moral life like *ren* (humanity), *li* (ritual or convention) and *xiao* (filial piety) as revealed in the *Analects*.⁵

Socrates's Being-Aspect-Concerned Perspective in Early Plato Dialogue⁶

Socrates's distinctive methodological approach which he consciously and systematically pursued in early Plato dialogues is called *elenkhos* in Greek, more usually written *elenchus*, literally meaning 'refutation.' The *elenchus* approach can be seen most clearly in such short dialogues as *Laches* (to define bravery) and the *Euthyphro* (to define piety); but it is also used in Book I of the *Republic*, the first part of *Meno*, *Protagoras*, and *Gorgias*. The presentation in the *Euthyphro* of such a methodological approach is usually considered the most neat, concise, and representative, especially in connection with its methodological-perspective dimension and methodological-instrument dimensions. The manifest level or layer of the *elenchus* approach clearly reveals itself through the dialogue between Socrates and Euthyphro on the latter's four definitions of piety presented in the *Euthyphro* (especially see 5a–15d).

To aid in understanding some characteristic features of Socrates's method, the structure of how Socrates applied his method in *Euthyphro* is highlighted as follows:

- 5a Euthyphro claims that he has knowledge of piety, and Socrates says he is eager to become his pupil.
- 5c–d Socrates puts forward the question 'What is piety?' and sets up three conditions or requirements to be met:
 - 1. Some feature that is the same in every pious action.
 - 2. This feature will not be shared by any impious action.
 - 3. It will be that feature (or the lack of it) that makes an action pious (or impious).
- 5d Euthyphro gives his first definition ("The pious is what I am now doing").
- 6d–e Socrates explains why Euthyphro's first answer is not an answer to the question [failing to meet the first condition above] and further clarifies the question ("What is the essential form of piety which makes all pious actions pious").
- 7a Euthyphro gives his second answer to the question ("What is pleasing to the gods is pious").

⁵In Mou (2001), I already give a brief examination of the two methodological perspectives. In the following, I give a more detailed account of them.

⁶What is called 'the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned methodological perspective' here is the methodological-perspective dimension of Socrates's methodological approach in dialogue (i.e., his *elenchus* method as a whole).

- 7a–8a Socrates explain why Euthyphro's second answer can be reduced to absurdity (self-contradiction) [thus actually failing to meet the second condition above].
- 8b–9e Socrates guides Euthyphro to his third definition ("What the gods all love is pious").
- 10a–11a Socrates analyzes the problem with Euthyphro's third answer/definition, which fails to meet the third condition above ("The pious is loved by the gods for the reason that it is pious, but it is not pious because it is loved by the gods").
- 11e–14d Euthyphro gives his fourth answer ("The pious is the part of the just that is concerned with the care of the gods") with Socrates's guidance and help in clarifying some key concepts.
- 14d–15b Socrates analyzes Euthyphro's fourth definition, and it seems that his fourth answer turns out to be his second answer.
- 15d Socrates, "If you had no clear knowledge of piety and impiety you would never have ventured to prosecute your old father for murder...."

The *elenchus* methodological approach is suggested for its application to anything that deserves reflective examination. Socrates's primary concern, however, is with the issues of how to live, and the typical objects of his reflective examination were those like piety (in the *Euthyphro*), justice (in the *Republic*), and virtue or human excellence in general (in the *Meno*). What kind of things did Socrates intend to pursue in regard to those objects, besides those more fundamental purposes among his guiding principles to be discussed below? The form of the typical Socratic question partially reveals this: "What is the F-ness?" The F-ness (the universal Form, in the platonic terms) is supposed to be a single (universal) thing that is somehow shared by many things we describe as F, as indicated in the *Euthyphro* (5c–d); and he supposes that F-ness can be accessed by rational mind through inter-subjective rationality and be articulated in definite terms, as shown in the *Meno*. There, under Socrates's guidance, an illiterate slave boy infers a complex mathematical insight through the boy's own rationality. Though there are various aspects or layers of any object, what Socrates was concerned with is the aspect of the object that is stable and invariant (stably and invariantly existing in all F-things), unchanged, definite, and thus inter-subjectively accessible by any rational mind. For convenience, a blanket term, 'the being-aspect,' can be used to cover those characteristics of the object, or to stand for the aspect of the object that is characterized in terms of the aforementioned characteristics.⁷ It is the being-aspect of the object to which

⁷It is noted that, though having been taken as a trademark term in ontological study in the history of Western philosophy, the term 'being,' when in contrast to the term 'becoming,' is intended to denote the stable, definite, unchanging aspect or layer of existing things. A classic example of using the term 'being' in this sense is Parmenides' case, though the assumption plays a role in most of Greek rationalism. Actually, the two characteristic uses of 'being' are somehow closely connected with each other in some philosophers' minds: because the stable, definite, unchanging aspect of an object is considered to be its defining aspect which reveals its essence, the metaphysical study of being as existence is considered essentially the study of being as the stable, definite, and unchanging.

the perspective dimension of Socrates's methodological approach is intended to point. In other words, Socrates's methodological perspective is directed towards gaining access (knowledge of) the stable, unchangeable, and definite aspect of all things. (Accordingly, the kind of knowledge that Socrates seeks through his method is also considered as stable, definite, and publicly accessible without appealing to any party's unequal or privileged intelligibility but inter-subjective rationality; it could be achieved via rational argument; it could be clearly and coherently expressed in terms of definition. In other words, the kind of knowledge Socrates pursues through his *elenchus* methodological approach takes certainty and exactness as its characteristic hallmarks among others.) This kind of methodological perspective might as well be called 'the being-concerned perspective'.⁸

*Confucius's Becoming-Aspect-Concerned Perspective in the Analects*⁹

Another representative methodological perspective under examination, in contrast to Socrates's being-concerned one, is Confucius's becoming-concerned perspective in his methodological approach to characterizing those things like *xiao* (孝 filial piety) and *ren* (仁, tentatively glossed as 'humanity') as revealed in the *Analects*. Interesting enough, like Socrates, Confucius also had dialogue with his interlocutors on what (filial) piety is. Let us look at how Confucius characterized filial piety as a virtue, pondering what kind of methodological perspective he adopted in comparison with Socrates's and whether or not those distinct things in Confucius's approach could jointly contribute to our understanding of (filial) piety with Socrates's methodological perspective.¹⁰

2.5 Meng Yi-zi [once studied ceremonies with Confucius but was not his disciple] asked about filial piety. Confucius said, "Never fail to comply."

While Fan Chi [a minor disciple of Confucius] was driving, Confucius told him about his talk with Meng Yi-zi: "Meng Sun [Meng Yi-zi] asked me about filial piety; I reply, 'Never fail to comply.'"

Fan Chi asked, "What does that mean?"

Confucius said, "When one's parents are alive, comply with the rules of propriety (*li*) in serving them; when they die, comply with the rules of propriety in burying them, and comply with the rules of propriety in sacrificing to them."

⁸Because Socrates's methodological perspective has strongly influenced the development of a mainstream Western philosophy in the analytic tradition, it could be characterized as one origin of the 'analytic perspective'.

⁹What is called 'the Confucius style being-aspect-concerned methodological perspective' here is the methodological-perspective dimension of Confucius's methodological approach in dialogue. For the source materials that present good illustrations of the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned methodological perspective, especially see Confucius's characterizations of *xiao* (filial piety) in the *Analects* 2.5, 2.6, 2.7 and 2.8, to be cited below, and of *ren* (humanity) in the *Analects* 4.3, 6.28, 12.1, 12.22 and 13.19.

¹⁰See the *Analects*, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8 (translated by this author).

- 2.6.1 Meng Wu-bo [Meng Yi-zi's son] asked about filial piety. Confucius said, "Don't give your parents any cause for anxiety other than your illness."
- 2.7 Zi-you [Confucius's advanced disciple] asked about filial piety. Confucius said, "Filial piety nowadays means no more than that one can support one's parents. But we support even dogs and horses. If one does not have one's feeling of reverence, where is the difference?"
- 2.8 Zi-xia [Confucius's advanced disciple who is known for his extensive knowledge and scholarship] asked about filial piety. Confucius said, "What is difficult to manage is the expression on one's face [when serving the elders]. It is hardly entitled to be taken as filial piety to merely take on the burden when there is work to be done for the elder or, when wine and food are available, let the elders enjoy them first."

Confucius exhibited no tendency to question about important words in his moral vocabulary by giving a Socrates style universal definitions or meaning formulae. He instead gave different answers to different interlocutors depending on who asked the questions, the degree of his or her preliminary understanding of filial piety, in what context the question was raised, etc. His answers were designed to give the disciple-questioner some useful guidance. Although it is unclear exactly why the cited sections were arranged in the order as they were, it turns out that Confucius's four answers to the same question went further and further. In 2.5, Confucius's answer is a kind of by-default answer in his times: having filial piety is never failing to comply with those ready-made rites concerning how to treat your parents. In 2.6, Confucius addressed (at least partially) some mental layer of filial piety: not merely ceremoniously follow these rites and rules concerning how to treat one's parents, but also don't unnecessarily cause them anxiety. In 2.7 and 2.8, Confucius highlights further gradations of complexity including expressing it in posture and facial expression. The detailed dimension of filial piety marks it as more a gradation of virtuous performance than a simple bivalent duty. It is neither a mere ceremony nor even substantial support of one's parents: it is one's warm feeling of reverence for one's parents deep in one's heart which can, and usually does, express itself on one's face; such feelings of reverence for one's parents is not merely not to cause them anxiety but further lift them up spiritually; it would be hard to maintain such feeling of reverence especially when one's parents are in difficult situation for a long time. (There is one Chinese old saying: "There hardly remains a truly filially pious son or daughter beside the bed of his or her parent as long-term patients.") It does not necessarily mean that the son or daughter would give up physical or financial support of his or her terminally ill parent but that it would be hard to show the feeling of reverence without impatience.

What Confucius was concerned with in the *Analecets* seems to be the dynamic, ever-changing, concrete characteristics of things under examination; all those characteristics are intrinsically connected with various situations in which things reveal themselves. A blanket term, 'the becoming-aspect,' is used here to refer to these characteristics of the object that essentially involve dynamic change or becoming. The methodological perspective that is intended to point to the becoming-aspect might be as well called 'the becoming-concerned perspective'. In this way,

in contrast to the typical Socratic question, “What is the F-ness (the universal that is supposed to be true of all and only F-things)?” the typical question that Confucius intended to answer seems to be “Where is the *dao* of F-things?” or “How does the *dao* reveal itself in a specific concrete situation?”

With the foregoing explanation of Socrates’s and Confucius’s seemingly competing methodological perspectives and their distinct purposes and focuses, one natural question is this: how to look at their relation? One can rephrase this seemingly simple question in more general and reflective terms. If the object under examination possesses both aspects, would Socrates’s and Confucius’s methodological perspectives themselves be compatible or even complementary to each other? Can Socrates’s and Confucius’s methodological perspectives make a joint contribution to our understanding and treatment of an object of study or a reflective issue of significance? To answer those questions, one needs the guidance of adequate methodological guiding principles. The suggested methodological framework is intended to spell out some general adequacy conditions for such methodological guiding principles, which will be explored in the next section.

On Adequacy Conditions for Methodological Guiding Principles

To adequately and effectively guide one’s way to look at the due relation between seemingly competing methodological perspectives like the foregoing two sample methodological perspectives, one needs adequate, instead of inadequate, methodological guiding principles for such regulation and guidance. One primary goal of the suggested methodological framework is to spell out adequacy conditions for such adequate methodological guiding principles.

In the following, I intend to suggest six sorts of adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles.¹¹ The first four of them, and one of the last two depending on situations, are expected for an adequate methodological guiding principle.

- (1) The perspective-eligibility-recognizing condition. A methodological guiding principle that is presupposed by the agent who uses some eligible methodological perspective as her current working perspective is considered to be adequate when this guiding principle renders other eligible methodological perspectives (if any) also eligible and somehow compatible with the application of the current working perspective. In contrast, it is considered inadequate in this connection if otherwise.

It is noted that, in comparison with the subsequent adequacy conditions, this adequacy condition is the minimal condition in the sense that it is to be presupposed by the remaining sorts of adequacy conditions and that this adequacy condition should be minimally met by any adequate methodological guiding principle.

For example, consider the two sample methodological perspectives spelled out in the last section, the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned perspective and

¹¹ A shorter sketchy discussion of the six sorts of adequacy conditions appears in Bo Mou (2008), “Searle, Zhuang Zi, and Transcendental Perspectivism,” in *Searle’s philosophy and Chinese philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Netherlands: Brill, 2008).

the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. The two kinds of methodological perspectives point respectively to two most basic modes of existence, being and becoming, of things in the world that are typically possessed simultaneously by most of things in nature. Now the object of study under Socrates's and Confucius's examination is (filial) piety. If piety as the object of study genuinely possesses both its being and becoming aspects, Socrates's being-aspect-concerned methodological perspective and Confucius's becoming-aspect-concerned methodological perspective are both eligible in regard to our reflective examination of piety. In this way, a methodological guiding principle that renders both methodological perspectives eligible on the issue of piety would retain the perspective-eligibility-recognizing adequacy.

- (2) The agent-purpose-sensitivity condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered to be adequate if it has its choice of a certain working perspective, among eligible methodological perspectives, sensitive to the agent's purpose and thus renders the most applicable or the most appropriate (the best relative to that purpose) the perspective that (best) serves that purpose. In contrast, it is considered inadequate in this connection if otherwise.

Again consider the two sample methodological perspectives spelled out in the last section, the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. Given that the two methodological perspectives are both eligible on the issue of piety, a methodological guiding principle that sets out to decide which methodological perspective among the two is to be taken by an agent herself as her current working perspective, or how to evaluate the validity of some agent else's working perspective (either one) should be sensitive to the agent's purpose or her own focus on which aspect of piety to be captured in a certain context. If so, the methodological guiding principle would retain the agent-purpose-sensitivity adequacy. Otherwise, that is, when a methodological guiding principle demands or allows the agent indiscriminately to choose one *ad hoc* methodological perspective without regard to the agent's purpose and focus in a certain context, the methodological guiding principle would fail to retain this adequacy.

- (3) The equality-status-granting condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered to be adequate if it renders all the eligible methodological perspectives (perspective simplexes)¹² equal: being equally necessary for the sake of a complete account of an object of study and being equally local from the global point of view that transcends any local methodological perspectives; thus none of them *absolutely* superior (or inferior) to the others in the above senses. In contrast, it is considered inadequate in this connection if otherwise.

Again consider the two sample methodological perspectives as spelled out in the last section, the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective, and assume that

¹² Clearly, what is talked about here is not a methodological-perspective complex that can be a combination of multiple methodological-perspective simplexes.

both are eligible on the issue of piety. When one resorts to a certain methodological guiding principle to guide one's evaluation of the status of the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned perspective (or the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective) and renders it indiscriminately and absolutely superior to the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective (or the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned perspective), the methodological guiding principle thus fails to retain the equality-status-granting adequacy concerning the aforementioned two methodological perspectives on the issue of piety. In contrast, if a methodological guiding principle renders one of the two methodological perspectives better than other or most suitable only in view of a certain context and in regard to a certain aspect of piety to which the perspective in question points but without viewing it absolutely superior to the other, this methodological guiding principle would thus meet the equality-status-granting adequacy condition concerning the aforementioned two methodological perspectives on the issue of piety.

- (4) The new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing condition. A methodological guiding principle is considered to be adequate if it takes an open-minded attitude towards the possibility of new eligible perspectives that are to point to some genuine aspect of the object of study but have yet to be realized by the agent because of the 'unknown-identity' status of that aspect. A methodological guiding principle is considered inadequate in this connection if otherwise.

For example, again consider the two sample methodological perspectives spelled out in the last section, the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective and assume that both are eligible methodological perspectives on the issue of piety. If, besides the two methodological perspectives, a methodological guiding principle takes its open-minded attitude towards the possibility of new (yet-to-be-recognized) aspects of piety and thus the possibility of new eligible methodological perspectives that are to point to and explain them, then the methodological guiding principle would retain its new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing adequacy. In contrast, any methodological guiding principle that renders exclusive and exhaustive the current working perspective (or the current stock of methodological perspectives that are so far epistemologically available), the guiding principle is thus inadequate because it fails to meet the condition of the new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing adequacy.

- (5) The complementarity-seeking condition. Given that multiple, seemingly competing eligible methodological perspectives concerning an object of study turn out to be complementary (in the sense that each of them points to one aspect of the object and is indispensable for a complete understanding of the object), a methodological guiding principle is considered to be adequate if it captures the complementary character of the involved aspects of the object and thus seeks the complementary connection and harmonious balance between those perspectives for the sake of enhancing the complementary unity of those eligible perspectives. In contrast, it is considered inadequate in this connection if otherwise.

Again, consider the two sample methodological perspectives spelled out in the last section, the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. Suppose that piety as the object of study genuinely possesses both its being and becoming aspects and that both aspects are interdependent, interpenetrating, interactive and complementary in regard to the constitution of piety. Then the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned perspective and the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned perspective are complementary instead of being incompatible or opposed to each other on the issue of piety. In this way, a methodological guiding principle that renders the two methodological perspectives complementary, seeks their complementary connection, and promotes their joint contribution to a complete understanding of piety thus meets the complementarity-seeking condition. If otherwise, a methodological guiding principle would be inadequate in this connection on the issue.

- (6) The sublation-seeking condition. Given that multiple seemingly competing eligible methodological perspectives are genuinely competing to the extent that they point respectively to the genuinely competing or contradictory aspects or dimensions of the current status-quo state of an object of study (or of some future stage of its due development) or the genuinely competing aspects of distinct objects of study,¹³ such a methodological guiding principle would be considered adequate: when there is a genuine need, this guiding principle deals with those eligible but genuinely competing perspectives by capturing the contradictory character of the object(s) and seeking a due solution through a Hegelian synthetic balance in the newly formed object of study via sublation that keeps what are reasonable from both while disregarding what are not in the original object(s) of study. In contrast, it is considered inadequate in this connection if otherwise.

For example, it is to be decided whether to take the profit-seeking-only perspective or the welfare-seeking-only perspective to build up one social-economic community. Sometimes the profit-seeking-only layer and the welfare-seeking-only layer of the status-quo state of the social-economic community become genuinely contradictory. Then, when a methodological guiding principle seeks a synthetic balance via sublation to bring about a new approach that keeps what are reasonable in the two perspectives while disregarding what are not, the methodological guiding principle would be considered to be adequate because it meets the sublation-seeking condition in this due situation (so that the status-quo state of the social-economic community can be adequately reformed under its guidance). Another example concerning competing aspects of distinct objects of study is this. Given that two ideological systems as two objects of study are incompatible in regard to some of their aspects that are thus related to two genuinely completing perspectives, and when there is a genuine need of having them somehow compatible, an

¹³ The latter situation (i.e., ‘the genuinely competing aspects of distinct objects of study’) is intended to cover such a case: given an object of study (at a lower level), there are two or more ideological systems as distinct objects of study (at a higher level), which either result from some theoretic constructions or are products of pre-theoretic ideological developments in different traditions in treating the foregoing object of study (at a lower level).

adequate methodological guiding principle seeks a synthetic balance via sublation in a newly formed ideological system (as a newly formed object of study) that somehow has the originally competing perspective become compatible.

Note that the minimal ‘perspective-eligibility-recognizing condition’ is presupposed by the remaining kinds of adequacy conditions. Also note that which one, between the last two kinds of conditions, needs to be maintained would depend on the nature of the object of study, the character of the involved perspectives and the purpose that a certain methodological guiding principle serves.

Three Paradigm Methodological-Guiding-Principle Models

In this section, I present three paradigm methodological-guiding-principle models, the Zhuang Zi’s, *Yin-Yang*, and Hegelian models, for two purposes. First, I intend to explain how some of the foregoing six adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles are embodied by one of them in a paradigm way. Second, I intend to show that there is the distinction between appropriate and inappropriate applications of the three paradigm guiding-principle models; that is, when they are applied to right situations with due purposes, their applications are rendered appropriate; otherwise they are inappropriate. It is noted that, when focusing on the three paradigm models here, I neither pretend that there are only three adequate paradigm models¹⁴ nor presuppose a ‘triadic’ Hegelian combination. I use these three paradigms both as substantial models concerning adequate methodological guiding principles and as samples to illustrate the relevant point. In so doing, I make no absolute celebration of the three paradigm models; for, as indicated above, each of them has its own limit and can become inappropriate when not being applied to due situations.

The core idea of the Zhuang Zi style model is suggested in the *Zhuang-Zi*, especially in its Chapter 2, “*Qi-Wu-Lun*,” and Chapter 3, “*Yang-Sheng-Zhu*.”¹⁵ The Zhuang Zi style

¹⁴ I present these three paradigms here instead of also including some others from African tradition, Latin American tradition, etc. for two considerations. First, I do not pretend to have due working knowledge about African philosophy, Latin American tradition, etc. Second, I do not intend to exhaust all eligible paradigms from all the traditions but employ these three as effective samples to serve my finite purposes in this article (showing their substantial methodological visions and their illustration roles).

¹⁵ My presentation of Zhuang Zi’s relevant insights is my interpretative elaboration of them in view of some of my general methodological considerations concerning studies of Chinese and comparative philosophy for the sake of constructive engagement. To save the space, I will not repeat the major points and their explanations of these methodological considerations here but give their references as follows: (1) Bo Mou (2001), *op. cit.*; (2) Bo Mou (2002), “Three Orientations and Four ‘Sins’ in Comparative Studies,” in the *APA Newsletter* (in the portion on comparative philosophy, edited by Chenyang Li) Vol.02, No.2, Fall 2002, pp.42–45; (3) the first section of Bo Mou (2004), “A Reexamination of the Structure and Content of Confucius’s Version of the Golden Rule,” in *Philosophy East and West* 54:2 (2004), pp.218–248; and (4) the second section of Bo Mou (2006), “How Constructive Engagement of Davidson’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy is Possible: A Theme Introduction,” in *Davidson’s Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Netherlands: Brill, 2006), pp. 1–33.

model can capture and implement ‘the perspective-relevance-recognizing adequacy’, ‘the agent-purpose-sensitivity adequacy’, ‘the equality-status-granting adequacy’ and ‘the new-eligible-perspective-possibility-recognizing adequacy’, which are expected for all adequate methodological guiding principles. Briefly speaking, it regulates how to choose eligible methodological perspectives as the current working perspective and how to evaluate the status of the current working perspective and its relation to the other eligible perspectives: depending on one’s purpose or interest, one is entitled to focus on ‘this’ aspect of the object of study thus taking ‘this’-aspect-concerned perspective as the current working perspective (to capture ‘this’ aspect), or ‘that’ aspect thus taking ‘that’-aspect-concerned perspective as the current working perspective (to capture ‘that’ aspect), or all aspects thus taking a complete perspective as the current working perspective (to have a complete account). One distinguishing point of the Zhuang Zi style model is this: while helping one in choosing the current working perspective among the eligible perspectives, this model encourages or demands that the agent take an aspectuality-transcending point of view as a methodological guiding principle so as to be able to realize the local character of one or many local perspectives and avoid one-sidedness (mistaking one local aspect as the only or exclusive aspect), whether or not one takes the complete perspective as the current working perspective.¹⁶

The *Yin-Yang* model captures and implements the ‘complementarity-seeking adequacy’ expected for certain methodological guiding principles. This is one paradigm guiding-principle model of treating the constructive-engagement relation between any eligible and complementary methodological perspectives for the sake of a holist and complete understanding. One good and significant illustration of such complementary relation is the relation between the Socrates style being-aspect-concerned methodological perspective and the Confucius style becoming-aspect-concerned methodological perspective, which have been presented in the previous section on two paradigm methodological perspectives via their approaches to the issue of (filial) piety as two paradigm methodological-perspective models at the level of the perspective dimension of the framework. The two kinds of methodological perspectives point respectively to two most basic modes of existence, being and becoming, of things in the world that are typically possessed simultaneously by most of things in nature. Because the two fundamental modes of existence, being and becoming, are interdependent and complementary in a number of senses, the two methodological perspective models are thus interdependent and complementary.¹⁷ This renders the *Yin-Yang* model suitable for looking at the rela-

¹⁶ In his recent essay “Hegelian, *Yi-Jing*, and Buddhist Transformational Models for Comparative Philosophy” [in *Comparative Approaches to Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Bo Mou (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 60–85], Robert Allinson resorts to the Buddhist ‘*apaya*’ model, which seems to be similar to Zhuang Zi’s model in some aspect. As I see it, the Zhuang Zi style model might be more complete than the Buddhist ‘*apaya*’ model to this extent: the latter asks the agent to be sensitive to concrete situation to choose perspective but without expectation that the agent needs to also take the above mentioned ‘aspectuality-transcending’ point of view as a methodological guiding principle.

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of this, see Mou (2003), *op. cit.*

tion between the two representative perspectives. When the two methodological perspectives are applied to right situations, they are rendered eligible; otherwise they are ineligible. In this way, there is the distinction between eligible and ineligible applications of the two paradigm methodological-perspective models.

The Hegelian model captures and implements the ‘sublation-seeking adequacy’ expected for certain methodological guiding principles.¹⁸ This model deals with the constructive-engagement relation between the eligible but genuinely competing perspectives in the dual sense of ‘genuine’: first, as far as the current status-quo state of the object of study, the object possesses its genuine competing or contradictory aspects whose solution needs to resort to the Hegelian synthesis via sublation; thus the two eligible perspectives that point respectively to the two aspects are genuinely competing; second, as far as some future stage of its due development is concerned, the object possesses some genuine contradictory aspects whose solution needs to resort to the Hegelian synthesis via sublation.

The three paradigm guiding-principle models, theoretically and practically speaking, are not mutually exclusive but could be applied simultaneously even when facing the same group of perspectives. The Zhuang Zi style model is clearly compatible with the other two: while taking either the *Yin-Yang* model or the Hegelian model to look at the relation between the involved perspectives depending on their nature, one can follow the Zhuang Zi style model to choose one eligible perspective as the current working perspective in view of one’s current purpose and interest. Even the seemingly mutually-exclusive *Yin-Yang* model and the Hegelian model could be applied simultaneously: (1) when one focuses both on the current status-quo state of the object of study, which would render certain perspectives eligible and complementary, and on some future stage of its due development where some genuine internal contradiction would emerge, which would render the involved eligible perspectives the character of Hegelian contraries; (2) when the object of study possesses more than one dimensions some of which has its own complementary aspects while some other of which has its own genuine contradictory aspects.

As emphasized before, the paradigm identity of the three guiding-principle models does not render the three models exhaustive. There would be other guiding-principle models.

The relation between adequate methodological guiding principles (generally speaking) or between adequate applications of the *Yin-Yang*, Hegelian and Zhuang Zi models (specifically speaking) is considered to be *yin-yang* complementary both in the sense that they are needed in regard to different situations and in the sense that they could be used simultaneously for the sake of a holistic treatment. As illustrated above, the three paradigm guiding-principle models are complementarily relevant to our dealing with the relation between methodological perspectives. To this extent, the *Yin-Yang* model is also considered as one important meta-guiding-principle model.

In the foregoing discussion, I have presented and explained a meta-philosophical methodological framework of how to look at seemingly competing approaches

¹⁸ For the source materials of the Hegelian model, see Hegel, see Georg W. F., *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie (London: Sonnenschein, 1919) and *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952).

for the sake of cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement. With some needed conceptual and explanatory resources and distinctions, I have first examined two paradigm methodological perspectives as samples, Socrates's being-aspect-concerned perspective and Confucius's becoming-aspect-concerned perspective. I have then suggested and explained six adequacy conditions for adequate methodological guiding principles, which constitute one core portion of the suggested methodological framework. I have also brought out three paradigm methodological-guiding-principle models, i.e., the Zhuang Zi's, *Yin-Yang*, and Hegelian models, for the sake of illustrating the preceding six adequacy conditions and emphasizing their respective roles in the enterprise of comparative engagement as specified above.

The examination of this framework is intended to be one way to explore the issue of how cross-tradition understanding and constructive engagement is possible. The issue is one central concern in comparative philosophy, as the term 'comparative philosophy' is understood in a philosophically constructive way.¹⁹ It is noted that the issue of how constructive-engagement methodological strategy in comparative philosophy is possible is not merely a matter of theoretical possibility but has been already effectively and productively implemented in recent philosophical practice. One piece of evidence in this connection consists in two recent constructive-engagement projects in comparative philosophy concerning Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy in the analytic tradition, whose methodological guiding principles are intended to meet the foregoing six adequacy conditions.²⁰

¹⁹ The term 'comparative philosophy' is sometimes vague and is used in a less philosophically constructive way. For a detailed discussion of three representative orientations and their relations in comparative studies in philosophy and the constructive-engagement strategy of comparative philosophy, see Bo Mou (2001, 2002, 2006).

²⁰ One project is on Davidson's philosophy and Chinese philosophy, and the other on Searle's philosophy and Chinese philosophy. The research results of these two constructive-engagement projects are two anthologies edited by this author: (1) *Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Netherlands: Brill, 2006) and (2) *Searle's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Netherlands: Brill, 2008).