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Thomas P. Kasulis

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academia. In short, a truly Global thought. Eliot taught me the importance of avoiding what he called “the loud moaning about finitude” and focusing on self-creation and the development of creative powers as a primary philosophical task. In a field saturated with technical pretensions and that has all but severed its ties to the original motivations of philosophy, Eliot showed us that it is still possible to pursue Philosophy in its original sense as a seeking after Wisdom.

Eliot wrote that “With death the person game is over. Only various silences remain.” In Eliot’s case, these silences are voluble, reminding us time and again of the risks of self-deception and the necessity of nurturing our creative power.

Training Comparative Philosophers: The Deutsch Approach



Thomas P. Kasulis

University Distinguished Scholar Emeritus, The Ohio State University
kasulis.1@osu.edu

For me, Eliot Deutsch embodied comparative philosophy. When I entered the grad program with an EWC Fellowship, I had just completed my doctoral exams in Western philosophy at Yale and so the UH department let me concentrate on Asian philosophy. After acquiring some familiarity with the Asian traditions, I was eager to take one of Eliot’s seminars in comparative philosophy. Much prior work in the field hadn’t impressed me. “Kant argued x and so did Nāgārjuna. Isn’t that interesting?” [Not really, I thought.] In his seminar Eliot disdained such trivial comparisons and immediately immersed us in more substantive projects.

There was one established fruitful comparative technique that he did sometimes use to great effect, however: the method of applying an Asian term or argument to enhance, improve, or clarify a Western position. The effect is to make Asian philosophy a resource to further an agenda of Western philosophy. That is about what I expected to glean from studying Asian philosophy at that point in my career and I thought Eliot’s comparative philosophy course would teach templates for doing that.

As the semester proceeded, however, I realized something else was going on, something more profound, something paradigm-shifting. As we followed Eliot’s meticulous course design, we were no longer just seeking better answers to the old (Western) philosophical questions, but also undertaking a novel form of philosophical questioning. Comparative

philosophy, it turns out, was not just a way of improving Western philosophy. Rather it opens us to a new way to philosophize.

Eliot Deutsch thus became an exemplar of how I would want to philosophize. Four points stood out in his method. As far as I know, he never formally stated them, but he *showed* them in his teaching and his writing.

- (1) *Be clear about the question.* Too often we jump into an ongoing philosophical discussion and just respond to the latest twists of argument in the literature without asking what the root question is and how it came about. Unless we question the question, we can overlook the cultural assumptions that blind us to pathways of insight.
- (2) *Be clear in your answer.* I loved to disagree on some point with Eliot because I didn't have to waste time trying to figure out what he meant. His thinking and his articulation of that thinking was always so clear. He avoided hiding behind obfuscating jargon. If he used technical words, he explained them precisely. If he coined new words or expressions, he used them to great effect. So in the end, whether he convinced me of his position or not, I always learned from Eliot and became a better philosopher for the discussion.
- (3) *Distill and critically evaluate the crux of the argument.* In my career I have encountered many philosophers of many talents. In one respect, Eliot Deutsch stands alone. While a student and later professor at UH, I repeatedly marveled at how he could listen to an hour-long talk and at its conclusion, without having taken any notes, immediately ask the most discerning question that cut to the heart of the most probative philosophical point. He could do that with a written piece as well. Despite my efforts, I have never been able to match that insight and alacrity. My consolation is that no one else has either. Eliot's philosophical perspicacity in this regard was unique, but we should all try to emulate it as best we can.
- (4) *Philosophize as a creative expression of our humanity, not as a technical skill.* For Eliot Deutsch philosophy fashions who we are and expresses our deepest drive to achieve fully human being. Philosophers don't detach themselves from the world; they engage themselves in it. Philosophers don't brood about the world; they give birth to new worlds of meaning through the interplay of reflection, reason, and imagination.

Eliot Deutsch was my mentor, my colleague, and my friend. I will miss him deeply. But since he is also part of me, he may have departed, but he will always be close.