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OF

A Doctoral Thesis, entitled:

**Intercultural dialogues and the Creativity of Knowledge: A Study on Daya  
Krishna**

Submitted by

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## **I. Aims**

The aims of this thesis are clearly articulated.

Overarching aim: Elise Coquereau-Saouma's goal is to articulate a philosophy of dialogue that is consistent with professor Daya Krishna's philosophical practice *and* with his general theoretical approach to philosophy. The reason is that without such a theory (or philosophy) in place, one cannot fully appreciate the value of a series of dialogical experiments in philosophy that occupied a large part of Daya Krishna's philosophical life and oeuvre. Moreover, she argues that while we find many theoretical contributions to philosophy in Daya Krishna's work, what is conspicuous by its absence is a deliberately developed theory of dialogue. The desire to fill this gap is the fundamental motivation for this thesis. She intends to fill this gap via the work of reconstruction: to "reconstruct one [a theory] from the intentions, the practices and the concepts of the experiments". (p. 163)

## **II. Methodology**

Coquereau-Saouma approaches her topic with care, evidenced in her methodological choices.

1. Archives of source materials: oral and written.

The archival material to which Coquereau-Saouma has access is impressive in its quantity and variety of content. There are the published details of the dialogical experiments conducted by Daya Krishna. She also has access to and use of personal letters about the experiments. In addition, she conducts a number of interviews with DK's former colleagues and students.

The rationale for the choice of these source materials is clear: they allow Coquereau-Saouma to offer her readers a rich sense of Daya Krishna's motivation for the choices of structure, content and participants to the dialogues that are the focus of her analysis.

## 2. Use of source materials

I was struck by the effectiveness of even more specific choices in Coquereau-Saouma's use of her source materials.

- a. *Reproducing in full the texts of Daya Krishna's work, as a way of reproducing his voice.*

It is particularly significant for this dissertation when one of the motivations is precisely to highlight the work and thought of underrepresented philosophers. This choice of method is therefore consistent with the meta-philosophical task in that it is a way of letting the proponents speak for themselves.

- b. *Juxtaposition of different voices within and across traditions.*

For instance, KC Bhattacharyya and Daya Krishna on interpretation (pp. 65-66); also, the French and German thinkers referenced in the thesis. These juxtapositions of voices allow Coquereau-Saouma not merely to assert similarities and differences in her own voice but to showcase directly those connections and disconnections.

3. In addition to deliberate juxtapositions of *voices*, Coquereau-Saouma includes *ideas and arguments* across cultural and academic traditions: French and German; UK and North American; Indian: colonial (KC Bhattacharyya) and post colonial (Matilal)).

4. Her method of inclusion also involves as well original translations of her own (from French and German academics), and in this way bringing those ideas into conversation with the Anglophone academic community.

5. Finally, her method of 'inclusion' is not merely secured by *addition* of voices and of ideas, but by *foregrounding* contemporary Indian voices, and in particular of those trained in India rather than abroad; for example Raghuramaraju; TN Madan; NV Banerjee. This is particularly important as one considers what it means to conduct dialogues across academic 'cultures', and where one 'culture' may be valued over another.

Overall, the methodology – which includes a commitment to the exhaustive survey of all materials, written and oral – offer a challenge due both to its quantity and especially to its variety. Coquereau-Saouma expertly rises to the challenge.

### **III. Content**

This is overall a thesis of very high quality.

Coquereau-Saouma's challenge, I think, is to find a way to weave together the many different strands of her argument without losing her reader in the texture of the details. I think she has for the most part succeeded in her endeavor. In what follows, I highlight key aspects of the content in order to make the case for its high quality.

**Chapter 1** identifies a central analytic concern for the project, one that I will call "the demarcation problem." Right at the outset, Coquereau-Saouma's goal is to differentiate dialogue from other modes of communication/conversation. In this connection, she highlights, among other things, a quote from Daya Krishna (p. 9) on the problem with the concept of "debate," wishing to separate it from what he has in

mind by dialogue. She also notes other views that interest her at the beginning of her work, like, for instance, Weditmann's idea of the "in-between" of cultures (p. 18). And, as she thinks about cross cultural studies in general within which she wishes to situate her interest in dialogue, she is particularly interested in extending Rada Ivekovic's critique of the French post modern philosophers in her own work.

**Chapter 2** is a looking back to the various forms of verbal confrontation in the Indian Sanskrit literature, with a view to contextualizing Daya Krishna's own revision of *samvad*, namely, the removal of competition in favor of an open-ended and non-competitive discussion. One might think of this in terms of the distinction between an agonistic rather than an antagonistic conception of dialogue, i.e., what Daya Krishna calls a "loving fight" (p. 59).

This is an excellent analysis of the classical tradition and an effective synthesis of the traditional and more contemporary approaches to debate and dialogue in India. Stylistically Chapter 2 is rather dense, and the reader can at times get lost in the details that are packed into the argument (and in the footnotes).

In **Chapter 3** Coquereau-Saouma introduces *samvad* as "a regulative idea" (p. 146) and argues for a distinction between the regulative and the normative domains. In this section there are concrete examples of the predecessors of the formal experiments, namely, on the one hand, the Jaipur experiments and JICPR (in particular the sections that function as does a blog); and, on the other, The Interdisciplinary Project. This is followed by an account of the official dialogues, published and unpublished, that were organized across India. Coquereau-Saouma argues that the attention to and recovery of these details in the thesis are not

peripheral to her argument, as one might think, but are in fact essential to her case for the distinctiveness of Daya Krishna's dialogical experiments. This line of reasoning is persuasive.

She then reconstructs and responds to two quite different critiques of Daya Krishna's *samvad* project (understood as "planned experimentation"): one by Raghuramaraju (p. 151) regarding inclusion and the other by Halbfass (p. 155) regarding its impossibility from the get-go. Her response to both strands of skepticism is thoughtful, even as she finds them in the end insufficiently persuasive.

Coquereau-Saouma then poses a key question: How does Daya Krishna's practice of dialogue contribute to philosophy? Her answer: as a method or tool for philosophers, where she argues for "the necessity of collectivity for thinking *tout court*" (p. 160). This in turn generates more specific and pressing ones: Who is the collective? And, importantly, how should they approach the encounter? In answering the latter question, Coquereau-Saouma identifies both cognitive and conative virtues -- trust, integrity, vulnerability, openness to new ideas, detachment, willingness to listen to the strange, awareness of one's own positionality, an exploratory spirit of friendliness, and a welcoming of uncertainty and incompleteness. Her task going forward is to contextualize these virtues and attitudes required for dialogue by anchoring them in Daya Krishna's broader philosophy. The promise of this endeavor is to unearth and to put together those aspects of his philosophy that are crucial to understanding Daya Krishna's *philosophy of dialogue*.

In **Chapters 4-7** she begins this phase of her project with the question regarding the place of dialogue in Daya Krishna's overall model of knowledge (p. 176). What follows are chapters devoted to three main concepts that are fundamental to Daya Krishna's philosophy: presuppositions (chapter 5), dissatisfactions (chapter 6) and illusions (chapter 7). Coquereau-Saouma's goal is to connect each of these theoretical foci of Daya Krishna's work to the dialogical experiments, showing how these theoretical ideas get reflected in the practice of dialogue.

In my view, these chapters constitute the intellectual core of the thesis and showcase both Coquereau-Saouma's philosophical creativity and her analytic and synthetic abilities. There is much in these sections that involves careful nuance and critical reflection. I will focus on one strand of her argument regarding the connection between the human existential predicament and the "demand" of dialogue (chapter 7), for this is the densest part of the thesis, and the most challenging for Coquereau-Saouma's work of analysis and synthesis. In this chapter she focuses on the concept of "demand". In the Indian Anglophone tradition this concept may be understood epistemologically, metaphysically and/or politically. She identifies a use that is explicit in KC Bhattacharyya's work during the colonial period but that is interpreted in relational terms by Daya Krishna's teacher, NV Banerjee, in the post colonial period. For Banerjee, "demand " is a felt relational obligation, which is an existential aspect of being human ("I am located with others.") Coquereau-Saouma takes this relational conception of demand (of the



“we”) one step further, extending it explicitly to Daya Krishna’s project of engaging and dialoguing with others.

On her view, as I see it, Daya Krishna’s concept of dialogue is best understood as constituted by a certain kind of demand – a (non-moral) “obligation” to be in relation to others. This insight and her argument in support of it is a valuable contribution to the philosophy of dialogue.

Coquereau-Saouma finally connects this feature of dialogue to what is arguably an overarching theme in all of Daya Krishna’s philosophy – that of freedom. While the concept of freedom is complex and has different dimensions, it remains a central inter-cultural topic of philosophical discussion and dialogue across time and traditions. In this connection, Coquereau-Saouma – in her concluding section – proposes that we might view Daya Krishna’s particular method of dialogue as a form of investigation into our own illusions (p. 351). The link between dialogue and the aspiration to freedom could be more tightly made in the thesis; nonetheless, what is clear is Coquereau-Saouma’s proposal that the aspiration to freedom cannot be satisfied in isolation from others but in dialogue with them. And it is sufficiently clear to the reader how the creative assembling of the different elements of Daya Krishna’s conceptual framework from the vast oeuvre of his work – both his philosophical writings and his practical experiments – contributes to a distinctive *philosophy* of dialogue.

#### **IV. Trajectory of Future Research**

Coquereau-Saouma herself identifies many good directions for future research (p. 354 and following). I would add to those some others that are brought up in reading

this thesis. For instance, I could see new work being done on NV Banerjee and Margaret Chatterjee, reinterpreting their important arguments and insights for our times. Also, the topic of “address” is important in philosophy and the modes of address adopted by philosophers from the Indian context could benefit from focused investigation. And the relation between theory and practice is a topic that, as Coquereau-Saouma has shown, is messy, complicated, but can deliver rich philosophical dividends.

## **V. Impact on Fields**

First and foremost, this thesis contributes to the history of philosophy *tout court*. That is, the value of this thesis is that it is neither a history of *European* philosophy nor a history of contemporary *Indian* philosophy. It is really a contribution to the history of *philosophy*. We could perhaps view it as contributing to *world or global* philosophy, except that that qualification itself contains the risk of relegating the work to a sub-field of philosophy, and this would be a mistaken assessment of its value.

In addition to the history of philosophy, this thesis also contributes to political philosophy, metaphysics, and epistemology. It contributes to the fields of Cultural Studies, Theory of Communication, and Translation Studies. For instance, in this thesis the inter-cultural comparisons are prosecuted both for their intrinsic and instrumental value.

Finally, the thesis makes a meta-point regarding fields, and that is their interrelation and inter-animation. In an era that can be preoccupied with the

distinctions between fields of inquiry, this thesis demonstrates the value of continuing to articulate the relationships between them.

For all of the reasons detailed above, I give this thesis a score of 1, indicating that apart from some minor flaws, this is a thesis of very high quality.