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Toward New Adventures in Philosophy

Review: Eli Kramer,
*Intercultural Modes of Philosophy, Volume One:
Principles to Guide Philosophical Community*,
(Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021), 382 pages.

*At the heart of the nature of things,
there is always the dream of youth
and the harvest of tragedy.*

(A.N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 1933).

Harrowing a Most Unattended Mode

Eli Kramer has provided us with the first volume of an ambitious trilogy entitled *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy*. His first volume, *Principles to Guide Philosophical Community* (hereafter PGPC), sets us on a rich, detailed, and lengthy exploration of the much neglected, and at times romanticized, communal mode of Philosophy (philosophical community). For Kramer, philosophical community is a “mode of mutually reinforced ethical praxis in a shared cosmopolitan place” (PGPC, 6).¹ The exploration of these communities (some present, some past, and

1) A few of Kramer’s exemplars for this are Thomas Davidson, Dewey, and Leonard Nelson (PGPC, 74).

some to come), serves as “[a transition] to a new adventure in philosophy” (PGPC, 99), along with an attempted rescue of successful philosophical community practices that, in turn, “[unify] the activity of a stable community” (PGPC, 129). Kramer’s twenty-six “principles,” derived from communal investigations, act as samples (experiential swatches) of living communities, and from histories of philosophical communities that would serve as support, or guiding images, for future communities (PGPC, 140). Looking ahead while glancing back is how this treatise remains for, and most noticeably from, an ongoing “praxis of learning” (PGPC, 144). The patient work of tilling such a field, “harrowing” in this case, will call for contributions from many other wisdom lovers for future plantings, grafting, pruning, and harvesting. Kramer is, and will be, in good company: first with what he found alive and well in Dewey and Thomas Davidson’s idea of community (along with a plethora of other authors), second in his more immediate group of friends, and lastly, to those friends-to-come. A call from out of a “neglected communal mode of philosophy” (PGPC, “Preface”), is a signal that such a mode is, has been, and will seek to once again, become a mode of philosophy’s very horizon of expectation. One notices that Kramer’s treatise stems from “exercises in formation” (*exercices de formation*), that is, “cultivating particular kinds of philosophical dispositions, reflections, and living, moving from practice to theory” (PGPC, 203), with the added introduction of highly speculative principles used in the work of theoretical to practical crop rotation, as the author, and others, notice the possibilities of novel communal concrescence.

A mode, as Kramer explains, is “an enaction of philosophy based on ... what we think philosophy can be and do ... based on those [e.g., Cynic, Skeptic, Idealist, theology-bound, Existentialist, Analytic, Pragmatist, professional philosophy, public-intellectual, etc.,] implicit presuppositions” (PGPC, 11–12, see 13). If one could only list all the ways of such histories in the plural! However, in Kramer’s view, there are three underlying intercultural modes, or meta-modes. They are the modes of community, wandering, and speculation, and they, when balanced, “support (ground) robust philosophical life within, and effective for a culture [and] ... enhance the ethical and educative character of cultural life” (PGPC, 13–14). What we experience in this volume is Kramer’s desire to recover the ways of philosophical intercultural modes, (philosophy as a way of life). It is a recovery past the dry academic essay, technical philosophy, and tired predictable publications prone to mass-marketability that aim to change a life, but avoid living “presentational symbols of ... philo-dynamic images” (PGPC, 18), or working through a metaphilosophy with style and practice.

The overall structure of Kramer’s treatise is straightforward, (though I will have a few format and conceptual recommendations later in this review). Part 1, “Method and Historical Precedent” is divided into eight sections, (including the “Preface” and “Introduction”), and runs 133 pages.² The pace is lively, explanations are generous, and sources are well noted. One instantly feels pulled along this “new adventure in philosophy” (PGPC, 99) that Kramer has prepared patiently, and caringly. Throughout, one notices a tension between examples of successful, secularly redemptive “betterments” due to the mode of philosophical communities, as well as the faltering of the more provocative mode of wanderers, blind to “the concrete other” (PGPC, 15), when dreaming too far ahead of an ethereal Other. I will visit this mode when turning to “Appendix 1,” but for now, to Part 2 of Kramer’s treatise.

There are remnants of ethereal others as terminological *revenants*, that make their apparition strongly noticeable when turning to Part 2. The shift is palpable. Part 2, “The Principles,” contains four chapters. The first chapter is “The Peculiar General Principles of Philosophical Community,” and contains ten sections. The second chapter is “The Personal Axiological Principles of Philosophical Community,” and contains ten sections.

2) Sections are, “Preface,” “Introduction,” “Intercultural modes of Philosophy,” “Philo-Dynamic Images,” “Philosophical Community as an Intercultural Mode of Philosophy – Some Brief Historical Sketches,” “The Emergence of Professional Philosophy,” “Living Philosophical Communities,” and “The Logic of ‘Principles’ for the Method of Radically Empirical Philosophy of Culture.”

The third Chapter is “The Concrete Cultural Principles of Philosophical Community,” and contains six sections, and the fourth Chapter, “The Dialectically Propitiated Principles of Philosophical Community (the Nature of Rhizomatic Wandering)” contains another six sections. Following this rather forceful display of exhibited empirical digging, historical research, terminological work, play, and speculative breadth, one happily settles into the port of the “Conclusion: The Constellation of Principles at a Turning Point in Culture and Nature,” after having traveled through 172 demanding pages. Herein, we receive a succinct testament of Kramer’s vision and desire. We find his compass of stewardship, and see his larger project become individual stars that guide us best (as we look back), and find again the call to “reigning [or local] pieties” (PGPC, 285), that “should help others find their way back to these lost homes and refurbish them as a mode of philosophy” (PGPC, 310). Here one begins to think of the “constellation of principles” as the after-glow of a constellation, as an ultimate lure, notwithstanding their “gleaming leprosy” (Hegel), that nevertheless remain as “bright spots during the storms of time ... as robust philosophical communities” (PGPC, 311). Both speculators and wanderers glance at these celestial lures, and the many other so-called “principles,” when navigating through the semblance of being.

What of these wanderers and speculators? Under “Appendix 1” and the “Glossary” section entitled “Specialized Terms and References,” we do get a definition of the mode of “Philosophical Wandering,” and “Philosophical Speculation” (PGPC 317–18). Wanderers are those “Who have an embodied errant praxis, supporting wisdom wherever they travel. They enact reflective life as the force that, as an exercise in being obnoxious, awakens culture out of its settled dogmatism and into new and ethically richer routes in the wider world” (PGPC, 318).³

To add to this definition one must turn back to Part 2, chapter 2, section 10, “Dialectics II (Errantry and *Enhousing*),” to catch how Kramer sees “wandering [as] primal to humanity” and of how this “deeply human affair [of wandering is a] history [he] hopes to explore in” volume two (PGPC, 252, also 252 n.552). There is less about the mode of philosophical speculators, though we find that they are “a special kind of philosophical-artist, or artist-philosopher” (PGPC, 14) “focused on reconstructing, via philo-dynamic images, ultimacy and the nature of reality” (PGPC, 317). There is much less of philosophical speculation, and speculators, but only if one overlooks what one is reading as Kramer’s very treatise. Philosophical speculation also refers to how speculators think-design wider images of reality, the cosmos, and, all the while, in and as their part and position in the history of philosophy. Apart from their production of texts, lectures, and interviews housed under steadier, and at times lucrative, academic positions, speculators linguistically gesture toward “transformations that reconceptualize the world around us,” in “images that are ... ‘existential’ or ‘spiritual’ exercise,” and “dynamic images of cosmos” (PGPC, 28). In the wanderers, image is their performative mode, while in speculators, images projected, as through a *camera obscura*, are theirs, and they are composed from tomes, articles, archives, histories, lectures, and rebuttals in the hopes that we too may catch the shimmer-play of light (see PGPC, 317–18). In the words of a certified grand speculator, “Pure light scatters its simplicity as an infinity of separate forms, and presents itself as an offering to self-existence, that the individual may take sustenance to itself from its substance.”⁴ Speculators enjoy bathing in such light, like plants turning toward their suns. There are many haunting *revenants* within the quills, inkwells, and keyboards of philosophical speculators, and Kramer has a lovely host of his own. In some wanderers, such as the city-bound Socrates, or

3) From my literary sauntering, I would recommend the books under review in Alejandro Chacoff, “Doom Strolling: Are We Losing our Ability to Wander?,” *The New Yorker*, August 30, 2021: 75–77. The texts by Duncan Minshull, along with his use of Woolf, de Certeau, Petrarch, Thoreau, Edith Warton, Rousseau, D.H. Lawrence, Antonio Muñoz Molina, along with a few philosophers, might be an enjoyable stroll as volume Two develops.

4) G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans., James B. Baillie, (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1967), 701.

Diogenes, Crates of Thebes, Aristippus, Pyrrho, Apollonius of Tyana, Bruno, Nietzsche, Thomas Davidson, and Cornel West, amongst others, there is even a tendency to blend in with those grander speculators.⁵

“With a Little Help from my Friends”

Kramer acknowledges how “Philosophical community can show us that we can always do ‘better’ even if it is but with a few close friends” (PGPC, 311). Many of these friends are part of this treatise, cited in the body, footnotes, and bibliography of the text, as supporting scholars, who provide images, research, and lures as are others very caringly acknowledged. As part of this exchange, recognition, and mutual support, toward what dreams the “better,” and in tune with the view of a complex adaptive system of agents, I will offer a few suggestions.

Adaptive Prediction and Feedback

What would help the reader’s first dip into this rich treatise is to turn to the final section of Part 1, entitled “The Logic of the ‘Principles’ for the Method of Radically Empirical Philosophy of Culture,” and review the eight points that tell us “what [Kramer is] not doing in this work” (PGPC, 129–33). Perhaps to these “nots” Kramer should have added one more point: that his “highly speculative project move[s] beyond what is warrantable in the social science or history proper” (PGPC, 127, 321, see also PGPC 121).⁶ The lack of the warrantable is not mortally detracting from the work, but there are times when one feels the pinch. In addition, instead of the use of “principles,” why not, *relata* of the *systema*, provisional localized practices, temporal associations, agent re-assemblages, use of Dewey’s description of moral principles, or fully adopt Schwayder’s “rules for succeeding” (PGPC, 7, n.12, 8, n.13)?⁷

As part of “The Logic of the ‘Principles’ for the Method of Radically Empirical Philosophy of Culture,” one must review Kramer’s use of “postulate” (PGPC, 124–126). I will list them standing alone, for in my estimation, their current placement, enmeshed in engulfing paragraphs, does not do justice to their bestowed importance to the upcoming principles and consequences of the *systema*.⁸

5) For a wonderful initial treatment (prequel) of this see Eli Kramer. “Philosophical Wandering as a Mode of Philosophy in Cultural Life: From Diogenes of Sinope to Cornel West,” *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 2, no. 3(5) (2018): 51–73. <https://doi.org/10.26319/5815>.

6) As a mild remedy to this, I would suggest the work of Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to the Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans., Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015). See also Hartog interviewed by Marcin Rychter, in François Hartog. “Presentism and Beyond,” *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* 4, no. 1 (2020): 110–16. <https://doi.org/10.14394/eidos.jpc.2020.0010>.

7) Renaming “principles” would eliminate adding the “mongrel breed of necessity” (PGPC, 8, 128), as well as display the constellation of “principles” as a movable complexity, far from a dissected ontological “necessity unto themselves” (PGPC, 8). Successes and failures cannot be judged from a centered philosophical praxis (cf. PGPC, 128). See William James on “exteriorization” in *Principles of Psychology* (1890), chapter XIX, “The Perception of Things.”

8) The definition of “Systema” is under the Glossary of “Axioms of Transformation” (PGPC, 316). The use of “axiom” as is the use of “systema,” requires taking up where A. N. Whitehead left off, and this is a tall order for a reader to manage in one swoop. Turning to PGPC, 127, where Kramer opens up to being a “good Whiteheadian,” helps a bit. Yet, by the author’s own admission, his project is a joining of the “highly speculative (but not vacuous),” and the “grounded in concrete experience (but not limited to what would be warrantable by a careful social scientific or historical study).” Is the grounding in concrete experience not working the twin of the radically empirical hard enough, thus falling prey to untested consequences of research protocols? To be sure, this treatise is breaking ground on a most vital aspect of philosophy as a way of life. See also PGPC 137, 139, 165, 181, esp., 299–300.

- Postulate 1: "Relation (mediation) is immediate and concrete."
Postulate 2: "The 'real' is our warrant for action."
Postulate 3: "That potential experience is 'generic' to existence."
Postulate 4: "Whatever is actual is possible."
Postulate 5: "Culture (in this context) is the creative place of plasticity Geist manifests through its own activity to reconstruct its environment for the better."
Postulate 6: "Nature and culture are co-emergent features, each 'emerging' from the other in a different respective way."
Postulate 7: "Experience is the 'well' from which we draw our reflections, and such reflections should adequately, coherently, and applicably return to the 'wellspring' of experience to reconstruct it."

As placement, with the treatise, I would have these postulates listed in Part 1, section 5, after "Philo-Dynamic Images" (PGPC, 26–30). I believe they are as important as what the author is after with the use of "Philo-Dynamic Images." As used in this treatise, "postulates" assume the character of postulations. In fact, "postulates" and "Philo-Dynamic Images" are haunting doubles: one speaking from what is reflected, the other one whispering projections as the mirror's tain. I remain puzzled, though fascinated, by Kramer's use of the term, "postulate." The term "postulate" does not retain its meaning as a demand that emerges from some axiomatic truth, based on how this treatise unfolds (though a dose of the *mos geometrico* never hurts).⁹ As far as I can see, "postulate" replaces the term "axiom." If this is the case, then Kramer's seven "postulates" should also be mentioned before each "principle" within Part 2, from pages 142 through 253, to support, enrich, connect and serve his speculations in "Peculiar General Principles," "Personal Axiological Principles," and "Concrete Cultural Principles."

Philosophical speculation strikes the dominant chord in Part 2, "The Principles." It is also populated with much more when one recognizes the themes and melodies; reattaching the reader to Kramer's work in Part 1, and reemerging in his mention of each principle's global and historical examples. Theory belligerently folds back into history – and the changing conditions and crisis, as noted in this very treatise – leave vestiges of theory behind as nostalgic, colorful, and alluring frayed swatches.

Kramer's treatise also contains two Appendices. Appendix 1, "The Systemic Scheme and Glossary" (PGPC, 315–19), displays the "*systema*" (I through IV), lists his Principles, and notes the "mirror content" between "General" principles and the "Axiological" principles. The "Cultural," and "Propitiated" principles, while listed, do not partake in any mirroring. In my estimation, the interaction between "Cultural," and "Propitiated" remains open to further query. The "Glossary" has three sections, "Axioms of Transformation," "Regions (the modal form in which a principle is given)," and lastly, "Specialized Terms and References."

The Systemic Scheme, *Systema*, and the fourfold division of Principles of Appendix 1, retain the format of a table of contents. Perceptively, this is somewhat jarring, casting the eye back to the actual "Contents," as a touch of strabismus (PGPC, vii–ix). I imagine this systemic scheme placed after the "Contents" (or under Part 1), and in a format that would graphically display the mirroring ("analogical relationship," PGPC, 19). Technically speaking, it is a specular wave reflection between the "General" principles, and the "Axiological"

9) The only use of "axiom" yet, buried in Appendix 1, as a division of the Glossary, is "Axioms of Transformation." I am not sure how the eight "axioms of transformation" work along with the postulates. Perhaps they are, as C.I. Lewis suggested, as how "Mr. Russell ... bases *his* logic on an implication relation such that if twenty sentences be cut from a newspaper and put in a hat, then two of these be drawn at random, one of them will certainly imply the others, and it is even a chance that the implication will be mutual." C.I. Lewis, *Mind and World-Order: Outline of a Theory of Knowledge*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1929), 248.

principles. I would have also moved the three sections of the “Glossary” up front within part of Part 1, “Method and Historical Precedent,” following the more graphic rendition of the “Systemic Scheme.”

As mentioned, between the “General” principles, and the “Axiological” principles there are, what the author has called, “Mirror Content[s]” (PGPC, 194, 315–17).¹⁰ I will suggest that the term “mirror” should be substituted with the term “parallax,” “double,” or retain the usage of “analogical relationship” (PGPC, 194). A mirror is an added tool (one constructed, and technically separate, in its material makeup from what it mirrors). While a mirror is different media, it does not partake as an agent in the inherent adaptive system of the treatise’s genre. A mirrored image is not an analogical reflection. It is an added object/tool (and term), for which the reader has received no warning, or hermetic buildup from the treatise. Is the “mirror,” in Kramer’s case, a flat surface, planar mirror, belonging to each “General” principle, thus eight mirrors in all? Do we have eight mirrors, and eight reflected object-concept images? If this is the case, are the “Axiological” principles the objects/concepts reflected (duplicated), as if they are going in for a grooming, or are the “General” principles going in for a grooming at the “Axiological” parlor? Are the personal Axiological mirror images prey to the actual workings of the left-right axis flip and front-back axis flip? They would need to be? If not, the usage of “mirror content” would shatter, and they would be specular wave reflections (think mountains in a lake).

Perhaps to house or save this use of “mirror content,” we find the use of “gyroscope,” “tensor,” and “region,” that signal a mix of actual and possible (PGPC, 190, 276, 309, and 317). Yet, these terms tend toward opacity when explained in the text (see especially PGPC, 276, 309). Could all this mirroring result from the author’s usage of the more spectral “image of a mode”? (See PGPC, “Preface,” 13, 26, 128, 304, 299). Granted, the term appears alluring, yet has it not revealed a doubling between philo-dynamic image (of a mode), and philosophical-discursive language? (See PGPC, 23). I will return to this in my disagreement with Kramer’s use of Van Gogh’s paintings where contrary to the author’s position – on the lure of images, and the primary illusion of cosmos – Van Gogh’s images (as those of other artists), are very much displayed as a semblance of a philo-dynamic image overfilled with incitement for the perceiver.

What seems clear, but remains caught in some type of optical glitch, is that the modal form of the “General” principles (mirror) is the possible, whereas the modal form of the “Axiological” principles (mirror content) is the concrete (PGPC, 317, 141). I might have here reversed mirror content and mirroring device, or am resisting seeing them as what Kramer tells us is a “blend of an ideal (possible) aims and actual constant partial success” (PGPC, 317, # 1). My reservation is due to how this reading is put into question by how the “personal axiological principles fill in the more concrete nature of the peculiar general principles,” found under “The Order of Exhibition” (PGPC, Part 2, 138). I remain unsure of this optic-conceptual illusion.

As part of Appendix 2, “Research Plan, Methods for Site Visits, and Primary Source Research” (PGPC, 320–48), we find two example interviews. The first is from the 2016 Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness Programs of CIIS, and the second, in 2017, is from the International School of Philosophy. It would have been ideal if under Appendix 2 the reader would have been reminded of the ten communities found in Part 1, or have had Kramer’s “Living Philosophical Communities” list more ready-at-hand (see PGPC, 115–22).

10) This “Mirror Content,” or “Content Mirror,” as defined under “Axioms of Transformation” (PGPC, 316–17), is part of the hopeful eight (sic), “Axioms of Transformation,” and whether consciously or not, is placed as the fourth axiom. If latently, then this footnote retains a modicum of insight to share with the author and readers. Convenient mirroring (perhaps?), but only due to a counting parapraxis, thus mirroring axioms 8 as 3, 7 as 2, and 5 as 1? Thus, “Subduction” in the “(Propitiatory) Dialectic,” “Manifest in the Propitiation,” “Quarterming” in the “*Systema*.” Number 4, the “Content Mirror,” would create a visible non-reversing mirror, but strangely, only from the mirroring planes 8 as 3, 7 as 2, and 5 as 1, thus revealing number 4, “Content Mirror” not as the “mirror,” but as the reflected object, or is it Superject!, seen from the mirror. Such is my dose of a hermetic influence, with a dash of Whitehead. Alas, this is all due to having found a simple oversight in the text’s numbering.

It is good to see that on page 320, Kramer provides readers a link for the other eight interviews, found at the American Institute for Philosophical and Cultural Thought – <http://americanphilosophy.net/>. The author hopes to continue these visits, and mentions philosophical communities that span the globe, some in name (Heythrop College, London; Collège International de Philosophie, Paris; Philosophy Department, Elon University, North Carolina, USA), as well as unnamed ones in “India, Tibet, Nepal, China, Thailand, and Japan” (PGPC, 122). A tall and exciting order indeed. *Bon voyage*, and as extra reading material, I would once again highly recommend Latour’s 2005, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, for the work of tracing associations, agency, and his helpful account of using four different kinds of notebooks.

These, and other critical suggestions of mine, are a by-product of Kramer’s crossing (perhaps fully mine), between networks or “regions” (PGPC, 137, 141) as momentary glitches when shifting from the mode of speculation to that of wanderer. Both of these twins hope to aim, (parallax warning!), at the “density of [said] rhizomatic activit[ies]” of philosophical community (PGPC, 275). Each mode has its network reach; each is dispersed along an adaptive system, some wider, further cast, some tighter knit upon the strands of wanderings, and others as communities cross-stitched and busy connecting the two (see PGPC, 275). It appears more and more likely to me that a philosophical community is, and remains as, a living breathing parallax. In Kramer’s usage of “constellation,” whether celestial, intercultural, common, of principles, or of cosmos, we have the prime image of a “cursive duration,” our spatial/temporal incurvity where almost “no immediate decision is called for” (PGPC, 172, see PGPC 318 # 7). Yet,

At best, [a living map of imaginative reflection] should help others find their way back to these lost homes and refurbish them as a mode of philosophy. This treatise is a spiritual exercise as philo-dynamic image, and illusory image that guides and proffers the potential for remaining and new philosophical communities alike. (PGPC, 310)¹¹

Double soul

Apart from setting us on a rich, detailed, and lengthy exploration of the “neglected communal mode of Philosophy (philosophical community),” this volume more intimately reveals itself as a journey of twins (doubles).¹² First, we have the author’s self-recognition as a welcomed wanderer (stranger), while simultaneously and steadfastly, we have the author’s manifesting the characteristic of a highly speculative systematic drive, indeed, as prospector of “images to guide us through a series of transformations that reconceptualize the world around us” (PGPC, 28). In any deeply felt investigation into the philosophy of culture, radically empirical or not, the “double soul” (as Otto Rank expressed long ago), is what exposes the “dual aspect of culture as a rationalized concretization of spiritual values ... at the same time tabooed and venerated.”¹³ While this does not jeopardize the search for philosophical community, it certainly infuses it with a meta-level “plan of living ... meant to guarantee [one’s]

11) One must recall that for Kramer, “philo-dynamic images” are in and *à la mode* of “philosophical speculation” (see PGPC, 317, see also PGPC, 318 for the “embodied and performative” mode of the mode of philosophical wandering).

12) This is not to reintroduce a psychology for the philosophical activity displayed in this volume, or to philosophical community itself, and yet, the thresholds of human culture, and the repeated patterns of successful philosophical communities as the call for transformation, and need of improvement, are fraught with inner conflict. The *agora* requires its *agon*. (Cf., PGPC, 131). While not intended to round-off a psychological view of philosophical activity, my mention of the double is exemplified in many examples of Ancient, not so ancient, and now deformed into the super-structure by-the-book insurance-data-friendly version of CBT psychagogy.

13) Otto Rank, “The Double as Immortal Self,” in *Beyond Psychology*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1941), 84.

self-perpetuation as a social type.”¹⁴ “Culture serves a dual function: it preserves the old spiritual life-values in a more permanent form, independent of the seasonal re-creation, and at the same time provides a more direct and permanent participation of the average group member in the creation and maintenance of its symbols.”¹⁵

Psychagogic enough, especially from what the author stresses is “a turning point in culture and nature” (PGPC, 310). In addition, Kramer’s “mutually reinforced *enkrateia*” calls for nothing less (PGPC, 242). Nevertheless, for now, let us return to the beginning, and visit Eli Kramer’s dedication.

Xenocleia

Kramer’s dedication is “To those once strangers who provided me hospitality while wandering the world in search of philosophical fellowship.” Xenocleia (Ξενόκλεια) is the appropriate Pythia to frame this section. Contrary to her nonresponse to Heracles’s question, and his attempt to then steal the Delphic Tripod right from under her to set up his own oracle, Kramer’s search, questions, and projected three-volume treatise is a proper offering to balance (or restore) the tripod of a robust philosophical life. It thus would warrant a response from the Oracle and, no doubt, will receive many responses from his beloved community. Along with his gifting of a tripod-to-come (PGPC, 2, 6, 99, 114), there is the author’s recognition of hospitality, his acceptance as being a guest, and his welcoming the help of strangers. Here we have a veritable force of imagining the concrete other, and one that “welcomes strangers and guests” (Ξενοδοκέω). Kramer’s journey through intercultural examples, both those present and those “no longer immediately present” (PGPC, 176) as historical others – cross-culturally and globally – is a testament to Kramer’s care for his guests, hosts, and his readers. One will find no mistreatment of Iphitus to these exploits of Heracles.

Filling an Aurelian Void

The experiences and research that make up this treatise are also telling of “a void around [the author]” while “in search of the only thing necessary”: philosophical community. The reader faces this in the example of Marcus Aurelius cited front and center by one of Kramer’s champions, Pierre Hadot (PGPC, 4). This “only thing necessary,” though neglected, is the painstaking craftwork displayed in this volume of reassembling, in a patch-work kind of genealogy, the leg of philosophical community, revealing even decorated details (dialectical tensions), of coiling bronze serpents, as once was the Tripod at Delphi. Without such reassembling, without the “regulative symbol of the sage” (PGPC, 209), or shelved histories of previous sages; as archives, or relics, or place-names (since wanderers and speculators do cast memorable shadows); how can a philosophical community act as a luring symbol without belonging, in name, to a philosophical version of a Proustian pantheon of “Place Names: The Name”? It cannot. Yet, the place-name is also a lure, doubled in one’s imagination from a long narrated heritage. Not even one leg of Marcus Aurelius’ “endowed chairs” could have held up without being in-the-name-of.¹⁶ Tethered to places are names. These are actor-networks of in-language personalities,

14) Ibid., 63.

15) Ibid., 84.

16) These being “renewable positions [by Marcus Aurelius’ imperial foundation] at Athens for the teaching of Platonic, Stoic, Peripatetic, and Epicurean philosophy.” See Ilsetraut Hadot, *Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle and Plato*, trans. Michael Chase, *Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 23. See PGPC, 39.

in a universe of discourse, whether in boundaries or not (cf. PGPC, 183, 176).¹⁷ A philosophical community must either conform to “the sanctuary of a name,” or suffer neglect by turning away from the richness of their lineaged pattern (PGPC, 6–7, 177).¹⁸ Kramer’s has pointed this out in early Buddhist and Jaina communities and, with the help of Harmut Scharfe, has shown how “renunciates” (*samnyāsin*) “banded together in communities of their own whose denomination ... matched in name ... the societies that produced their founders” (my emphasis, PGPC, 306).¹⁹ The transformation of spaces in places is by place-names, replete with memory, lived time, and again with Proust, “like all the things whose ‘double’ someone had begun by putting into my imagination. It would warm them, bring them to life, give them a personality, and I would want to find them again in reality ...”²⁰ Philosophical texts, and authors, both wanderers who left nothing in writing, and speculators who left enough to keep professional university philosophy busy for centuries, are lures first in name. Attached to these names (and their masks), there are the intensified activities and readings of scholar-personalities, and other wanderers, perhaps even communities, creating doublings, refractions, and places within the original place-names of texts. There “by the most moving kind of geometry [they become] inscribe[d] on the map of [one’s] own life.”²¹ Kramer tackles this admirably in Part 2, Chapter 1, section 11, “Overview of Dialectics”; section 12, “Dialectics I (*Sankofa* and Place)”; and in Chapter 2, section 10, “Dialectics II (Errantry and *Enhousing*).” Here we have a tension or permanent crease in the threads of the *eutopian* and the utopian in the woven dreams of stabilizing assemblages of a community. (See PGPC, 34, 73, 185, 303–308).

Place-Names ...

To prolong the sojourn a little longer in how places are tethered to names, Kramer’s axiological “Principle of *Enhousing*” mirrors in name the general principle of “Cosmopolitan Place” (PGPC, 244–50, 183–9). My query would be in how closely can “successful *a posteriori* self-regulated activit[ies]” of communities, wanderers, or speculators, (as a “retelling of [oneself]” PGPC, 178) be realistically reflected around “emergent practices that lead to predicable success at achieving [Kramer’s] ends-in-view,” without an extraordinary dive into complexity theory (PGPC, 7)? This tension belongs to the first “Dialectics I” (PGPC, 190), and “Dialectics II” (PGPC, 250). *Sankofa* will remain errant by definition, prey to the hospitable/in-hospitality of an *enhousing* place from the created seam between the site and the imagination of the site. There is no egress between these. Space itself is powerless to “that imaginary Time in which we situate, not one journey at a time but others simultaneously.”²² The reflection here is far from achieving a non-reversing mirror. Kramer neatly expresses a possibility of egress (supported by Auxier’s lead), that raises more questions about the mirroring. Once again, “at best [a living map of imaginative reflection] should help others find their way back to those lost homes and refurnish them as a mode of philosophy. This treatise is a spiritual exercise as philodymanic image, an illusory image that guides and proffers the potential for remaining and new philosophical communities alike” (PGPC, 310).

17) See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 133, 169, 179–80, 247.

18) Marcel Proust, “Place-Names: The Name,” in *Swann’s Way*, trans. Lydia Davis, (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 405.

19) The quote is from Harmut Scharfe, *Education in Ancient India*, vol. 16, Handbunch der Orientalistik, (Boston: Brill, 2002), 131.

20) Marcel Proust, “Place-Names: The Name,” *Swann’s Way*, 410.

21) Marcel Proust, “Place-Names: The Name,” *Swann’s Way*, 409. Recall here Kramer’s “Philosophical Community Ought to Be a Cosmopolitan Place,” Part 2, Chapter 1, “The Peculiar General Principle of Philosophical Community,” PGPC, 183–9.

22) Marcel Proust, “Place-Names: The Name,” *Swann’s Way*, 408.

Here we clearly have a mirroring of the “Ought to *Sankofa*” as “Ought to Incite Communal Errantry” (PGPC, 176–83, 241–42, see PGPC, 190–92). However, if *sankofa* is successful, if epic memory, resistance, symbolic gestures from and toward sources is accomplished, how does a formation (no matter how temporary), not yield to an exclusive community of persons, when “*sankofa* praxis [must be] recognized and supported by a community” (PGPC, 179)? There is more of a double here, or parallax, than a mirroring or “analogical relationship” (PGPC, 194). In our own inherited spectrality of veils (of reality or semblance), some are lovingly sown, others dismissively proffered, and many made to maintain one in invisibility. They are doubles surrounding and nurturing our very inquiries, and take part in how we map, wander and strive, and speculate from the grill of “negative prehensions” to the aboriginal grail of “positive prehensions” (cf. PGPC, 181).²³ We compete within as our own Zeuxis and Parrhasios. There are no pre-boundaries, only lures (*méconnaissance*), or the immersive *trompe-l’œil* where we are part of the sculptural rendition. At best, we ferry between intra-boundaries, infra-boundaries, or infini-boundaries, visible seams in non-reversing mirrors, especially if one takes Kramer’s quick mention of Giordano Bruno’s “magic” seriously (181). Bruno captured these types of seams as seals in his *Sigillo dei Sigilli*, and *Hermetic Diagrams*.²⁴

In “Ought to Incite Communal Errantry” (PGPC, 241–44), there cannot be an “outside of [one’s] own universe of discourse.” That is hermetically impossible, since tethered to places are names. Nothing is irretrievably lost, or dismissed (PGPC, 241), if *sankofa* is “a way of looking forward through the rearview mirror in hindsight,” and if *sankofa* is a continual retelling to ourselves that even the “irrelevant wants to find itself, or a community wants to find ‘it’” (PGPC, 178). The itch, to flip Peirce, will find its scratch (PGPC, 243). It is here that Bruno’s example of errantry would have made a greater impact if developed past the “something life *sankofa*” that Kramer believes to have found as Nolan’s “central principle of magic” (PGPC, 181). Which magic? Egyptian, natural, demonic, Hermetic, Neoplatonic, or Kabbalistic? For Bruno, magic is more about perception than principle, about perceiving contraries, and thus, “he who wants to know the greatest secrets of nature should observe and examine the minima and maxima of contraries and opposites.”²⁵ This is what Bruno called the leap of the imagination within his idea of a *pluriverse*. To be fair to the author, the high number of Kramer’s cast of philosophical characters mentioned throughout volume One, could not lend themselves to individualized focus. If they did, as an example with Bruno, it would have required to turn to his final, and unfinished work, *De vinculis in genere* (On Bonding in general), for a reconceptualization of magic in the sphere of community life.²⁶ I feel certain about, and joyfully look forward to, how many actors from volume One will return in Kramer’s *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy*, volume Two, on philosophical wanderers, and return again in volume Three, on philosophical speculators, as did many of the colorful characters in Balzac’s *Comédie Humaine*.

More like a Van Gogh painting ...

This section title was spurred by Kramer’s mention of Van Gogh, and the break that painting undergoes from what, wrongly, Kramer believes is “significant forms [that] incite reflective life and discursive reasoning”

23) See Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected edition, eds., David Ray Griffin, Donald W. Sherburne, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1978), 220, 225.

24) See Giordano Bruno, *Il Sigillo dei Sigilli, e Diagrammi Ermetici*, ed. Ubaldo Nicola, trans. Emanuela Colombi, (Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 1995).

25) Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity*, trans. Robert De Luca, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 100.

26) *Ibid.*, 145–76. Kramer did cite the text that enshoused this work, see PGPC, 181, n. 395. See also Giordano Bruno, *Opere Magiche*, eds. Michele Ciliberto, Simonetta Bassi, Elisabetta Scapparone Tirinnanzi, (Milano: Adelphi Editori, 2000).

bestowed by his “philo-dynamic images” in contrast to presentational symbols (PGPC, 8). This mention came early on in my reading of Kramer’s treatise, and I followed this example throughout the text as a thread so to first challenge my critical position that favored a Van Gogh painting as fully charged to “incite a reader, student, or audience, to new reflective and discursive engagement” (PGPC, 8). I have come back to this thread often.

This, as my other critical engagements (and others left for future exchanges), are a testament to, and product of, the richness of Kramer’s treatise, opening us to examples, characters, and adventures that call for more reflection, more work, and play within his many examples and speculations. Although his focus is on the mode of philosophical community, Kramer’s selection of evidence is wide. This avoids the worst in the warning of one of his ideal mentors, Alfred North Whitehead, where, “The chief danger to philosophy is narrowness in the selection of evidence,” though in the example of Van Gogh (and painting), I feel that Kramer resists embracing the “multifariousness of the world.”²⁷

“But where the danger is, / the saving power also grows.”²⁸

The danger in Kramer’s positioning of Van Gogh’s painting was in adopting the theoretical stance of Susanne Langer on “presentational symbol,” as if discounting how a painting emerges from the artist’s life, attached to a community, or on the fringes of a community, and the art world. If one has to take philosophy as part of a larger mode, which is philosophical community as a way of life, then in a similar reading of modes, one must take artistic creations as an aspect of artmaking as a way of life from an artistic community. It would be a bit hyperbolic to say that works “written as philo-dynamic images ... *exhaustively* captures the kind of knowledge it gives us” (PGPC, 8). There is much reflection that a painting gives us, and captures, and with a modicum of curiosity would wash over us as a torrent of serial *relata* when, as in the case of Van Gogh, we turn to his paintings, and his life through his letters. If Van Gogh’s works do not count as a “dynamic image of cosmos” (PGPC, 9), I am not sure what would.

What about Van Gogh in Kramer’s treatise? We have a first mention on PGPC 8, led by Langer’s “presentational symbol,” and Van Gogh’s paintings being contrasted to Plato’s dialogues, Montaigne’s *Essays*, Emerson’s *Nature*, and Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Tough opponents. On PGPC, 26, under section 5, “The Philo-Dynamic Image,” we have the repeated use of Kramer’s statement from PGPC, 8; “unlike a Van Gogh painting, the whole purpose of their significant forms is to incite our reflective life and discursive reasoning.” The “their” has now gained in number. Thus, to Emerson and Hegel, there is added, once again, Plato’s *Timaeus*, then Rousseau’s *Emile*, Thoreau’s *Walden*, and Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*.²⁹ It is strange that in section 2, “Langer on the Arts,” (PGPC, 19–21), Kramer comes very close to overturning his position on Van Gogh by his definition of “dynamic images,” combined with the help of Auxier’s reading of Langer’s “primary illusion,” “*presentational space*,” “spaces,” and “place.” The inability to see how Van Gogh’s paintings are, in fact, a high example of a reorganized world from a particular perspective is puzzling. Each stroke of his brush is

27) Whitehead, “The Ideal Opposites,” in *Process and Reality*, 337–38. I have previously noted approaches that would further help the selection and connection of evidence from the work of Bruno Latour.

28) Friedrich Hölderlin, “Patmos,” in *Hölderlin*, poems translated by Michael Hamburger, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952), 217.

29) How many of these texts, especially when shared in a vibrant pedagogical arena, reveal the overflowing of connotative engagements, where through mastering image-making, students begin to master untutored thinking. It is there that the presentational and the discursive are doubles. See Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, (New York: A Mentor Book, 1942), 128, 237, 220, 165.

syntactic-rule become semantic meaning and, besides that, one cannot fail to notice how reproductions of his paintings have transformed so many variable “spaces” into unique “places.”

This lacuna is nearly salvageable, and I believe it can be, when one turns to Part 2, Chapter 4, “The Dialectically Propitiated Principles of Philosophical Community (the Nature of Rhizomatic Wandering),” and section 5, “Philosophical Community Ripens Cosmological Contemplation” (PGPC, 292–302). The entire section of what Kramer imagines under the “Principle of Cosmic Contemplation in Its Relation to the Constellation of Principles,” is a section that emerges from the dynamic of Kramer’s entire system. It is and, to my surprise, can be, read as nothing less than a latent ode to Van Gogh’s idea of, and life in, nature, from his struggle with turning points in the culture of his time. Indeed, in the words of another one of Kramer’s ideal mentors, one is hard pressed to say that Van Gogh did not “accept life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half knowledge and turns that experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities.”³⁰

Beyond the purely mystical, or religious (though indebted to the latter), when Van Gogh’s paintings are studied in their various stylistic series, and his letters read through, one notices an articulation of a coherent “cosmic contemplation” (PGPC, 293) as a continuous exercise. This is notwithstanding that his community-to-come did not materialize except in cursive moments, dramatic flashes, misunderstandings, and loss – very similar to the speculators, and wanderers of philosophy that search for, or inhabit the fringes of, the “not-yet” of the few existing beloved communities.³¹ Notwithstanding, the extreme technical/stylistic pressure within Van Gogh’s paintings is charged from joining the macrocosm in a microcosm, and as its reverse, and all (as Kramer mentions many times in his treatise), “for a ‘better’ world” (PGPC, 294).³² This was to perceive better, revere better, and influence our way of existing. Kramer’s mention of Emerson’s essay, *Circles*, is itself an appreciation *manqué* of Van Gogh’s spirit gazing at, in, and over the horizon of nature to an artistic cosmology (see PGPC, 297, 297 n. 624). Closer yet is Kramer’s mention of the *eutopian* community, as Van Gogh’s constant longing and cause of his wandering, while he realized his being *en housed* in nature, and there, in the words of Hadot, right along with “Rousseau, Goethe, Hölderlin, Van Gogh.”³³

If only Kramer’s *systema* would have allowed “aesthetics” its rightful “place” as an “artistic cosmology” (PGPC, 299), then all would be right in the world under a “view from above,” and in how Van Gogh’s work could even rescue the image-shy Plotinus in a “‘vision’ to feel/know the whole in all of its simplicity” (PGPC, 298).³⁴ Has the tragicomic, critical, ethical, and the human-all-too-human fragility of the systematic

30) Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 41, in Kramer PGPC, 292, 292 n. 616. See Van Gogh’s letter to the Dutch writer and artist, Mr. Isaäson, dated 25 May 1890, from the artist’s commune outside of Paris Auvers-sur-Oise, where many painters lived and worked through the years. The letter is worth reading in its entirety, here as a link: <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/RM21/letter.html>.

31) From a letter to his brother, Van Gogh writes, “Will that [Theo’s impending marriage] be appreciated by the society to which you belong? Perhaps no more than the artists suspect that from time to time I’ve worked and suffered for the community.” Letter 741, 22, Jan. 1998, see <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let741/letter.html>.

32) To note for another study is how, throughout Kramer’s treatise, there are over sixty mentions of “better.” No doubt, this is an appropriate nod to one of his ideal mentors, A.N. Whitehead. See PGPC, 224, 224 n. 488.

33) Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis*, 319, in Kramer, PGPC, 298. As Van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo, 3 November, 1881, “Since then, of course, I’ve suffered a great many ‘petty miseries of human life,’ which, if they were written down in a book, could perhaps serve to amuse some people, though they can hardly be considered pleasant if one experiences them oneself. Nonetheless, up to now I’ve been glad that I left the resignation or ‘how-not-to-do-it’ method to those who prefer it and, as for myself, plucked up a little courage. You understand that in cases like this it’s surprisingly difficult to know what one can, may and must do. But ‘wandering we find our way,’ and not by sitting still.” Letter 179, 3, Nov. 1881. See <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let179/letter.html>.

34) As this simplicity, note “I find such a wonderfully elevated, practical, wordless philosophy in this painting, [Millet’s] it seems to be saying, to know how to suffer without complaining, that’s the only practical thing, that’s the great skill, the lesson to learn, the solution to life’s problem.” Letter 211, 11 March, 1882. See <http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let211/letter.html>.

been captured closely enough in the works of Van Gogh to count as a diffused vision (philo-dynamic image) called “cosmological”?

I believe Van Gogh would take a place beside a participatory cosmology à la Whitehead, the work at the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program at CIIS, and be in agreement with Father Casaglan’s explanations (see PGPC, 301–2). At worst, Van Gogh’s place-name would certainly become the “place” of the interstices where philosophical discourse and artistic representation turn, as doubles, to semblance, to “living map[s] of imaginative reflection” (PGPC, 310) and as lures “to live, to live well, to live better.”³⁵

In Community

I have written this as having been party to a vibrant assemblage of a philosophical community, from philosophers travelling from many parts of this world to gather in a cosmopolitan setting at the Department of Philosophy of Culture, Faculty of Philosophy, at the University of Warsaw. It was there that I was fortunate to have first meet Dr. Eli Kramer. Now, nearly three years in my rear-view mirror, the experience retains the liveliness of those summer days, evenings, and nights at the International Philosophy of Culture Week, June 8–11, 2019. Reading through Kramer’s treatise, *Intercultural Modes of Philosophy, Volume One: Principles to Guide Philosophical Community*, brought this all back, and was as enlightening and thought provoking, as it was a delightful reminder of how much “better” thinking-through is with “a few close friends” (PGPC, 311).

35) Alfred North Whitehead, *The Function of Reason*, 8, in PGPC, 224, and 233.



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