

## ON PHILOSOPHICAL COLONIALISM

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### **Abstract**

The phrase “philosophical colonialism” seems to be used in many contexts with seemingly different meanings. This prompts the need to consider its possible meanings in order to discern its primary and secondary ones. This essay aims to discuss four possible meanings: 1. Philosophical colonialism as the view that Western Philosophy or western philosophical ideas are or should be considered superior in contrast with other philosophical traditions or ideas; 2. Philosophical colonialism as the justification of Western colonialism; 3. Philosophical colonialism as the view that considers that philosophy as a scholarly research field should be the dominant one or that certain philosophical ideas are dominant in a system of thought; 4. Philosophical colonialism as the domination by argumentative means. The first two are considered primary meanings, since they are linked to the historical phenomenon of colonialism, and the last two are considered secondary ones.

**Key words:** philosophical colonialism, domination, western philosophy, justification, ideas, arguments.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

If we are to see the field of philosophy with apparent Foucaultian lenses, then we can make out a view according to which philosophy is no stranger to “power relations”. These may take many shapes and forms, genuinely philosophical or less so. Among these power relations we can identify several which can be

fixed under the umbrella phrase of “philosophical colonialism”. For example, we can encounter its usage in different contexts such as a view on Hegel’s “master narrative”, applied to everything in his thought, as a version of “philosophical colonialism” (Blunden 2010, 63), or in a discussion about independence in moral philosophy in terms of “philosophical colonialism” (Dworkin 2011, 10), or, yet again, a discussion about the “destructive tendency of philosophical colonialism with regard to the impact of modern European philosophy” (Dussel 2014, 33). Surely, other examples of similar or different usages can be found or imagined. Something obvious at this point is that the phrase “philosophical colonialism” can take different meanings in different contexts and these contexts are not necessarily directly linked or related to one-another. A clarification in this respect might be helpful and the present essay aims to provide some steps in this direction.

In order to achieve this, the present paper shall have the following outline: 1. Starting from usual ways we understand the terms “philosophical” and “colonialism”, we will attempt to suggest different possible meanings of the composite phrase that are to be taken into account; 2. Then we will discuss each possible meaning in particular, starting with the ones we consider to be the more proper meanings and ending with the ones that are less so.

## **2. PHILOSOPHICAL COLONIALISMS**

Before taking into account the different meanings of the phrase ‘philosophical colonialism’, it should be stressed that here, as in many other cases, the different meanings of the composite are provided by the different possible meanings of its parts. Thus, the possible meanings of the composite phrase are based on the particular meanings taken by the terms “philosophical” and “colonialism”. Let us consider first the term “philosophical”. In the online version of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary we find the following definitions of the adjective “philosophical”: 1.a. “of or relating to philosophers or philosophy; 1.b. “based on philosophy”; 2. “characterized by the attitude of a philosopher; specifically:

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calm or unflinching in the face of trouble, defeat, or loss”<sup>1</sup>. In turn, “colonialism” is a noun which can be defined thus: 1. “the quality or state of being colonial”; 2. “something characteristic of a colony”; 3.a. “control by one power over a dependent area or people <the colonialism of the British Empire>”; 3.b. “a policy advocating or based on such control <Colonialism was brought to an end in the country.>”<sup>2</sup>.

However, we will not take into account all the meanings just enumerated and we will also add either nuances to these definitions or some new meanings. This, because to take all the possible combinations into account would not only be counterproductive but will actually generate some strange results. Such is, for instance, the case of combining “philosophical 2”, which denotes a mostly passive attitude, with “Colonialism 3a. or 3b”, which indicates an active attitude. Of course, one can exercise unjust control unflinchingly and serenely, but we should not follow down this path because this is not really in the focus here. Therefore, we will consider “philosophical” in the following two ways: 1. related the discipline of philosophy and/or philosophical ideas (*Phil-1*); 2. denoting an attitude that is critical, argumentative or persuasive, by means of philosophical tools (*Phil-2*). In the case of “colonialism” we will first retain the reference to the infamous historical phenomenon that significantly shaped the world in the last five centuries, i.e. the literal meaning of colonialism (*Col-1*) and we will also add that in cases such as that of the example from (Blunden 2010) above, we cannot say with propriety that ideas among themselves dominate or exploit each other in terms similar to what happens in the case of historical phenomena, but we can express ourselves metaphorically by taking into consideration a figurative meaning: when a philosophical idea has ascendancy within a philosophical system or a philosophical discussion, we can say that we have an instance of “colonialism” between ideas. Therefore, we can also take into account a broader sense of “colonialism” that is “a relation of imposition, domination and/or exploitation” (*Col-2*).

By considering the possible combinations between these different meanings, we propose the following table comprising of phenomena that can be called “philosophical colonialism” more or less properly:

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philosophical>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/colonialism>

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	Phil-1	Phil-2
Col-1	(A1) – Philosophy as practiced in the West is seen as superior and dominant (strong version) (A2) – certain western ideas are seen as superior and dominant (soft version)	(B) – justification, grounding or acceptance of Western colonialism in a philosophical manner, i.e. using philosophical tools
Col-2	(C1) – disciplinary colonialism: philosophy should dominate other fields (C2) – certain ideas should be dominant in a system of thought	(D) – domination by means of ideas imposed via argumentation and persuasion

Thus, based on what we have observed to this point, we can fit each of the usages mentioned right at the start of this essay in one of the categories. The example from (Blunden 2010) could be considered a case of C2, the one from (Dworkin 2011) a case of D, and the one from (Dussel 2014) a case of A1. At this point we should distinguish the proper or primary meanings of the phrase from the derived or metaphorical ones, and to do this we will take the relation with the historical phenomenon of colonialism to be the main criterion of separation. Thus we have:

1. Primary meanings: the practice of domination involving the exclusion and/or the subjugation and/or exploitation of one philosophical tradition by another, the same practice in instances related to specific philosophical ideas, or the justification and acceptance of colonialism by means of philosophical tools.
2. Secondary meanings<sup>3</sup>: the idea that philosophy as a field should dominate or regulate all the other fields of knowledge (interdisciplinary context), the idea that certain philosophical ideas dominate and shape a system of thought (systemic context), the imposition of certain philosophical ideas on other people (argumentative context).

We will consider all these in turn, beginning with the primary meanings.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, in the case of secondary meanings we can usually find synonymous terms or phrases.

### 3. THE DOMINANT PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

To discuss about colonial relations between philosophical traditions may very well be the subject of entire books, either on this topic proper or its discussion in the context of the general historical phenomenon of colonialism. In this particular case, we will try to touch on just a few points related to this issue. As seen above, the usage of the phrase in this sense was in the context of speaking about the “destructive tendency of philosophical colonialism with regard to the impact of modern European philosophy” (Dussel 2014, 33). The view that Western philosophy is (or should be) dominant in the world is not new. It can be said that in certain cases (usually considered many), core philosophical concepts developed in Western tradition were transplanted by imposition (or not) in the contexts of other philosophical cultures. Examples can range from ethical/moral ideas such as those of human rights, epistemological ideas as those related to modern science, to political ideas such as the primacy of democracy in contrast to other regime types. In the second part of this subsection we will also consider a specific way of “doing” philosophical colonialism, that of “conceptual mining”. There were, of course, many real historical interactions between what can be considered, in broad lines, different philosophical traditions. Some of these, such as the influence of Arabic philosophy on Western philosophy in the case of Latin Averroism, or that of Indian philosophy on 19<sup>th</sup> century European philosophers, are better documented and there is generally no dissent in this regard<sup>4</sup>. Other cases, such as the influence of Indian philosophy on Greek Neoplatonism still need serious pondering. In the same venue, Greek philosophy influenced Arabic philosophy, or in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when European philosophy had an overwhelming influence in the world. Of course, we also have the cases of more or less imaginary colonialisms: the “philosophy” of ancient Egypt influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, the philosophy of India in Ancient Greece, Dacian or Celtic philosophy in ancient Rome etc. We are not saying that these influences were not possible. Quite the contrary! But, historically speaking, fantasy always had a good friend in improbability.

<sup>4</sup> An exception, although not very influential, can be considered the book written by the French medievalist Sylvain Gouguenheim, *Aristote au mont Saint-Michel*, published in 2008, in which the role of the Muslims in the transmission of the ancient heritage is downplayed.

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In regard to the relation between philosophical traditions, some questions should be considered: how can a philosophical tradition subjugate and dominate another? What are the forms of this relation? Is it about the human resource? Is it about appropriating philosophical ideas that in the end the dominant tradition flaunts as invented by itself? Should this phenomenon manifest itself by necessity in many subdomains, or every now and then in different ones? It is difficult to provide straight-forward and generally applicable answers here. We can only observe particular situations and eventually, if there is sufficient data gathered from these, a more comprehensive picture might emerge; and this should be done in order to avoid the comfortable radical views such as those stating that different traditions are impervious to one another or that the Western philosophical tradition is an absolute villain in this respect. Thus, right from the start, we will pass over the discussion of the relation between the Western philosophical tradition and the others in terms of *universal* superiority (A1 from above), this being easily refutable as a standpoint, and we will only discuss it in particular instances, where actual interactions occur (A2 from above).

As stated above, subtypes of philosophical colonialism in the sense A2 can be imagined: ethical/moral colonialism (e.g. Western ethical codes of Christian or Hellenistic origin, on which systems of laws are based, are considered superior), political colonialism (e.g. democracy is the superior political system), epistemological colonialism (e.g. Western science is superior to other forms of knowledge around the world). Of these, for lack of space, we will consider the situation of democracy as a political system that needs to be superimposed on non-Western societies and the problems of its legitimacy and cultural compatibility.

The word “democracy” is one of the most used and abused words, and this for a variety of purposes. One of them is to denominate the regime considered by many Westerners to be the best one possible at this point in time and by this they mean liberal democracy. However, regarding the legitimacy of democracy, liberal or not, there have been dissenting voices starting with ancient times. For instance, at the roots of Western political theory, we can find, in classical Greek philosophy, a criticism of democracy for some of its shortcomings. Among the most renowned philosophers who had a say in this, we can count Plato and

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Aristotle. For example, in Aristotle's view, democracy is considered inside a taxonomic system of political regimes where we have six just regimes contrasted with three degenerated or corrupted regimes<sup>5</sup>. In this system, democracy is the best, but not the best of all regimes, but the best of the corrupted ones, because the ones that rule, the mob, govern in self-interest only.

Usually, criticisms of democracy focus on the unsuitability of Western political ideas in non-western contexts given the incompatibility between the values of western liberal democracy and the cultural, theological or philosophical values of non-western countries. For example, one should ponder seriously on whether democracy as it is understood in the West could be successful in a far eastern society if we are to take into account its respective social specificity shaped by a philosophy such as that of Confucianism. The answers to this question can range from full compatibility (if the underlying philosophies are read and understood in a most charitable fashion) to its opposite, although the opinions of the scholars on this matter are usually found somewhere in between. Maybe the most important issue here is the claim to conceptual universality and priority that characterizes a Western mode of approaching things: in the case of the so-called proper political constitution is that where the values such as "justice", "rights", "individual liberties" (and others, specific to Western democracies) are seen as primary in relation to other values such as that of "family", "piety" or "deference", i.e. values that can be seen as fundamental in other cases (for this see discussions in Fukuyama 1995; Rosemont 2004; Chen 2007; etc.). Similar issues may arise when it comes to the Middle Eastern or to African societies.

Another way "philosophical colonialism" can manifest itself is by abuse of "conceptual mining". While in colonialism, the dominator exploits and appropriates whatever he considers useful off the dominated, in the case of philosophy (and probably of sciences in general) we can observe a specific kind of exploitation and appropriation: "conceptual mining". For instance, in a paper published in 1987, Gerald James Larson talks about "conceptual resources" taken from Asian traditions in order to find answers to philosophical

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle's theory of political regimes has been called "political morphology" and it has its specific place in an ancient theoretical tradition focused on the topic of government forms in which we can count other thinkers such as Plato, Polybius (see Bereschi 2009) and many medieval philosophers later.

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problems related to the environment (Larson 1987, 154). This is taken into account in (Callicott 1994, 193) and formulated thus:

“Mining” the “conceptual resources of indigenous intellectual traditions for insights and images that will help articulate the environmental attitudes and values latent in the emerging postmodern scientific worldview is a reprehensible kind of *philosophical colonialism*, according to the comparativist Gerald James Larson

It is hard to discern historical cases of philosophical colonialism in this sense. Discussions on the alleged direct influence of Indian philosophy on the Greek Neo-Platonist tradition or the degree of influence of Arabic philosophy on Western Scholastic thought may come to mind. It is not the place here to consider in detail such topics. However, it should be said that the phenomenon of appropriation can also happen non-intentionally and this makes it extremely difficult to clear the waters in this case. So, in the discussion, a special attention should be given to this particular aspect. Where intention is obviously present, if we ponder about this kind of phenomenon in terms of ‘reprehensibility’, it is hard to tell which of two dominant attitudes is worse: totally ignoring (and discarding as inferior) the views and the concepts from other traditions, or appropriating those views and those concepts by means of “conceptual mining” and presenting them as one’s own. So, we can distinguish between non-intentional appropriation and intentional appropriation. This second one can be of two kinds: one where credit is given to the source and the second where none is given, presenting what is appropriated as one’s own production. It is clear that the last one of these three possibilities is the one to be avoided and can be labeled “conceptual mining” and considered with all its negative aspects. But we need to be careful. The burden of proof to show that a certain philosophical concept or doctrine was appropriated intentionally in the worse way (i.e. “stolen”), lies with the one who stated that it was so. And, for the sake of accuracy, one needs to make the mentioned distinctions and some more if one wants to avoid blatantly anachronistic false statements as the one made by Yosef Ben-Jochannan: that Aristotle stole all his knowledge from the Library of Alexandria (Lefkowitz 1996, 2-3)<sup>6</sup>. The Greeks

<sup>6</sup> The example of Yosef Ben-Jochannan fits well in the trend of radical interpretations in the context of Afrocentric readings of history occasioned by scholarly work such as Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena* (1987-2006).



did not culturally “stole” anything from Egypt or the Middle East; at least not in the sense suggested by affirmations of this kind. A discussion in terms of “stealing” on the influence of, say, the ancient Egyptians or Babylonians on the ancient Greeks is seriously misleading in this respect. If anything, the Greeks gave credit to the source of their knowledge: there are many accounts of pilgrimages made by ancient Greek philosophers, as soon as Thales or Pythagoras, whose trips to Egypt or to the Middle East were done in order to learn mathematics or astronomy. This needs to be taken into account if we are to discern the negative instances of conceptual mining.

#### **4. PHILOSOPHICAL JUSTIFICATION OF COLONIALISM**

Philosophy, or at least parts of it, is seen and used as a tool, for better or for worse. One of the most morally questionable phenomena in the history of philosophy was the way philosophers employed it in the service of colonialism, by justifying it. This is the second meaning of the phrase “philosophical colonialism” we shall consider here. Philosophical colonialism in this sense joins militaristic, economic and political colonialism and attempts to justify their aims and even means by philosophical argument and tools.

European colonial powers, starting with the Spanish forced colonization of their American conquered territories, always tried to show that the way they treated the original inhabitants of those territories was justified somehow by God, natural law, “moral responsibility” and a lot of other faces of the “white man’s burden”. Many examples can be given here, since there was a significant number of influential European philosophers who justified colonization in one way or another. Examples such as John Locke (Arneil 1996), I. Kant (even though his position is a matter of debate; see Muthu 2003; Flikschuh et al. 2014) or G. W. F. Hegel (Stone 2017) come to mind. In many cases, the justification of the European conquest in the Americas or elsewhere was based on the *jus naturale* or natural law. If the natives would “break” or “violate” natural law, then it was the duty of the Christians or Westerners to civilize them, because, since the natives were in breach of natural law, it was clear that they were not rational

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enough. So, usually, philosophical concepts such as *human nature* and *natural right*, play a role in this type of justification. An attitude of this kind is, maybe, best illustrated by one of the most influential British philosophers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Stuart Mill. In his *Considerations on Representative Government*, we find an account about how savages need to learn obedience in order to take the first steps on the road to civilization (Mill 1861, 37-40<sup>7</sup>):

Again, uncivilized races, and the bravest and most energetic still more than the rest, are averse to continuous labour of an unexciting kind. Yet all real civilization is at this price; without such labour, neither can the mind be disciplined into the habits required by civilized society, nor the material world prepared to receive it. (...) A civilized people have far other means of imparting civilization to those under their influence; (...) At some period, however, of their history, almost every people, now civilized, have consisted, in majority, of slaves. A people in that condition require to raise them out of it a very different polity from a nation of savages. (...) A slave, properly so called, is a being who has not learnt to help himself. He is, no doubt, one step in advance of a savage. He has not the first lesson of political society still to acquire. He has learnt to obey. But what he obeys is only a direct command. (...) A despotism, which may tame the savage, will, in so far as it is a despotism, only confirm the slaves in their incapacities. Yet a government under their control would be entirely unmanageable by them. Their improvement cannot come from themselves, but must be superinduced from without. The step which they have to take, and their only path to improvement, is to be raised from a government of will to one of law. They have to be taught self-government, and this, in its initial stage, means the capacity to act on general instructions. What they require is not a government of force, but one of guidance.

The fragment is clear enough in itself with no additional explanation needed. However, one more thing should be said here: there were also a number of dissenting figures who criticized the way Europe overshadowed the world, such as Rousseau, Diderot or Kant (Muthu 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Mark Tunick observes that Mill conceived a classification of people, even though at times he did not follow it exactly: savage, semisavage, slave, semibarbarous, barbarous, and civilized. For example India was considered semibarbarous, i.e. it still needed “help” from the British in order to advance further towards civilization (Tunick 2006, 11).

## 5. THE SECONDARY MEANINGS

It is worth mentioning that in these cases the use of term “colonialism” is decontextualized, denoting not necessarily a relation of economic, military or cultural domination, but rather domination in a more general sense that can take its specific features from the things involved in that respective relation.

### 1. The relation of philosophy with other fields:

Historically, philosophy and its practitioners tended to consider their enterprise as one of the, if not *the*, most noble of human pursuits. For example, for this to be the case, it means that the purpose of certain sciences is to provide for philosophical inquiry with their particular results and philosophy, in turn, should conduct and determine those sciences teleologically, methodologically or in some other way. This possible phenomenon should be considered in the context of disciplinary subalternation (or scientific subalternation). In this respect, “philosophical colonialism” denotes that relation of interdisciplinary subalternation in which philosophy determines in one way or another the manner in which other fields should be regulated.

This superiority of philosophy in relation to other human enterprises was already asserted, in a different epistemological context, in classical Greece. Maybe the most well-known and influential example is that of Aristotle’s classification of sciences into theoretical, practical and productive (e.g. in *Metaphysics* VI, 1, 1025b; *Topics* VI, 6, 145a). The noblest of these are the theoretical sciences, and of these the single most important is first philosophy. The wisdom associated to it is the highest form of knowledge and this becomes possible only after other *lesser forms* are developed in order to provide for a life that offers the chance of leisure (e.g. *Metaphysics* I, 1). The general principle is that the field of knowledge which deals with a more universal (or higher) subject matter is superior to the one that deals, say, with particulars. This is why, for example, history was seen as inferior to drama (as in the *Poetics*), because history dealt with particular events. In this vein, it is only natural that one should consider first philosophy as the best of all human scientific endeavors. In the case of Aristotle appeared an idea that was later named “the subalternation of sciences”, where we have inferior and superior

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sciences, the inferior ones usually providing facts and data, while the superior sciences provide the explanations (e.g. *Posterior Analytics* I, 13, 78b34-79a7 etc.; cf. *Metaphysics* I, 1 etc.).

Aristotle's classification of sciences and its principles remained influential in the Middle Ages, Renaissance and the early modern period. Even today we can find something similar in the field of transdisciplinary studies. In a paper written by Manfred A. Max-Neef (2004) we are told that interdisciplinarity (which is something different from disciplinarity, multidisciplinarity, pluridisciplinarity and, of course, transdisciplinarity) "is organized at two hierarchical levels. It thus connotes coordination of a lower level from a higher one..." (Max-Neef 2004, 6). The higher level gives purpose. If we are to compare the advocated theory, that of transdisciplinarity, with interdisciplinarity, we find out that transdisciplinarity is more complex. Usually we can envisage hierarchies from certain perspectives between sciences, as is the case of biology using results from chemistry, or of chemistry using results from physics. This is a simple hierarchy. But in the case of transdisciplinarity all the possible hierarchies are fitted into a scheme that will allow transdisciplinarity to be "the result of a coordination between hierarchical levels". These levels are the following, from the lowest to the highest, from the less important to the more important (see Max-Neef, 2004, 7-9):

1. Empirical level (Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Sociology, Economy, etc.) – with the specific question: "what exists?"
2. Pragmatic level (Architecture, Engineering, Agriculture, etc.) – "what are we capable of doing?"
3. Normative level (Planning, Design, Politics, Law) – "what is it we want to do?"
4. Value level (Value, Ethics, *Philosophy*) – "what should we do? Or rather how should we do what we want to do?"

If we are to understand why certain disciplines have a higher place in the hierarchy, we should know that "the purpose of each level is defined by the next higher one" (Max-Neef 2004, 7). Thus, if we take for example the following disciplines, each part of a level: mathematics (empirical level), architecture (pragmatic level), politics (normative level) and philosophy (value level), we are to understand that the purpose of mathematics, in this particular case, is given by architecture,

which in turn has its purpose given by politics and which in its own turn has philosophy as a guide. At this point, we are wondering whether transitivity is allowed here, so that mathematics would get a handful of purposes from all its disciplinary superiors.

What is “colonial” in all this? Obviously, when one discipline has precedence over another in determining the latter’s purpose (maybe even methods) we can say that we have a relation of domination (even if it is not political or economic as in a historical context). In general lines, as indicated initially, this model can be more properly called scientific (or interdisciplinary) subalternation and only metaphorically colonialism, or “philosophical colonialism” (when philosophy, by some of its practitioners, dreams itself at the top of the epistemic food chain). However, this particular type of network between scientific disciplines might prove counterproductive in terms of research policies, given the fact that resources distribution can be significantly affected by the importance given to certain disciplines in spite of others. But it is not the purpose of the present essay to pursue this issue.

## 2. Dominant ideas in philosophical systems:

Here we have in mind the situations where a main philosophical idea is dominant in the case of a philosopher (or a philosophical school). We encountered this manner of use in a text talking about a “master narrative” present in Hegel’s philosophical conception, a “master narrative” applied to everything. This is what in (Blunden 2010, 63) is called “a kind of philosophical colonialism”. This particular type of phenomena is fairly common in philosophy and can be encountered, at least in Western tradition, since the beginnings of philosophical thinking. For example, we can consider Plato’s theory of ideas as permeating (and “colonizing”) all his middle and later thought, or Aristotle’s views on matter and form, potentiality and actuality, acting in similar manner, as observable throughout his writings on physics or metaphysics. The same goes for Plotinus and his theory of hypostases, emanation or conversion. Or, in the case of Kant, the thing in itself, phenomenon, or the categories. While in the case of philosophers like Hegel we may be warranted to consider that there is a master narrative, in the case of other philosophers we might not have enough information to decide.

The idea of the existence of “power relations” between ideas and concepts may be considered a fascinating one. Of course, one cannot deny the relevance of it in the case of philosophers who made it explicit that a certain concept is the fulcrum of their philosophical views, but, at the same time, one cannot stop but to raise an eyebrow at the nature of certain scholarly work that openly states its so called dedication *to clarify the essential issue(s) of such and such philosopher, ignored by everyone to that point in time*, even though there is no direct or solid evidence that warrants such an interpretation. The pains taken by this type of scholar, in bringing to light so called hidden power relations in a philosophical system, may in some cases be paralleled with those of a conspiracy theorist. However, proper historiographical reconstruction in philosophy has little to do with conspiracies.

### 3. Argumentative domination

In recent scholarly work, argumentation is usually defined in a neutral way (van Eemeren et al. 2014, 7):

Argumentation is a communicative and interactional act complex aimed at resolving a difference of opinion with the addressee by putting forward a constellation of propositions the arguer can be held accountable for to make a standpoint at issue acceptable to a rational judge who judges reasonably.

The insistence on “resolving a difference of opinion” and the fact that this needs to occur between rational agents is indicative of the fact that the outcome in this case should not be seen in a negative light. However, this definition seems to be more prescriptive than descriptive in relation to the actual everyday argumentative practice. In many cases the model that seems to be at work in a argumentative discussion is the adversarial one, in which the interlocutor is seen as an adversary that needs to have his own view crushed followed by the acceptance of the arguer’s view on the discussed matter. This attitude seems to be deeply rooted in European philosophy since the time of the ancient Greeks. This specific spiritual attitude of the ancient Greeks was subject of scholarly focus at least since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when two of the most influential classical scholars of the age, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacob Burckhardt, described the “agonistic” or “competitive” spirit of the Greeks. This spirit manifested itself in every field and

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had its identifiable roots in Greek mythology (see Nietzsche 1997; Burckhardt 1999; etc.). Thus, it was also present in philosophical or political argument, the sophists being the ones who were known to impart the art of arguing well, “on both sides of the problem”, on anyone who was generous enough to pay for their art. Arts such as sophistry and rhetoric were an important political currency when one needed to be seen as better at arguing than their political adversaries or when they wanted to convince the audience of something that was not exactly the case. Eventually, many of the tricks taught by the sophists and rhetoricians became obsolete as a result a counter-offensive of which the most important figures are considered Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (see Guthrie 1971; Kennedy 1963; also Aristotle’s *Sophistical Refutations* and *Rhetoric*; etc.). As we said, this adversarial model of argumentation is deeply embedded in the European tradition of philosophy and many developments in logic and argumentation were possible only due to this manner of considering it. While this may be productive in some respects, this does not mean that this model is universally conducive to important theoretical insights. It can actually prevent the possibility of a genuine dialogue between scholars who belong to different research paradigms. One example can be the lack of a productive dialogue during the Cold War between Soviet philosophers and philosophers from the Western block. Maybe one of the best known examples of persons who tried to reduce this shortcoming was J. M. Bocheński, who, starting with 1961, founded and edited the journal *Studies in Soviet Thought* (since 1992, *Studies in East European Thought*). This philosophical link between East and West had an underlying view on what a genuine philosophical dialogue should take into consideration in terms of aims. According to Bocheński, the philosopher engaged in dialogue should not take as principal purposes of his engagement the aim to persuade the other party, or the aim to defeat the other party in argument, or the aim to import in the philosophical argument any external aim (such as a political one). In turn, he should seek to better his understanding of himself or the world, to test his own opinion of the world or of himself, to improve his opinions (Bocheński 1967, 177-178).

Seeing argumentation in terms of conflict or contest, with winners and losers, is of no use in many situations since it can miss altogether the purpose the argument

is used for (see Cohen 1995; Rooney 2010; etc.). For example, in respect to knowledge and belief revision, we should consider more carefully who actually “wins” something in an argument? E.g. the winner defeats (i.e. convinces) the loser by showing that the latter’s belief is false and the contrary is true. While the winner may have some satisfaction drawn from the “victory”, the genuine epistemic gain, as Phyllis Rooney pointed out (2010, 221-222), is on the part of the so-called loser.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Why ending with the case in which argumentative domination can be seen as an example of philosophical colonialism? Because this particular case, at a micro level, is more important than we would be inclined to think. It is possible that the attitude of Western philosophers towards the other philosophical traditions was and still is determined to some extent by the argumentative ethos they are educated and trained in. The adversarial model of argumentation is not the best choice in terms of philosophical education. As Daniel Cohen, one of the main proponents of virtue argumentation theory, wrote in a paper, adhering to such a model of argumentation can aid in teaching a specific philosophy, not philosophy in general (Cohen 1995, 177, 178). We believe that the same thing holds true in the case of philosophical dialogue between philosophical traditions and a change of view at this level can lead to significant changes at the higher level of interrelations between philosophical traditions. The example of J. M. Bocheński is only one instance of a philosopher whose attempt to bridge a gap with bridges of genuine philosophical dialogue can bring about the hope that, in the future, some of these colonialisms will also become things of the past.

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