Relation of Mutuality

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The collection of five articles in this themed issue of the *KEMANUSIAAN the Asian Journal of Humanities* (KAJH) presents philosophical research revolving around the theme of solidarity. How to think this theme? We can understand it as referring to relations of mutuality. Now the two terms "relation" and "mutuality" already invoke and cluster together a complex network of concepts, logics, histories and etymologies, each requiring further theoretical, maybe rigorous, meditation. What happens when the terms are combined together? What is at stake and what is being questioned? What logos is being solidified and what aporias, in turn, leak out?

Certainly what is being proposed through this phrasal juxtaposition is a particular category of relation and, by extension, a particular category of relationality, a particular possibility of connection, connectivity and connectedness. There are many categories of relations, many types of relationships, but what is at stake in solidarity is mutuality, commonality, kinship. And perhaps we can go further, through that audacious speculative step that every philosopher knows too well, by asking whether every relation, be it between terms that are concrete, abstract, human or non-human, always refers to some mutuality because the actualisation of any relation necessarily requires beforehand some willingness to reciprocate, some open ground preparing for the possibility of bonding. As it has been said again and again, through a thematic thread as old as philosophical thinking itself, that negation is never negative enough. Perhaps there can never be complete non-mutuality in relationality, even for positions of complete negation, opposition or indifference. Every difference, every dilemma, every alterity, even every aporia, always becomes itself with respect to some common structure, some mutual category shared by each side. Yin always partly belongs to Yang, and vice-versa. Black and white, while different and opposed to one another, are both still colours. An opposition is always with respect to some explicitly or implicitly

agreed issue. We are different with respect to features that we already share. So every relation is always already, in the background, one of mutuality. There is a redundancy in the phrase "relation of mutuality" because the second term is already semantically embedded in the first. To use the Kantian terminology, we are speaking of an analytic truth when we say that a relation is mutual.

Relation of mutuality: but the very possibility of a phrasal juxtaposition implies a necessary separateness and otherness with respect to the terms. The possibility of a relation, the condition for there to be relationality, assumes beforehand the possible failure of rapport. It makes no sense to connect two terms together without not only this presumption of separation but also the possible breakdown in rapport. It makes no sense to place "mutuality" alongside "relation" if each term was already completely semantically subservient to the other and if there did not already exist this risk of relational disappointment. Relationalities that are always already mutual and always succeed in their mutuality would have no meaning. With the possible formation of this phrasal juxtaposition, perhaps with the formation of any phrasal juxtaposition, some obscure dynamic is at play, one that at times seeks to collapse the two terms together into one and at other times seeks to repel them as far away as possible.

We can reiterate the problematic in another way. This strange dialectic between relationality and mutuality points to one of the essential aporias that makes, creates and regulates the philosophical question of solidarity. Much will be gained of our understanding of this question once we apprehend that what is at stake there is some irresolvable double bind between two opposing and ancient exigencies of ontology, each dating back to the pre-Socratic origins of philosophical thinking. On one hand, there is the demand for unity, for perceiving the unification of disparate constituent elements into some structured solidarity, some community, some universalism. We cannot conceive the question of solidarity without this will to oneness. On the other hand, there is the exigency to recognise the diversity of Being, for a solidarity can only be constructed out of fundamentally separated and solitary elements. On one hand, we have the united sphere of Being in all its closed security as conceived by Parmenides and, on the other hand, we have the ever-shifting vicissitudes of a free and sovereign alterity of becoming as conceived by Heraclitus.

How then to achieve some philosophical synthesis? How to think of the Many without reducing it merely to the One? How to think a plurality, any plurality, without transforming it into some substantial and exclusive identity? How to think solidarity without the firm solidity of some centre? It would not be too audacious to note that each of the five articles in this themed issue of KAJH seeks to grapple, either directly or indirectly, sometimes even unconsciously,

with this essential question of solidarity. The article by Lok Chong Hoe, a philosopher based at Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia, analyses and tries to move beyond attempts at defining art through essentialist, anti-essentialist and institutional theory philosophies. For Lok, the traditional approach of essentialist aesthetics fails to offer the necessary and sufficient properties of art because the given criteria always end up being too narrow and/or too broad. One alternative examined by Lok is the relationist aesthetics of institutional theory, which claims that the common characteristic of all art works—a characteristic that cannot just be extracted by examining the works themselves—is some kind of relationship awarded by certain institutions of society or by certain people acting on behalf of those institutions. According to Lok, this relationist aesthetics provides only the necessary but not the sufficient conditions for art—exceptions abound, and the theory fails to explain the failure of some institutional efforts at conferring the status of art onto certain artifacts. Moreover, since the beginning of the 20th century, there have been movements, like Dadaism, and works, such as the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, that challenged this majoritarian view of art. Lok partially agrees with the anti-essentialist aesthetics that understands art as similar to a game or an open concept capable of incorporating novel and different objects or activities. Since the expansion of the definition of art, as witnessed from the past one hundred years in history, might end up carrying indefinitely, then the task of essentialism is bound to fail. This idea of art as an open concept does not however immediately contradict the essentialist project. The existence of common features is still possible, hand in hand with the empirical observation of continuous innovation. Lok examines the possibility of taking political activism as works of art. He produces a novel consideration of the political activities of Umsonst in Berlin and Hamburg, and the Occupy movement all around the world. For those cases, the question is not just to view political activism from an aesthetic viewpoint but, more radically, to consider the activity itself as art, even when the participants do not see themselves as artists, even when the protests serve no properly aesthetic function, and even when the audience do not see the activism as some performance art piece. Lok argues that, without destroying the mental distinction between art and non-art, radical politics obliterates the physical separation between art and its environment and between artistic creation and every day happenings. Art thenceforth becomes an extension of daily life and enters into the everyday space of life where creativity is conventionally absent.

The contribution by Eda Lou Ochangco, a philosopher based at Far Eastern University in Manila, the Philippines, examines and compares Karl Marx and Amartya Sen's philosophical analyses of freedom, particularly in relation to the role of political institutions and rights. Marx provides no systematic ideas on freedom in his works but Ochangco argues that strong positions and a philosophical framework on the issues can be teased out from his writings.

A Marxian conception of freedom can be extracted via the philosopher's explication of "species-being," a universal being with free conscious activity and free of the alienated existence imposed by capitalist market system, private property, and the division of labour. As conceived by Ochangco's reading of Marx, this free species-being stands in opposition to the slave class of workers who lack the positive freedom to, for example, hunt, fish and rear cattle. The only route towards true emancipation would be to abolish the powerful yet repressive capitalist institutions and the so-called rights that impede liberty, with the ultimate aim of establishing a communist society. The philosopher and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen understands freedom in terms of agency or, to be precise, in terms of functionings and capabilities to achieve things that the agents themselves value and would want to happen in their lives. What is crucial here is the notion of men and women as agents who can form objectives and have them realised. The agents should be able to influence the world via the communicative construction of social values and the positive empowerment of certain rights, which is enabled through the existence of desirable options and substantive opportunities and social arrangements understood in the language of rights and instrumental freedoms. Ochangco points out that both Marx and Sen's conceptions of freedom are, among others, similar in that they see the success of life in terms of fulfilling the needed human undertakings in order to enhance species-being or functionings. They both see men and women as worthy of a certain level of free existence, which is the active and willing participation in life activities without coercion. However, Sen was more focused on the positive role of political institutions and public policy that safeguard rights. In the Marxian view, such institutions do not reject outright the probability of some non-communist political conception that is partial to the capitalist domination of private property, free market and the division of labour. Marx would see the imposition of such political rights not as emancipation but a reduction, for they are the rights desired by the egoist who is separated from other human beings. For Marx, it is not individual interest that should be safeguarded as many institutions can hamper freedom if their operations are left unchecked. A Marxian conception of freedom would like to see a limitation of specific rights, especially property rights so that each and every species-being shares and enjoys the commons.

The article by Peter Chong-Beng Gan, a philosopher based at Universiti Sains Malaysia, takes as its central thesis the existence of an objective, rational and evidence-based ethics that can form the foundation of solidarity within communities of various multiplicities, particularly within multi-religious polities. Such an ethics forms the sovereign and authoritative point of reference, above doctrinal religious edicts, on whether actions or beliefs are right or wrong. This does not mean that religion is always at odds with rational ethics when it comes to the moral appraisals. Gan notes that even though we should caution ourselves

against any excesses in morally-perverse religious activities, faith-based beliefs and actions as such need not violate ethics. Gan turns to the thesis of moral evidentialism in order to explicate what he means by an objective rational ethics. This thesis, which links the morality of convictions with deliberatively-rational evidence for them, is often associated with a text by the English philosopher William Clifford. Since the moral truths of religious beliefs are amenable to evidential justification, then beliefs that lead to moral evil can never be evidentially supported. So ethically indefensible religious beliefs must be rejected. Nevertheless, ethical beliefs can originate from either religious or non-religious sources. Gan agrees with Kant's recognition of religion as filling a lack near the boundaries of moral reason by infusing final meaning to life as well as encouraging adherence to moral law. But since religion can also bring illusion, superstition and fanaticism, it should be tempered with self-caution as well as rational and evidence-based critiques. Between, on one hand, objective and universal principles of reason and, on the other hand, the devotional and subjective enterprise of religion, some equilibrium must be located. Solidarity within a multi-religious society can only be fostered by keeping the lines of dialogue open that, in turn, is only possible based on the principle, as noted in the title of Gan's article, that ethics precedes religious beliefs.

The article by Wu Shiu-Ching, a philosopher based at the National Chung-Chen University in Chai-Yi, Taiwan, demonstrates a complementary relation and convergence between the fundamental ontology of authentic Mitsein given by Martin Heidegger and the normativity given in the recent field of care ethics. Even though Heidegger never provides any explicit systematic ethics in his book—what is more an ethics of care—he does conceive ethics as derived from ethos (a derivation whose circularity compares with the famous hermeneutic circle), which is the ontological abode of being wherein Dasein always-already dwells and encounters him/herself, the world and others. The concepts of Sorge (authentic care) and Fürsorge (concern for others) in Heidegger's thinking underscore the primacy of an ontology of dependence over independence. This fundamental ontology challenges the dominance of the modern Cartesian subject-ego and replaces it with an alternative thinking of Dasein as primordially and always-already Mitsein, a Dasein engaged in being-in-the-world that is heedful and careful of things in order to serve others. The relationship of Mitsein, which is ontologically prior to other modes of relationships, is the ontological precondition for care—which connects with the field of care ethics. Both care ethics and Heidegger's fundamental ontology criticise the modern doctrine of the Cartesian subject that prioritises individuals and autonomy at the expense of relationships and concern for the other. The main difference between care ethics and mainstream moral theories is that the former is based upon the caring relationship as its starting point whereas the latter prioritises moral subjects along with their individual intensions, motives, dispositions and virtues.

Wu provides five major characteristics of care ethics and furthermore argues that the ontological encounter of Mitsein could have been inspired by an account of care ethics resulting from the engagement in taking care in the familiarity of everydayness, particularly in the ontic caring practice of oneself and of others in the abode of the everyday, starting from the home and family life. Empathy and social welfare is based on the relational ontological constitution of Dasein as Mitsein and care. Care ethicists can supplement their framework with Heidegger, and the various Heideggerian concepts of Sorge and Fürsorge can be enriched with the approach of care ethics. Wu provides extensive meditations on the Heideggerian difference between authentic and inauthentic care, and she relates this difference to the issue of the wrongful caring practices in the phenomena of spoiled children and helicopter parenting.

Through close readings of Edith Stein's philosophy and a text by Benedict XVI, the contribution by Maybelle Marie O. Padua, a philosopher based at Far Eastern University in the Philippines, thinks through the question of community and its connection to solidarity. Underscored by both Stein and Benedict XVI is the essential relational character and natural connectedness of human beings, which is already there in the event of birth from the mother's womb and continues with the family, the village, the tribe, and so on. We are not self-sufficient strangers in a random universe but subjects who live side by side with one another. For Stein, being is essentially being-with and Benedict XVI writes of the anthropological unification, motivated by charity and love, of all humans on a global scale into a single solidarity through a transcendent communion with God. From her readings of Stein and Benedict XVI, Padua offers a framework for approaching the structure of community and its relation to the individual persons forming it. What is crucial for Stein is the act of empathy that permits one individual to become inwardly aware of other subjects. The fundamental characteristic for community is the reciprocal openness of individuals to each other and the living experience of one in the other through solidarity. Stein likens a community to an individual person, with its own personality, character, development and genetic constitution. A community contains a lifepower that relates to the individual lifepowers of its constituents as well as those who stand outside that community. Strengthening that lifepower, solidarity unites a plurality of subjects, and the carrier of an individual life realises itself by means of other subjects within the community. This will to solidarity is important to counter the false understanding of social development that regards people as not fundamentally ordered to relation.

Again and again we encounter in these articles this essential question of solidarity and this theme of immanent closure versus open multiplicity. In Lok, we see it in the opposition between essentialism and anti-essentialism, and also in the thorny philosophical task of constructing some unified understanding of art amidst all the continuous innovation from the past century. In Ochangco, we see it in the

difficulties and dilemmas of constructing a political and economic system that does not lead to oppression or impede human freedom. In Gan, we see it in his proposal of a rationalist and evidence-based ethics becoming a universalist solution to the task of making moral appraisals within a multi-religious community. In Wu, we see it the critique by Heidegger and by care ethicists of classical Cartesian metaphysics in favour of an ontological framework that begins first and foremost with the everyday care relations with the other. In Padua, we see it in the reconstruction of Stein and Benedict XVI's analysis on the relation of solidarity that connects communities with their members, as well as the role of communal lifepower. The viewpoints addressed here by the authors—two from Malaysia, two from the Philippines, and one from Taiwan—range from ethical, political, aesthetic, epistemological, ontological, metaphysical and phenomenological. But I will resist the all-to-easy gesture of trying to directly relate the diversity of author backgrounds and methodologies here with the theme of this issue. Instead, let me end by relating this question of solidarity to one concrete and contemporary manifestation, which might not only entice further philosophical invocations but also counter the banal complaint about philosophy being too abstract for everyday use. Why does the real world need a deeper understanding of solidarity? Certainly it points to an arche-concept and episteme that is as old as thinking and living itself, as well as relates to a host of profound and tangible experiences that intersect with all manners of human thinking. On the micro-level, solidarity occurs when we fall in love, make a friend, or establish some mutual manner of human connection with another person or entity. On the macro-level, it takes place in and through every form of organisation and institution, such as the family, the city, the firm, the nation-state and so on. And even the university. We aim for solidarity with the formation of various supranational unions, such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the recently established ASEAN economic community. Solidarity happens when we identify with a particular race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, sexuality, political ideology, or system of ethics—and it becomes an issue when such homophilic preferences lead to segregation.

So solidarity refers to something ontologically profound and primordial. But perhaps the very ontological coordinates for the possibility of mutual relationality has been changing recently due to various disruptions that have made themselves felt, which are too many to recount sufficiently here. Take for example the various technological advances in information and computational technology, and the related sociological, political, economic and possibly ontological aftershocks. We can ask ourselves whether some event has taken place in the nature of solidarity when, instead of establishing human connections the traditional way, we now resort to "friend" or "follow" some Facebook, Twitter, Weibo, Google+, WhatsApp, WeChat, LinkedIn, Line, Reddit, or Instagram account, even with the likelihood of that account being operated not by a human

person but by some automated botnet. What does it mean to have 1,000 friends on Facebook, and how think of that grouping of friends and networked multiplicity of friendships and acquaintances? Are we speaking of a fundamentally different solidarity when we "like," "favourite," "♥," "BFF" or "bae" someone or something on social media? What form of solidarity is a webbed cluster of independent agents compared to, for example, a village, a firm or a nation-state? And might not any agent be understood in itself as a webbed cluster? This ontological structure of relationality might have been overturned by more decentralised and networked forms of operational associations and tribal adherences, particularly with internet technologies that reduce transaction costs and thus, as an updated demonstration of Coase's Theorem, break open group boundaries and necessitate the functioning of peer-to-peer networks of association and production, such as those that we see in social media; Wikipedia; Uber; blockchain systems; Airbnb; decentralised networks of drone and Internet-of-Things devices; Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); and large-scale open source projects—with the latter two even threatening to render obsolete the current operational paradigm of the university and academia as we know it in both the arenas of teaching and research. To return to dichotomy I mentioned earlier, what is at stake here is not just the reality of mutual relationality itself, but also another kind of non-structured entity that lacks a centre and is located outside the spectrum of unity-versus-multiplicity, a new "relation without relation" that just might reconfigure our very understanding of being itself and, by extension, of philosophy itself as a mode of thought that constantly seeks to rethink itself. Here we have a possibility of diagonalising through the ancient One-versus-Many binary opposition that we have inherited from the pre-Socratics. A tantalising idea that invites further thought, but I will end here.