Pragmatism, Spirituality and Social Theorizing:
Confucianism, Vedanta and the Contemporary Challenges of Planetary
Conversations[1]

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[..] Theory in the Greek sense requires a combination of interest and disinterest. The theorist needs to be fully engaged and completely, even urgently *interested* in the quest for truth, goodness, and beauty; but at the same time, the theorist needs to bracket selfishness and to be *disinterested* in the pursuit of his / her own particular "good" or advantage.

Fred Dallmayr (2013), "The Future of Theory," p. 8

My tendency to idealize Western civilization arises from my nationalistic desire to use the West in order to reform China. But this has led me to overlook the flaws of Western culture.. I now realize that Western civilization, while it can be useful in reforming China in its present stage [..] I have no choice but to carry out two critiques simultaneously. I must:
1. Use Western civilization as a tool to critique China
2. Use my own creativity to critique the West

 -Liu Xiaobo (2013), *No Enemies, No Hatred: Selected Essays and Poems*

[..American pragmatism is characterized by its understanding of human action as a *creative action*. The understanding of creativity contained in pragmatism is specific in the sense that pragmatism focuses on the fact that creativity is always embedded in a *situation*; i.e. on human being's 'situated freedom.' It is precisely this interconnection of creativity and situation that has given rise to the repeated charge that pragmatists merely process a theory that is a philosophy of *adaptation* to given circumstances. This accusation fails to perceive the antideterministic thrust of the pragmatists. [..]

It is perhaps best to trace the importance of situated creativity for pragmatism in the works of all four major representatives of pragmatism. The decisive innovation in Charles Peirce's logic of science—namely, the idea of abduction—is aimed precisely at generating new hypotheses and pioneering their role in scientific progress. Peirce's speculative philosophy of nature is built around the question of under which conditions the New can arise in nature. His philosophy also endeavours to find a niche for artistic creativity in an age characterized by both the dominance of science and Darwinism, a way of thinking that brought the Romantic philosophy of nature to an end. Of William James it can be concluded from his biography that for him a conflict between a belief in

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[1] The Outline of a Proposed Seminar

free will with religious justification and naturalistic determination was not simply an intellectual problem, but rather one that actually paralyzed all his mental powers. Accordingly, his attempt to find a way out of this dilemma by regarding the ability to choose as itself a function crucial to the survival of human organism in its environment not only signaled the beginning of functionalist psychology, but was also a step which unleashed his lifelong productivity. John Dewey's work was colored by his theory of art, or, rather his theory on the aesthetic dimension of all human experience. Far from being geared exclusively to solving problems of instrumental action, the unifying element running through Dewey's work, with the numerous areas it covers, takes the shape of an inquiry into the meaningfulness to be experienced in action itself. As for George Herbert Mead, his famous theory of the emergence of the self is primarily directed against the assumption of substantive self; his concept of the human individual and the individual's actions is radically 'constructive.' In all four cases the pragmatists' ideas are not devoted to the creative generation of innovation as such, but to the creative solution of problems. Despite all the pathos associated with creativity, the pragmatists endeavoured to link it to the dimension of everyday experience and everyday action.

Hans Joas (1993), *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, pp. 4-5.

[..] A chapter which had a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of human race. In the present age, the world has been united on a material plane by Western technology. But this Western skill has not only "annihilated distance," it has armed the people of the world with weapons of devastating power at a time when they have been brought to point-blank range of each other without yet having learnt to know and love each other. At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way. The Emperor Ashoka's and the Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions: here we have the attitude and the spirit that it can make it possible for the human race to grow into a single family— and, in the atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves.

Arnold Toynbee (1969), Foreword, *India's Contribution to World Thought and Culture*, p. xv.

Pragmatism, Spirituality and Social Theorizing:

An Introduction and Invitation

Pragmatism has been an important philosophical and socio-cultural movement in the US which has influenced our view of language, social reality and human condition. American pragmatism as cultivated by C.S. Pierce and John Dewey has influenced post-war continental philosophy in the works of seekers such as Karl Otto-Apel and Jurgen Habermas (cf Aboulafia & Kemp 2002). But this has not been merely a one-way influence. In the works of Apel and Habermas, we see a mutual dialogue between American pragmatism and streams in

continental philosophy namely Kant leading to what is called Kantian pragmatism. Kantian pragmatism has influenced critical theory. Kantian pragmatism has opened up pragmatism to new realities and possibilities as a result of dialogue between American pragmatism and continental philosophy.

But this dialogue now needs to be broadened and needs to be part of what can be called planetary conversations. There is a need for dialogue between varieties of pragmatism and also for exploring spiritual horizons of pragmatism. For example, Confucianism does have an important emphasis upon practice and pragmatism. John Dewey did visit China and did get to know the Confucian streams of theory and practice. Pragmatism does also have a spiritual horizon and base as, for example, in many streams of Indian spiritual traditions there is a focus on transformative practice. In this context, Sri Aurobindo in his *Life Divine* talks about a nobler pragmatism "guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge." In his *Human Cycles* Sri Aurobindo also talks about spiritual vitalism. Sri Aurobindo also urges us to look at language as *mantra* and cultivate the *mantra* dimension of language. This urges us to go beyond a simplistic view of language as reflection of society. This resonates with Martin Heidegger's conception of language as a way making movement.[i] In Sri Aurobindo and Heidegger we find streams of spiritual pragmatism in their meditations on language, self, being and reality which can also inspire us to explore the spiritual struggle in Wittgenstein's conception of language as a form of life.[ii]

With a creative dialogue with Sri Aurobindo, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Habemas and Dewey, we can cultivate paths of spiritual pragmatism as a new way of looking at self, society, language and reality. In spiritual pragmatism new languages and practices are born of multidimensional *sadhana*, strivings and struggles touching both the social and spiritual bases of life and society. Spiritual pragmatism involves interpenetration of spiritual and material, immanent and transcendence, capability and transcendence. Spiritual pragmatism involves practical discourse as suggested in the critical theory and practice of Jurgen Habermas and practical spirituality suggested in the works of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo as well as in many transformative spiritual movements in societies and histories (cf. Paranjape 2009). Spiritual pragmatism thus contributes to strivings for realization of non-duality as an ongoing *sadhana* and struggle in life, culture and society. It must be noted that there is an important legacy of overcoming dualism in American pragmatism as well which we notice in the work of social philosophers such as Goerge Herbert Mead who urge us to go beyond the dualism of subject and object (cf. Mead 1934, 1935; Giri 2012).

Pragmatism, Society and Spirituality

Pragmatism has influenced sociology in many important ways in the course of more than one century. Many classical and contemporary sociologists have had dialogue with pragmatism (cf. Joas & Knoble 2009). Durkheim (1983) gave a set of lectures on pragmatism and sociology. There have been varieties of pragmatic sociology and anthropology over the

years and it is important to explore the manifold spiritual horizons of these sociologies starting from Mead to Habermas to Bourdieu and onto contemporary creative pragmatic sociologists such as Laurent Thevenot, Luc Boltanski and Piet Strydom (Boltanski & Thevenot 2006; Strydom 2014). Indeed, Habermas's pragmatics of communication does have a transcendental dimension what he himself calls immanent transcendence. Thevenot's different modes of sociology of engagement does point to spiritual horizons as Latour's modes of existence (Latour 2013; Thevenot 2014). Boltanski (2012) explores agape and justice as competences. Piet Strydom's exploration of a new cognitive critical sociology also has a dimension of depth as it points to need for new modes of self-formation. The current discourse of post-secular as it emerges from scholars such as Habermas (2008) does have a dimension of spiritual seeking. Thus it is important to explore the spiritual horizon of varieties of classical and contemporary sociology and then open to planetary conversations. For example, it is helpful to open up the contemporary discourse of the post-secular as it emerges from the works of scholars such as Habermas to critique of secularism coming from scholars such as T.N. Madan (2010) from India. Confucianism and Vedanta

Pragmatism, Spirituality and Social Theorizing:

Confucianism and Vedanta

Daya Krishna, the pre-eminent philosopher from India, tells us: "Society need not be considered the last term of human thought. The centrality may be restored to the human individual who, then, may be viewed as the nucleus of the social cell from what all creativity emanates or originates. In this perspective, then, society would be conceived as a facilitating mechanism so that the individual may pursue his trans-social ends. Instead of art, or religion, friendship or love being seen as the lubricating oil for the functioning of the social machine, the machine itself would be seen as facilitating the emergence and pursuit of various values [..]" (Krishna 1993: 11). In many cultures, including the Indian, the social does not have the same ultimate status as it has in modern Western society and socio-religious thought. *The social in Indian thought does not have a primal significance and it is considered an intermediate field and*

an ideal society is one which facilitates our realization of potential as Atman, soul. Daya Krishna calls it *Atman*-centric approach which is also the perspective of Vedanta and contrasts this with the socio-centric approach in not only modern West but also in religious traditions such as Christianity. But one also finds socio-centric approach in certain aspects of Confucianism which accords primary significance to social relations and not, to the same extent, to processes of self-realization. Both *Atman*-centric and socio-centric approaches have their own limitations what Daya Krishna calls the "two predicaments"-- the Atman-centric predicament and the socio-centric predicament. The socio-centric predicament does not give enough space to self-realization while "Atman centricity leads a people's attention away from an active concern with society and its betterment" (ibid: 23). In order to overcome the one-sidedness of an *Atman*-centric approach and socio-centric approach Daya Krishna links it to a new realization of freedom and Sri Aurobindo (1962) to evolutionary transformations, transforming the very constitution of the individual and the social beyond their present-day dualistic constitutions.[2]

From the point of view of this aspiration to overcome *Atman*-centeredness or self-centrality and socio-centeredness we can look at Asian traditions in new ways. We can here take, for example, the case of Buddhism and Confucianism—two major traditions of discourse and practice from Asia. In its reflections on humanity while Confucianism focuses on webs of relationships Buddhism emphasizes the need to transcend the limits of social relationships, particularly anthropocentrism. But both the traditions have gone through many inner debates as well as contestations among them giving rise to movements such as Neo-Confucianism which

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[2] For Sri Aurobindo:

> In the relations between the individual and the group, this constant tendency of Nature appears as the strife between two equally deep-rooted human tendencies, individualism and collectivism. On one side is the engrossing authority, perfection and development of the State, on the other the distinctive freedom, perfection and development of individual man. The State idea, the small or the vast living machine, and the human idea, the more and more distinct and luminous Person, the increasing God, stand in perpetual opposition. The size of the State makes no difference to the essence of the struggle and need make none to its characteristic circumstances. It was the family, the tribe or the city, the *polis*; it became the clan, the caste and the class, the *kula*, the *gens*. It is now the nation. Tomorrow or day after it may be all mankind. But even then the question will remain poised between man and humanity, between self-liberating Person and the engrossing collectivity (1962: 272-273).

urges us to pay simultaneous attention to webs of relationships as well as nurturance of self-realization in our quest of human realization (cf. Dallmayr 2004: 152-171). According to Tu Wei-ming, Neo-Confucianism involves a "continuous deepening of one´s subjectivity and an uninterrupted broadening of one's sensitivity" (quoted in Dallmayr ibid). It also involves a "dynamic interplay between contextualization and decontextualization. Hence, the self as a ´center of relationships´ finds itself simultaneously in the grip of an ongoing deecentering or displacement [..] Just as self-cultivation requires self-overcoming, so cultivation of family and other relationships demands a transgression of parochial attachments such as ´nepotism, racism and chauvinism` and ultimately a transgression of narrow ´anthropocentrism` in the direction of the ´mutuality of Heaven and man and the unity of all things`'" (ibid: 164).

Thus in neo-Confucianism there is a simultaneous attention to social relationship as well as deepening of subjectivity which helps us go beyond the one-sided emphasis on either society or self. We find a similar emphasis on emergent sociality and self-realizations in neo-Vedantins such as Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo who urge us to cultivate creative relationships between self and society with additional cultivation of the divine along with and in between. We can also find the resonance of similar concerns in Gandhi and Tagore. So it is helpful to cultivate further dialogues between neo-Confucianism and neo-Vedanta. This, in turn, calls for dialogues between Confucianism and Vedanta and not only between Confucianism and Buddhism. The dialogue between Confucianism and Vedanta has not yet been undertaken and for the making of a new world order it is helpful for us to undertake this. For example, Confucianism is concerned with harmony but in the conventional manifestation of harmony in traditional China this can be hierarchical and anthropocentric. In the conventional articulation of harmony in Confucianism there may not be enough realization of the challenge of establishing harmony between humans and non-humans and society and Nature. Vedanta with its concern of unity of all life can help Confucianism to realize this as Confucianism with its emphasis on proper social relationships can make Vedanta more social and here Confucianism vision and practice of *Tian-Xia*—All Under Heaven—can help us. For example, the Vedantic concern with unity of life need to be practiced in the realms of social relationships which in the traditional social order are dominated by caste and gender exclusion. Both Confucian harmony

and Vedantic unity face the challenge of transformation of hierarchy, monological domination and authoritarian construction of unity.

Harmony and unity help us in coming together with and beyond the traps of domination and exclusion. This is suggested in the vision and practice of loka-samgraha from the Indic tradition which has a Vedantic root in a very open and cosmopolitan sense. Loga-sangraha is spoken about in Bhagabad Gita which challenges us to realize gathering of people and this gathering is not only a public gathering but also a soulful gathering. In modern social and political thought and practice, we are used to the vision and practice of public sphere and we can realize and transform this also as a field and practice of loga-sagrahma which is simultaneously public and soulful. Logasamgraha is a field of mutual care and responsibility and it is a challenge at all levels of human gathering—from dyadic associations, institutions and movements to the triadic and beyond such as family, community, nation and the global order. In our present phase of globalization and the challenges of global responsibility via such challenges as climate change and terrorism, we need to talk about global loga-samgraha. This global loga samgraha becomes a field of a new cosmopolitan realization where to be cosmopolitan is not only to be a citizen of the world but also to be a member of the human family. It is also not only epistemological and political but also ontological and spiritual.

Confucianism, Vedanta and the Calling of Planetary Conversations

Confucianism is a major influence in Asia, especially in China, Japan, Korea and many parts of South East Asia. Confucianism has been used in various ways in South East Asia as it is in China in histories and contemporary societies. Many a time it has been used to justify authoritarianism. But there is a new democratic consciousness brewing in South East Asia as well as in China which calls for rethinking Confucianism beyond the prism of authoritarian justification (Han 1998). Another issue is the issue of pluralism. Confucianism has existed in societies which have not valued pluralism as a way of life. Most of the societies where Confucianism is present is monological characterized by the dominance of one ethnic group, for example that of Han Chinese in China, Japanese in Japan and Korean in Korea. In this context we have to link Confucianism to pluralism. This in turn calls for dialogues across borders and

making Confucianism part of varieties of planetary conversations.[3]

Such planetary conversations can begin at home, for example, with now already noted pluralities in China by some creative interpreters. For example, Tu Wei-ming, the creative interpreter of Confucianism now talks about five teachings of China—Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity (Pl see references to many works of Wei-ming below). In Chinese histories and intellectual streams there have been visible and invisible dialogues among these teachings. During a visit to a Muslim town, Nagu Town, in Yunnan province (in July 2009), I asked an interpreter what has been the mutual influence between Islam and Confucianism. She said while Confucianism has made Islam much more this worldly Islam has made Confucianism have new understanding of the meaning of Heaven. Though scholars such as Tu Wei-ming have carried out dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity and not with Islam

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[3] In this context the work of Dallmayr is enriching. He tells us about the affinity amog these different streams of thought and practice—pragmatism, Confucianism, Gandhi's experiment with truth and paths of Swaraj. First Dallmayr (2007) writes the following about Gandhi and the pragmatists like William James and John Dewey:

> In speaking of interconnectedness and the 'play of mutual forces' Gandhi displays an affinity with the spirit of Jamesian and Deweyan pragmatism. But the parallel can be carried further. Like William James and Dewey, and perhaps even more emphatically, Gandhi was an ethical and spiritual pragmatist, in the great tradition of Indian spirituality. [..] Gandhi deliberately chose the path of action or praxis (*karma yoga*) demanding continuous ethical engagement in the affairs of the world. Again like Dewey he did not assume that human beings are free and equal by nature (or in an original 'state of nature'); rather freedom and equality for him were achievements requiring steady practice—a practice involving not only change of outward conditions but primarily self-transformation (2007: 10).

Then Dallmayr writes the following about Confucius, Dewey and Gandhi:

> Despite his deep modesty, Confucius himself can be seen and was seen, as an 'exemplar' or 'exemplary person' (*chun-tzu*) who taught the 'way' not through abstract doctrines but through the testimony of daily living. At this point, the affinity with the Deweyan philosophy comes clearly into view—a fact perhaps not surprising given Dewey's extended visit to China after World War 1. As in the case of Gandhian *swaraj*, leading a responsible life in society involves self-restraint and the abandonment of domineering impulses. In Confucius's own words, humanness or to be properly human (jen) means to 'conquer oneself (ke-chi) and to return to propriety (fu-li) (ibid: 15).The above reflections of Dallmayr can help us to probe further the affinities among paths of Confucius, Gandhi and the pragmatists like Dewey as part of planetary conversations.

there is an urgent need for further dialogues in this field now. This is especially needed when the preset day Chinese Government is promoting Confucian Institutes all over the world. Such Institutes should give rise to mutually transforming dialogues in China, India, Middle East and the world rather than be a center of promotion of official Chinese nationalism.

Dynamic Harmony and Dynamic Emptiness

Harmony is a key concern in Confucianism as well as in many Asian traditions. But usually this is taken as static and has been used to justify authoritarianism. We need to rethink harmony and here we can build upon traditions such as dynamic harmony.[4] In his study of Japanese religion where Buddhism has interacted with Shintoism and Confucianism sociologist of religion Robert Bellah tells us that while Japanese religion is concerned with harmony—harmony among persons and harmony with nature—this is not static harmony but dynamic. For Bellah (1985: 62-63),

> What has been said about the unity of man, nature and divinity should not be interpreted as a static identity. Rather it is a harmony in tension. The gratitude one owes to superordinate benevolent entities is not an easy obligation but may involve the instant sacrifice of one's deepest interests or even of one's life. Union with the ground of being is not attained in a state of coma but very often as the result of some sudden shock in daily living. Something unexpected, some seeming disharmony, is more apt to reveal the Truth than any formal orderly teaching. Japanese art and aesthetic attitude toward nature are also concerned with the unexpected [..]

Compassion here is not imprisoned in the logic status-quo rather it is animated by a spirit to unsettle the existing harmony and invite the unexpected in a spirit of dynamic harmony. Realization of dynamic harmony is also an animated aspiration in paths of Kashmir Saivism. As Harish Deheja (2006: 422; emphasis added) writes about it:

> Kashmir Saivism postulates that *Parama Shiva* contains the entire universe, pulsating within it, just as the seed of the mighty *nyagrodha* potentially contains the entire tree. At the immanent level, the transcendent *prakashavimarshamaya* splits into *prakasha* and *vimarsha*, Shiva and Shakti, *aham* and *idam*, I and this, subject and object, held together in pulsating, *dynamic harmony* [..] At every level there is differentiation into subject and object, *aham* and *idam*, but the differentiation is based in, and unified by the non-duality of consciousness.

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[4] Dynamic harmony has a dimension of harmonization: it is dynamic harmonization

Kashmir Saivism seeks to realize dynamic harmony by realizing differentiation without dualism. Realization of non-duality is also an animated goal in the paths of Buddha and Kashmiri Saivism possibly has contributed to this pursuit of non-duality the work of dynamic consciousness. There is an occasion for mutual learning on the part of Buddhism and Kashimiri Saivism as we all concerned can learn from experiments in these traditions.[5]

Dynamic harmony can be accompanied by dynamic emptiness. Emptiness is an important concern in Buddhism but this emptiness is not static but dynamic. Emptiness is not there only in the beginning, we are perpetually invited to realize emptiness in all our modes of thinking and being. As the Dalai Lama tells us: "Things and events are 'empty' in that they do not possess any immutable essence or absolute 'being [..]" (The Dalai Lama 2005: 49).

Both dynamic harmony and dynamic emptiness are important contributions from Asian traditions to revitalize modern social theory and dialogues with modern Western social theory can help to make both these concepts more transformationally dynamic as in Asian traditions there is a tendency to conserving the status quo in the name of either harmony or emptiness.

Meditative Verbs of Pluralization

Dialogues help us realize pluralities in our singularly conceptualized and constructed identities. There are pluralities in Europe as there are in Asia, and each of the countries, cultures and civilizations in both these spheres such as India and China. We need to build our understanding upon these pluralities. But in order to understand this we need to have a dynamic view of pluralism by contributing to the process of creating a more plural

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[5] It must be noted here that differentiation and integration are perennial human concerns and these also have been key themes in social and political theory in the last three or four hundred years. In our recent theoretical discourses, Niklas Luhman urges us to realize the need for distinction, for example, between system and its environment, Derrida urges us to understand the work of difference which is just not mere difference but has the capacity to resist temporal and spatial incorporation and Parsons and Habermas in their own different ways the need for integration and communication. All theses attempts can be enriched by the quest from Kashmiri Saivism to realize differentiation without dualism. Buddhist quest for non-duality (see Loy 1988) can also be enriched by it. It can also help us to rethink identity and difference in contemporary social and political theory.

understanding as well as society. But here our activities of pluralizations are not only activistic but also meditative. There is a need to cultivate meditative pluralizations in thinking about and realizing our identities as well as reflecting upon themes in social theories.

Vedanta and the Calling of Planetary Conversations

As Confucianism is concerned with harmony, Vedanta has been concerned with oneness and unity. Vedanta has been part of a global engagement for a long time. Recently scientists and philosopher have explored links between Vedantic concern with unity and scientific concern with unity.

Confucianism, Vedanta and Social Theorizing

Social theorizing needs to rethink terms of discourse such as individual, state and community as well as make dialogue with themes such as harmony and unity in trans-disciplinary and open ways. We need to specifically focus on looking into implications of rethinking contemporary social theories from the point of view of Confucianism and Vedanta.[6] We need to carry out a simultaneous engagement with neo-Confucianism and neo-Vedanta as they reconstitute relationship between individual and society. This involves a simultaneous historical and theoretical engagement and this also brings Buddhism into our universe of discourse. As has already been argued, mainstream Confucianism needs to deal with the problem of pluralism and this is also a challenge for Vedanta, especially in its Sankarite Advaita Vedanta variety. Going beyond the absolutist conception of singular and articulating varieties of manifestations of singular plural is an important striving in many streams in contemporary social theory and philosophy (Nancy 2000; Irigaray 2003; Hardt and Negri 2004). So as we carry out border-crossing dialogue between Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Vedanta with Buddhism as an active partner of dialogue, we come to a border-crossing dialogue between Confucianism and Vedanta.

In this outline, we have discussed some issues related to Confucianism and let us explore some issues concerning Vedanta and modern social theory. Modern social

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[6] Here we can follow a very important recent work on social theory and China, *Globalized Knowledge and Chinese Social Theory* where the author Xiayoing Qi (2014) discusses significance of Chinese concepts and modes of thinking for advancing Western social theory. Qi also here urges us to look at an important posthumous essay by C. Wright Mills, "The Language and Ideas of Ancient China," exploring similar issues. Also important here is the work of Brooks (2010). With specific reference to cross-currents of modern historical and contemporary theoretical issues in understanding Asian resistance and search for alternatives, see Alatas (2006) and Mishra (2012).

theory talks about individual and society and the Vedantic concern with Atman or soul can help social theory to explore the soul-dimension of individual and society. This exploration would have resonance with creative works in psychology such as in the works of Carl Gustave Jung (1933) and Victor Frankl (1946). Finding commonalty in the midst of differences is an important theoretical and practical challenge and here Vedantic quest for oneness with its needed internal and foundational transformation such as the one which already embraces many can be an important contribution to rethinking modern social theory and philosophy (Cf. Giri 2012b). In modern social thinking and social movements such as the ones initiated by Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi, Tagore and Sri Aurobindo some of these Vedantic concerns have played an important role but in Indian social theorizing we see glimpses of engagement with Vedanta only in a few social theorists such as in the works of Radhakamal Mukherjee and A.K. Saran (cf. Madan 2013; Mukerji 2000; Saran 1996, 1998).[7]

Themes to Explore in Our Dialogical Workshop

Pragmatic and Spiritual Dimensions of Confucianism and Vedanta

Spiritual Dimensions of Pragmatism and border-crossing dialogues with Confucianism and Vedanta

Confucianism and Vedanta: Neo-Confucianism and Neo-Vedanta in Histories and Societies and

Their Contemporary Manifestations and Possibilities for Alternative Futures
Dialogues Between Contemporary Social and Political Theorizing Confucianism and Vedanta
Confucianism, Vedanta and the Contemporary Challenges of Renewal of Social Theory and Planetary Realizations

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[7] In fact, Mukherjee's project of integral sociology has a Vedantic resonance.

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[i] What Heidegger writes in his essay, "Way to Language" deserves our careful attention:
"*What unfolds essentially in language is saying as pointing. Its showing does not culminate in a*

system of signs. Rather, all signs arise from a showing in whose realm and for whose purposes they can be signs" (Heidegger 2004: 410). Furthermore, "What is peculiar to language thus conceals itself on the way, the way by which the saying lets those who listen to it get to the language" (ibid: 413). For Heidegger, "the way to language is the [..] way-making movement of propriation and usage" where "propriation propriates human beings for itself, [..] propriation is thus the saying's way-making movement toward language" (419, 418):

> What looks more like a tangle than a weft loosens when viewed in terms of the way-making movement. It resolves into the liberating notion that the way-making movement exhibits when propriated in saying. It unbinds the saying for speech. It holds open the way for speech, the way on which speaking as hearing, hearing the saying, registers what in each is case is to be said, elevating what it receives to the resounding word. The saying's way-making movement to language is the unbinding bond, the bond that binds by propriating (ibid: 419).

What Heidegger speaks about language as saying as part of "way-making movement" is suggested in tradition of people's enlightenment in Europe namely the folk high school movement and people's enlightenment patiently cultivated by Grundtvig and Kristen Kold. Both of them challenged us to realize language as "living words"--words that could enliven and energize us. This is also akin to Sri Aurobindo's suggestion to create poems which would work like *mantra*.

[ii] Veena Das building upon Stanley Cavell shares some insightful reflections here:

> When anthropologists have evoked the idea of forms of life, it has often been to suggest the importance of thick description, local knowledge or what it is to learn a rule. For Cavell [Stanely Cavell, the noted contemporary philosopher] *such conventional views of the idea of form of life eclipse the spiritual struggle of his [Wittgenstein's] investigations*. What Cavell finds wanting in this conventional view of forms of life is that it not only obscures the mutual absorption of the natural and the social but also emphasizes *form* at the expense of *life* [..] the vertical sense of the form of life suggests the limit of what or who is recognized as human within a social form and provides the conditions of the use of criteria as applied to others. Thus the criteria of pain do not apply to that which does not exhibit signs of being a form of *life*—we do not ask whether a tape recorder that can be tuned on to play a shriek is feeling the pain. The distinction between the horizontal and vertical axes of forms of life takes us at least to the point at which we can appreciate not only the security provided by belonging to a community with shared agreements but also the dangers that human beings pose to each other. These dangers relate to not only disputation over *forms* but also what constitutes *life*. The blurring between what is human and what is not human sheds into blurring over what is life and what is not life (Das 2007: 15-16; emphasis added).