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This essay displays knowledge & understanding of the
For completion by Marker 1 : chosen texts & raises some
interesting discussions. In places, there's room
Comments: for further development of some of your points,
& drawing on other sources/readings to do
this could aid a more in-depth analysis. In
your discussion of Gottlieb's text, you've ambitiously
provided a summary of the entire text, &
your discussions here are helpful for a potential
reader. Overall, this is a fairly well written
assignment and you make some interesting claims.
But further development of these claims is needed/would
be beneficial.

Marker's signature:

Alt

58%

Date:

28/11/22.

For completion by Marker 2/Moderator:

Comments:

Marker's Signature:

Date:

AGREED INTERNAL MARK (where necessary):

Comment on process on arriving at agreed mark:

External Examiner's comments (if relevant)

External Examiner's Signature:

Date:

1. Anthony Gottlieb, *The Dream of Reason*

(London: Penguin Books, 2001)

This is a A brilliant overview of philosophy from pre-Socratics to Renaissance.

The main thing that sets this book apart is that it is written by a journalist and not a philosopher. This shows itself in two aspects of this book:

- *The w* Writer doesn't have a personal philosophical agenda. When a philosopher writes a history of philosophy or an overview of philosophy, their personal agenda makes them emphasise certain philosophers or certain aspects of a particular philosopher. But here, Gottlieb's main agenda is to give a good report on something called "philosophy".

I say "something called philosophy", because as the writer says on the very first page of the introduction, his overall conclusion is that "there is no such thing as philosophy". As he explains further, philosophy as we know it started with some speakers, writers, and thinkers trying to provide reasonable answers to age-old questions like "Where we humans come from?", or "Where the world comes from?", "Why there is suffering, pain, disease, and death?", or "What is right or wrong?" These questions were previously answered by myths, which involved Gods and other imaginary creatures. Later those speakers, writers, and thinkers turned to more naturalistic explanations and this gave birth to philosophy. As time passed on, some of the philosophers got specialised and focused on certain questions and/or methods of reasoning and branched out towards disciplines like "natural philosophy" (later further branched into different natural sciences like physics, chemistry, and biology), psychology, sociology, politics, etc. In this manner, philosophy as Gottlieb finds it, is just the general and non-specialised attempts in providing reasonable explanations for anything happening around us and to us. In other words, philosophy in Gottlieb's view doesn't have a

specific subject, or a specific method, to become a specific thing on itself. *we can, indeed, philosophise about almost anything.*

Although I agree with his overall view of philosophy, but I still think that his declaration that "there is no such thing as philosophy" is too general. ✓
Philosophy exists as far as some speakers, writers, and thinkers try to reasonably explain things that are not yet the subject of a specialised branch of human intellectual endeavour. And as far as I can see there will always be some questions too general, or too niche, to fit in specialised branches. *And it is distinct from other disciplines in some ways or even many ways.*

Also, there is a chance (and this has happened in past) that some specialised branch falls out of popularity or gets rebuked, and all the explanations based on that would need to be reviewed, or in other words, the questions are returned to philosophy to find a better explanation. And then philosophy shows its own personality and distinction in another light too, and that is when the questioner is looking for a general explanation and not a specialised answer. For example, if the question "Why there is suffering, pain, disease, and death?" is asked by someone who is enduring some suffering, pain... at the time (and this is the majority of the cases) in today's world a psychologist or therapist, educated and trained in this regards, steps in and deals with the question in an effective way, but if the question is asked by someone with a curious mind and looking for a reasonable explanation, referring them to psychologist or therapist will not be effective at all. Such an explanation can be possibly put forward by a philosopher and discussed with them.

- The second aspect that shows Gottlieb as a journalist and not a philosopher is that he uses his journalistic experience in giving an entertaining and readable report of philosophy. The profound nature of questions philosophy deals with leaves small space for "entertainment", but Gottlieb here manages to use his writing prowess in making his report as entertaining and readable as possible. He employs three methods mainly:
 - Peppering his text with references to modern life. This as well as making the text more relatable, also shows that questions at the heart of philosophy are quite valid still today. ✓

Well observed / pointed out.

- Giving summaries of a philosopher's thinking or a subject from a modern scientific point of view. For us who are thought modern sciences and are more familiar with it this way of looking at old philosophies is much more accessible.
- Including anecdotes and stories about philosophers, although he knows that they are made up and imaginary and are not verified. This approach in addition to making the history more readable and entertaining, also gives a more human face to the philosopher and their rivals (generally other philosophers).

Good - add a concluding paragraph.

2. Karl R. Popper, *The World of Parmenides: Essays on the Presocratic Enlightenment*

Edited by Arne F. Petersen with the assistance of Jørgen Mejer

(London and New York: Routledge, 2012)

This is a compilation of Sir Karl's papers on ancient Greek philosophers, especially the Presocratic philosophers. These essays are anything but an open investigation of those philosophies and in contrast with previous book is not an unbiased report on them. In each essay Karl Popper puts forward a more or less clear central idea and tries to project it on his reading of Greek philosophers.

For example, the first essay's central idea is that Presocratic philosophers had produced a variety of different and opposing ideas on cosmology and understanding the reality because they adhered to critical thinking, which encouraged generation of different ideas. This central idea is what Karl Popper has been advocating in his works like *Conjectures and Refutations* and *The Open Society*. In Popper's view this tradition continued until Aristotle and his dogmatic philosophy overwhelmed the scene of philosophy for hundreds of years after him.

There is no doubt in variety of Presocratic philosophical ideas. But relating this to the critical reasoning encouraged by Thales is just a guess that the writer puts forward as a conjecture and likes to believe. (See section XI of Essay 1)

In the same manner, essays 3, 4, and 5 try to explain the main problem Karl Popper has faced with understanding Parmenides. (Essay 3 mentions only 1 problem, but essay 4 has 3 problems in it, the main one being the problem (II)) Anyway, Popper's answer to the main problem is again a conjecture about how

Be more explicit!
clear below about what you think this.

Parmenides was blinded by the powerful flash of great discoveries he has made and was made to believe that his discovery explains far more than it actually does.

All in all, I see this book mainly presenting Karl Popper's viewpoints and is a very good supplement to his major books in understanding his way of thinking and some of the origins of his inspiration.

But it should not be forgotten that Popper has included a lot of valuable notes about the texts and their translations, all coming from years and years of studying them. Such points make reading these essays a must for a serious scholar of Presocratic philosophies. ✓

3. **Zhuangzi: The Inner Chapters**

Translated by Robert Eno

Version 1.1 2019

Published by the translator at <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/23427>

This is one
One of the earliest philosophical texts of Daoism. This translation includes very useful notes added by the translator that are extremely helpful in understanding the text and in putting the text in context of early Chinese philosophy.

While reading this book you must always keep in mind that it has three aspects which are intertwined and cannot be separated

- *The first is the literary aspect.*
Literary. This aspect is mainly lost in translation. Although the translation is of a very high calibre, you cannot expect that literary flourishes in original language be translated. For example, the lines in passage 2.2 look disjointed and loosely related in translation. I guess this is because of the key words with dual meanings that join the lines in original language, couldn't be translated. *may be*

It should be also noted that although literary figures of speech generally make a piece more memorable and lasting, and they also allow the writer to pack more meaning in a single line/word, but they also, might hide the meaning intended and make it ambiguous. In philosophical texts, this ambiguity can have both positive and negative impact.

✓ Positive, because they lure the reader to think deeper about the text and

sometimes add their own interpretation to the text, and this is exactly the negative impact at the same time; readers adding their own interpretations, which nobody can say if were intended by the writer or not.

From another point of view, using literary ambiguity helps the writer to hide their own indecision about something when they are not certain about something or cannot express it more clearly. It can be said that they leave some matters to the readers and say something without actually saying it, and without admitting their indecision or ignorance straight away.

Anyway, I must ignore the literary aspect of Zhuangzi, as it's beyond my abilities and scope of this assignment.

- Philosophy. By philosophy here we mean what generally is known as western philosophy which uses logical reasoning mainly to answer general questions about the world and life.
- Daoism. Defining Daoism is even more difficult than defining philosophy. But in brief it can be understood as instructions on how to take the right path in life. It is vaguely based on a belief that the world has a certain way of function and if a person finds that way (the way of Dao, or the Dao) and unites themselves with Dao, then they will always take the right path, in other words: The world is on right path and if you are united with the world, you cannot possibly go wrong.

All in all, ignoring the literary aspects of this book, you must keep in mind the two aspects of philosophy and Daoism while reading it: For example, the butterfly dream (2.20) can be considered as a philosophical remark about reality vs. illusion, or about an aspect of Daoism art of transforming into things.

Or at the very beginning of chapter 3 it says: "Our life spans are bounded, but knowledge knows no bounds." This can be considered as a philosophical remark about knowledge, but also as an opening for general advice that "Take the natural middle as your steady path" as part of way of Dao.

A recurring theme, which can be considered the essence of Dao in the writer's view, can be formulated as: going beyond opposing aspects and seeing them as one or seeing them non-existent at all. E.g., in passage 5.1 it quotes Confucius saying: "if you view things in their commonality then the things of the world are all one." (Note that this is not a direct quote and even the translator

comments in the beginning of chapter 4, that the character mentioned as Confucius is an imaginary character created by the writer of this book.) This reminds me of what Parmenides wrote about the way of truth and provided some logical reasoning for it. Parmenides' way of truth showed him too that all opposing aspects of world are just illusions, and the reality is just a timeless, unchanging one. This brings to mind the possibility of the idea that contacts between east and west and the clashes between contrasting views on world and life, was the first spark that lighted the fire of philosophy among Greek philosophers.

