

## A Passionate Embrace With Thought Itself

*Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference*

by Thomas P. Kasulis

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*Review by Alan Pope*

I first read Thomas Kasulis' *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* on an airplane traveling from Los Angeles to Kyoto, Japan in June of 2002. I was to visit Japan for a couple of weeks prior to attending Kasulis' five-week Summer Institute on Japanese culture at the East/West Center of the University of Hawai'i. Prior to my travels I had been plowing through the more than one thousand pages of required background reading in Japanese history and culture. While interesting at one level, this very factually oriented material in recent days had begun to feel dry and lifeless. When I cracked open the remaining required text—Kasulis' own book, hot off the presses—I was immediately entranced, so much so that in spite of the exhaustion of readying myself for international travel, I devoured the entire book en route. Far beyond the brittleness of factual information, Kasulis' book was a passionate embrace with thought itself.

Tom Kasulis' work is not only a clear and compelling piece of comparative philosophy and cultural analysis; it is, to my mind, a very important work that informs just about any culture or discipline that might wish to understand more fully the perceptual viewpoint upon which it is founded. And, beyond elucidating cultural dynamics, this work also invites a deeper understanding of one's own way of operating in the world and relating to others. Early on, Kasulis suggests "the role of the philosopher is not just to analyze, but to give us better tools for analysis" (p. 11). Indeed, valuable analytic tools are exactly what Kasulis provides us, along with a highly entertaining and lucid set of analyses that simultaneously exemplify their use, convince the reader of their efficacy, and invite their application across a broad array of cultural productions.

Kasulis is a western philosopher and ardent Japanologist. Based on his immersion in cross-cultural experience and study, Kasulis discerned two general, recursive patterns that can be conceptualized as the two distinct cultural orientations within which societies construct meaning. Kasulis refers

to these patterns as heuristics, identifying them as *intimacy* and *integrity*. He claims, appropriately, that these heuristics are not universals, but rather merely generalizations. This circumspection avoids essentialist claims and acknowledges that any articulation necessarily provides some level of distortion, that counterexamples will always arise. It also affords Kasulis' model the flexibility required to address a wide variety of issues and contexts.

One feature that makes Kasulis' book very accessible is his deft use of a variety of drawings (such as gestalt pictures), diagrams, and metaphors. One particularly effective metaphor uses water, sand, and salt to illustrate the difference between intimacy and integrity. When water and salt come together, they merge and become inseparable. When water and sand combine, they each retain their own wholeness and are easily separated. In the first instance the relationship is one of intimacy, which etymologically means making known to a close friend what is innermost. Here the relationship between two entities is an internal one, marked by an overlapping of Being. In contrast, the relationship between water and sand is one of integrity, deriving from the word "integer," wherein each party retains a sense of wholeness, incorruptibility, self-sufficiency, and purity. Here the relationship between entities is an external one. It would be a mistake to think that Kasulis has simply found another way of making the "collectivist/individualist" distinction with regard to culture; rather, intimacy and integrity reflect the culturally determined orientations that underlie such distinctions and that cut across not only national cultures, but quite possibly any culture or subculture. In the evolution of cultural perspective, one orientation becomes dominant over the other as figure to ground, prefiguring the manner in which we see the world and think about it.

Following a very clear introductory chapter, Kasulis lays out in successive chapters detailed and nuanced characterizations of intimacy and integrity and the differences between them. To offer but one example, Kasulis describes how both heuristics engender a type of objectivity, with intimacy's being personal in nature, and integrity's impersonal. Whereas an integrity orientation seeks objectivity through external verification—truth is verified with the senses—intimacy seeks objectivity through an intimate locus of knowledge, as, for example, in the case of the figure skating judge whose quantitative scores are taken as having objective merit, even as the non-expert can not verify the results. In this instance, the members of the skating community form an intimate subculture in which knowledge is assimilated and shared through common practice. Kasulis proceeds in this manner to

analyze intimacy and integrity in their capacities as fundamental human orientations to experience and thought, clearly teasing out their differing senses of objectivity, interpersonal relatedness, affectivity, embodiment, and self-consciousness. Kasulis' analyses are at once intellectually compelling and personally evocative, as he is dealing here with matters that are at once intimate and integral to human existence.

Kasulis includes a fascinating chapter in which he explores intimacy and integrity as worldviews, using these heuristics to shine light on philosophy itself. From Kasulis' point of view, philosophy cannot answer the question of which orientation is correct—intimacy or integrity—because these orientations themselves provide the very basis by which philosophy proceeds. For example, Kasulis analyzes epistemology from both integrity and intimacy orientations, showing that making integrity dominant leads to a view of knowledge in which the world is independent of the knower, whereas making intimacy dominant reveals the world and the knower to be held in an internal relationship wherein each are mutually implicatory. In the realm of rational argument and analysis, an integrity orientation begins with opposite poles and analyzes phenomena in relation to them. By contrast, intimacy conducts analysis beginning with the *in media res*, meaning that the analysis begins with the phenomenon itself as an undifferentiated whole from which opposites are then abstracted. Similarly, in his metaphysical analysis Kasulis explores integrity's atomism and dualism against intimacy's holism. Kasulis proceeds to address a variety of other philosophical areas with very lucid, penetrating, and fascinating analyses that offer surprisingly simple ways of organizing them.

One small complaint I have is that sometimes Kasulis' analyses oversimplify the philosophical doctrines he addresses, leading to exaggerated characterizations. For example, in identifying existentialism and phenomenology as integrity-based, he does capture the essential features of early existentialism and the Cartesian-based analyses of Husserl, but fails to acknowledge that when later thinkers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty combined these disciplines into what is now called *existential phenomenology*, the dominant orientation became decidedly intimacy-based. Further, Kasulis performs an analysis of the early Buddhist doctrine of no-self which he uses to illustrate an instance of intimacy taken to the farthest extreme wherein the self only exists in the interdependent relationships that define it. While this analysis does apply to the Buddhist understanding of absolute truth, it overlooks the teachings of the Mahayana and Tantric schools which assert that absolute

reality is mutually interdependent with relative reality, an understanding that incorporates both heuristic orientations into its vision. Despite these objections, the main point is not how exhaustively Kasulis has managed to illustrate the tools he offers, but rather that the tools he offers provide the reader with ways of understanding familiar ideas and appropriating new ones. Thus armed, the reader can take the analysis further as he or she pleases.

In addition to exploring the *what-is* of philosophy, Kasulis turns his attention to the prescriptive realm—the *what-ought-to-be*—in an analysis of aesthetics, ethics, and politics that yields many interesting insights. In addition, he concludes his work with an exploration of intercultural conflict. In many respects this is the most powerful chapter of the book because it is here that he explores the conflicts that ensue when different cultures foreground different orientations. Can such conflict be resolved by simply blending the orientations? No, says Kasulis. One *must* adopt one orientation or the other.

In explaining this necessity of mutual exclusion, Kasulis likens these orientations to different natural languages, such as German and English. The German speaker conceives of various nouns as being gendered, yet would deny gendered status to the corresponding actual objects in the world. English, of course, does not recognize gender in this sense. A bilingual person, in making the shift from German to English and back again, will alternately be able to think in terms of objects being gendered and not, and basically will conceive of the physical world in the same way regardless of the language spoken. Obviously, but significantly, it is not possible to speak in both languages at once. Similarly, intimacy and integrity represent orientations which conceptualize the world in different ways, even as the world they conceptualize is, factually speaking, the same world. Certain features that are implicated by a given orientation—such as “human rights,” which is the exclusive province of the integrity orientation—are not intrinsic to the world itself. This recognition of the nature of such phenomena, which for all intents and purposes corresponds to the Buddhist notion of emptiness, affords the possibility that we might become “culturally bi-orientational.” This capability would allow us to alternate between orientations, rather than merge them, and permit us to frame our agendas in a manner that preserves the values behind them while “speaking the other person’s language.” There are lessons here for anyone who has ever engaged in a relationship with another individual, let alone mediators of international conflict

One of the lessons of Kasulis’ book, then, is that these orientations

must not be held too rigidly. We must recognize that they invite us into a conceptual world filled with features that are not to be taken literally. As such, Kasulis offers an incisive analysis of the benefits that arise with each orientation, along with the shadow side that comes with holding it in too fixed and rigid a fashion. Thus, for example, an intimacy dominant orientation can breed a sense of cooperation and harmony, but taken to an extreme it cultivates prejudice and exclusion. Here Kasulis' model resonates with a psychological sensibility ala James Hillman (1992) that psychopathology itself is a result of taking things too literally. His analysis reveals a postmodern sensibility that doesn't overturn modernism or romanticism, but rather situates them in an historical continuum of shifting orientations. Kasulis' postmodernism is a soft version that retains a sense of the existence of immutable values at the heart of human Being.

Kasulis acknowledges that he has written this work from an integrity orientation, as reflected by the rather modular manner of his presentation. While further acknowledging that the work could be re-written from an intimacy orientation, he offers the more modest and practical illustration of providing an intimacy-dominant bibliography. In place of the more typical list of texts, Kasulis provides a narrative description of how each relevant text influenced him in the context of his own intellectual biography. It is easily the most involving and helpful bibliography I've read, and illustrates the intimacy-oriented point that an academic work is inseparable from the history of the writer who produces it.

One especially interesting "entry" in the bibliography is Kasulis' explanation that it was Don Ihde's (1977) *Experimental Phenomenology: An Introduction* that influenced him in the use of the diagrams and gestalt figures which so elegantly illustrate Kasulis' core points regarding the nature and relationship of intimacy and integrity. This connection is not surprising, for the phenomenological approach to psychology makes it a mission to reveal the presuppositions and assumptions at the base of perception; in this vein, Kasulis' heuristics serve as schemata which organize the basic sets of presuppositions that influence how we see and interpret the world.

This book will be of interest to a wide readership, especially those involved with cultural studies and philosophy. It is also particularly relevant to gender studies (Kasulis includes a piece here), political science, art, psychology, science, history, and education. Any of these disciplines will come to understand their own subcultures better through application of these heuristics. For example, within psychology, we can recognize that behavior-

ism, arising out of a decidedly positivistic outlook, offers a psychology with an extreme integrity orientation, while many forms of psychotherapy adopt intimacy orientations. Further, we can use the heuristics to understand in general how people, ourselves included, see and think about the world. It would be a long stretch to characterize Kasulis' work as a "self-help" book, but in probing the orientations that prefigure our apprehension of reality, he has provided a set of tools that shine light on our own conceptual universe and on our own manner of Being. Whatever the application, I strongly recommend *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* to any person who thinks.

### *References*

- Hillman, J. (1992). *Re-visioning psychology*. New York: Harper & Row.  
Ihde, D. (1977). *Experimental phenomenology: An introduction*. New York: Putnum.