Foundations of Reason and Morality

A Philosophical Dialogue between Confucianism
and German Philosophy

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Preface

Philosophy may be regarded as the only domain capable to justify its own principles, its possibilities, and limits. Hence, we have to strengthen the awareness towards its role with regard to reason and morality in the different fields of human existence and towards nature as the ultimate horizon of our being-in-the-world.

(1.) Philosophy maybe near to politics by analysing political and social systems; but yet, we have to realize that we may set impulses, but whether our ideas or political concepts will then guide politics, is no longer in our hands. (2.) Philosophy has to be distinguished clearly from science: its task is to analyse carefully the methods, principles and the limits of science. Hence philosophy may argue systematically, but cannot be reduced to science; science is rather one possible object among others. If, for instance, we reduce consciousness to our brain activities, as understood by neurosciences, moral responsibility could not be justified anymore! (3.) Philosophy has to reflect carefully the realm of morality: its possibilities and limits within our social and political lives, but yet, philosophy cannot be a moral discipline, it will rather ask for the internal relations between morality and politics, science, nature, or spirituality. (4.) Philosophy touches the deep spiritual intuitions of religion and tries to understand the irreducible dimension of spirituality for our human lives, but yet, it will not be able to satisfy our striving for a fulfilled and meaningful life. (5.) Philosophy carefully investigates the development of cosmology, its concept of heaven, by analysing the natural laws outside of us, but yet, a cosmological view will never reach our human self-understanding. A concept of heaven

without morality will fail to understand freedom as the ultimate ground for the moral law within us.

And finally: inasmuch as philosophy tries to integrate all these aspects of our human nature, it cannot be reduced to one of them – neither to reason, nor to morality. And inasmuch as philosophy remains bound to a specific culture, our inter-cultural approach will hopefully help to overcome our limits in order to better understand, estimate, and welcome the different cultural hemispheres as an enrichment to learn from each other. Only by our mutual learning we will be able to create a peaceful future in a world to come.

These were the words Claudia Bickmann wrote down for the preface to this volume. Due to her untimely death she was not able to complete the publication of this volume. But for all the sadness, the appearance of the texts gathered here, which are a result of the work of understanding initiated by her, is also a sign of the possible victory over death and a glimmer of hope that "we will be able to create a peaceful future in a world to come".

Since 2012, at the suggestion of Claudia Bickmann and in cooperation with the Academy for Civic Education in Tutzing, German-Chinese work on world philosophy has taken place in a series of conferences, the first of which is documented here. Every visitor to such academic exercises is probably aware of the fact that joint discussion and mutual understanding is also a rarity at conferences. At the conferences with Claudia Bickmann the success of this attempt could always be experienced. Her alert and open mind was an essential condition for this.

With further conferences on questions of the method, the self and the role of the family, the conversation between European and especially classical German philosophy and Chinese tradition is continued into the present. Here the special ability of dialectical philosophy to connect with a completely different way of thinking within the Chinese tradition becomes apparent, whereby apparent opposites become recognizable as differences of a bigger unity.

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Possibilities and Limits of a Philosophical Approach to Reason and Morality

1. Introduction

Our question, from the onset, leads to the heart of our human nature and its role within the different civilizations in our times. While Western civilizations from their beginning with the pre-Socratics stressed the need of a theoretically based self-awareness, the Chinese way, as it seems, predominantly bound self-awareness to the ethical, the moral dimension of human nature.

And while the idea of a unifying principle, uniting reason and morality is abandoned within the horizon of a sceptical, relativistic, and scientific oriented modern Western philosophy, we face an upsurge of the profound and deep questioning of this topic within modern Chinese philosophy.

Thus an amazement and deep disquiet is now pervading within Western philosophy, which leads to an irritation about one's own access to a value-based concept of humanity; while in modern Chinese philosophy we find the strong tendency to generate distinguished theoretical concepts to found the morally and value-oriented approach to our self- and world-understanding.

2. Three Models of European Philosophy

The dominance of a theoretical analysis within European thinking in one of its mainstreams from the Aristotelian inspired scholastic medieval ages till modern science oriented philosophy and the remaining prevalence of a practical approach to all life affairs within the Asian traditions might be – as it seems – the most striking difference between the two traditions. Asking for the foundations of reason and morality within Western philosophy, three epochs may be named:

  – The classical European concepts from the pre-Socratics till the Hegelian system – similar to most Chinese traditions – stressed the need to consider a necessary internal relation between reason and morality: reaching out from the more sensually based concepts of the pre-Socratics to the intelligible principle such as the idea of the highest good from Plato to Kant; or the idea of the absolute spirit from Aristotle to Hegel.
  – Since the Age of Enlightenment both dimensions start operating in different spheres: reason, interpreted as the capacity of knowledge or thinking and morality as the capacity to act under normative rules or to strive for a good fulfilled life. Both should no longer be united by a common ground, no unifying principle should be valid or unquestioned any more.
  – Within a third model, the classical German philosophy from Kant to Heidegger, reason and morality should be understood as expression of one and the same human capacity. Kant argues as follows:

"If the critique of pure *practical reason* is to be completed, it must be possible at the same time *to show its identity with speculative reason in a common principle*, for it can ultimately be only one and the same reason which has to be distinguished merely in its application."[1]

"Indeed there is properly no other foundation for [morality, C.B.] than the critical examination of a pure practical reason; just as that for metaphysics is the critical examination of the pure speculative reason."[2]

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1   Kant 1911, p. 391 (own translation).
2   Kant 1911, p. 391 (own translation).

Thus as for Kant – as well as the concepts of German Idealism, the distinction between our speculative, theoretical, and our practical, moral reason is just the expression of one and the same human capacity, called reason – referring only to the different ways to apply this capacity in the sphere of knowledge or morality, in a theoretical or practical way.

3. Three Irreducible Ideas of an Unconditioned Ground

How to understand the integrative, all-encompassing horizon uniting the in-itself-contradicting nature of our human reason?

From Plato to Hegel a triangular structure of the unconditioned constitutes the framework of our investigation:

– The idea of the self as the unconditioned ground within us leading to an in-itself contradicting concept of a human being: freedom and necessity are the irreducible dimensions of a person.
– Secondly the concept of the world as a phenomenal whole is object of our intuition, reason and understanding. How freedom may be integrated in a fully determined structure of the given world? Presupposing freedom as the unconditioned ground within us leads to an in-itself contradicting concept of the phenomenal world.
– The third idea, the idea of an ultimate principle uniting the intelligible and the natural world, is necessary to understand the cosmic whole in its internal relation of freedom and nature, reason and morality.

These ideas of an unconditioned ground within and outside of us constitute the objects of the self (psychology), the phenomenal world (cosmology), and the unity between both (metaphysics).

4. The Triangular Structure of Our "Being-in-the-world" between Transcendence and Immanence

This triangular structure, as we hold, is to be found in almost all world traditions: as the all-encompassing horizon mediating the two spheres

just as the two opposite sides of being as a whole. Since the beginning of human investigation this triangular structure took a different shape: as the idea of the ultimate horizon it was named – among others – Dao, the highest good, the concept of *ren* or the idea of the absolute substance. As possible paradigms of an all-integrating, all-embedding and embracing mediating principle they are meant to interpret the compatibility between the poles of nature and spirit, reason and morality, etc.

How to define the relation between the integrating horizon and the two opposite dimensions?

– We presuppose radical immanence with regard to its all-encompassing function as developed in pantheism, Daoism, or Buddhism.
– Or else the ultimate horizon is regarded in its radical transcendence – beyond all dichotomies: like in Neoplatonism, Hinduism, and Islam.
– A third model is a combination of the two: the Christian trinitarian exegesis of the threefold existence of God as simultaneously immanent and transcendent. Similarly we may find Daoist interpretations, which, according to the first book of Laozi's *Daodejing*, interpret the Dao as beyond all dichotomies in a radically transcendent manner and simultaneously as a mediating horizon – i.e., in its ultimate immanence.

5. Self-critique Prevailing

5.1 Western Philosophy Shifting to Practical Reason

After Hegel and German Idealism a new horizon was opened. With Feuerbach, Nietzsche, and Marx practical reason became the new founding horizon. During a long period of time Western philosophy (under the auspices of the Aristotelian scholastics) – up to Kant and Hegel – attention was given to the understanding of the categories, principles, and rules guiding our theoretical and practical activities. According to Marx the theoretical task was accomplished by Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Times, as he states in his second thesis on

Feuerbach in 1845, demand for action: "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical question*."[3]

5.2 Plato's Allegory of the Cave

We will hold, that just the opposite might be valid. Considering for a while ourselves in a situation as the prisoners in a cave, as Plato described at the beginning of the seventh book of his *Republic*:

Living in an underground den, legs and necks in chains, unable to move. Relieved and forced to turn around, we reveal the delusion of our former access to the phaenomenal world and the world as a whole. Self-knowledge, as we conclude from this allegory, is needed in order to understand the presupposed cultural, religious, scientific, or philosophical concepts, guiding explicitly or not our actions. Since, as Plato argues, without a clear understanding of the major principle, the highest good, uniting knowledge and action, thinking and being, nature and spirit, the political leaders will be unable to organize a moral political order according to the idea of a harmony between all spheres.

5.3 The Prevalence of Self-reflexion (Confucius, Plato, Kant)

Thus self-reflexion in the very ancient Platonic or Confucian sense will serve as the opening path to our mutual understanding. Self-reflexion according to Kant means than: (1.) to think by ourselves, (2.) to think coherently, and (3.) trying to think from the point of view of the others.

Re-considering and questioning Marx's predominantly prevailing practical approach to thinking and acting, we will open the floor for the necessary priority of enlightening, understanding and theoretically anticipating the premises of a moral human praxis in a self-critical way,

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3   Engels/Marx 1998, pp. 167f.

instead of proclaiming a praxis which might be the proof criterion for our theory.

Hence, as Confucius already claimed in his *Analects*, in order "to hold an attitude of reserve with regard to what one does not know, and to follow the path of cultivation, we first of all have to purify and rectify our concepts before knowing how to act properly."

5.4　Two Extremes Approaching the Integrative Ultimate Principle

However, the question remains of how to get access to such an ultimate principle, uniting all spheres of a political and cosmic order? As the a priori highest object or ultimate good to obtain – indifferently in which historical or cultural circumstances we find ourselves –, Kant names the idea of harmony between our highest natural demands for happiness and the highest intelligible demands for morality and justice in all societies, providing perpetual peace among all nations. Without this regulative idea of the all-determining good to strive for – irreducibly bound to reason and morality, as he hold, we would be unable to understand our human nature.

If the striving forces in nature can be presupposed as either forces of the matter or forces of an intelligent principle, than we may consider its substratum as a lifeless or a vivid being.[4] Idealism assumes according to Kant: (1.) a living matter (in a pantheistic or hylozoistic way) as in Deism such as Daoism, Buddhism, or Aristotelianism or (2.) the idea of a living highest being as in Christianity. Or else we presuppose in a materialistic way: (1.) an inanimate matter (as done within the realism of a mechanistic causality in the atomism of Democritus or Leucippus (2.) or a lifeless goodness as in fatalistic conceptions.

4　See Kant 1913, p. 391.

6. The Opening Horizon of a Common Ground

6.1 The Irreducibility of a Concept of Transcendence

This idea of harmony, as Kant holds, presupposes transcendence as the ultimate horizon and spirituality as our attitude towards cosmos and life. According to Kant, spirituality is a guiding force in our human life.

But why should spirituality be an implication of reason and morality at all? Kant argues as follows: If we do what we ought to do, what may we then hope? Happiness, as he holds, is the satisfaction of all our desires in an extensive, intensive, and protensive way, and "the *practical law*, derived from the motive of *happiness*," he terms, is a pragmatic (rule of prudence).[5]

But the law, which has no other motive than worthiness of being happy, is a moral (law of morality). "The former advises us what we have to do if we wish to achieve happiness; the latter dictates to us how we must behave in order to deserve happiness."[6] The former is based on empirical principles; the latter considers only the "freedom of a rational being in general, and the necessary conditions under which alone this freedom can harmonise with a distribution of happiness."[7]

Hence, if (1.) the contingency of our empirical existence does not guarantee the fulfilment of our highest natural goods and (2.) the unconditioned state of morality is incompatible with our sensually bound existence regarding the attainment of happiness, (3.) the assumption of an ideal of a highest good, entailing the possibility of a harmony among our striving forces, is a necessary ingredient of our free moral actions.

Since the idea of a wanted harmony between our free will and the natural conditions of our existence presupposes a unity between our speculative reason, linked to the question: "What can I know?"; and our free moral will to create a world under moral rules, we may ask than:

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5   See Kant 1904, p. 523.

6   Kant 1904, p. 523 (own translation).

7   Kant 1904, p. 524 (own translation).

"What, if we act in a moral way, we might hope?"[8] This third question is theoretical and practical at the same time. Inasmuch as we are bound to our sensual nature, we are simultaneously free to act in a moral way. But the achievement of happiness or harmony in a future world, we might have deserved by the conduct of a moral life, is not attainable by us.

Thus our ultimate – theoretical and practical – questions are bound to a third one, which might give an answer to the question of the unifying principle between the two spheres. The question of a justified hope, as Kant holds, leads us to the idea of the highest good, uniting our highest natural and moral goods and opens a sphere of spirituality as the necessary link between moral actions and our striving for happiness.

Thus a sense of transcendence and of spirituality, as we hold, is an implication of our in-itself-contradicting nature. But how are both sides united in our being-in-the-world?

6.2 Heidegger: The Ultimate Horizon of Transcendence: A Mode of Our Being-in-the-world?

Being-in-the-world in its triangular structure: How to find access to the ultimate horizon, to the sphere of spirituality? We are – according to Heidegger – being within ourselves, always beyond ourselves. Self-understanding, as a mode of being-in-the-world and as an act of transcending ourselves, grasps the irreducible horizon of the wholeness of integrating both spheres in a non-contradicting way. However, conceptualized or not, being never fails to be completely understood. There are degrees of understanding of ourselves as beings-in-the-world from the unconceptualized approach, the absorption of the "they" or in the world, till "the authentic potentiality-for-being-its-self" or even the ontological and phenomenological understanding of the totality of the structural whole.

We may find different steps of enlightening the horizon, in which we find ourselves by birth and by tradition. An ontological and phenomenological investigation of the different ways, in which our *Dasein* exists

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8   See Kant 1904, p. 525.

and acts according to moral rules, defines the characters of the disclosure of our being-in-the-world. Our being-in-the-world, however, is already a mode to understand the world. World itself, if not understood as the infinite sum of objects, indicates the horizon, in which human beings understand themselves. And while the idea of a whole provides the orientation in the world, we nevertheless may fail to find the adequate path to live according to ourselves or to society, or according to nature as the all-embedding framework of our life or even according to the interdependence of the relations between all these spheres.

This moderate Heideggerian way to interpret transcendence or spirituality (or the ultimate horizon) as (1.) a mode of being-in-the-world, (2.) striving for the highest good by acting and enlightening, and (3.) finally as rationally understanding and founding our being-in-the-world in an intelligible way. May this open a horizon to Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism?

7. Preconceptions Within the Horizon of Modern Western Traditions

7.1 Two Major Obstacles

The idea of an integrating horizon (as articulated similarly in the Chinese principle of the Dao or *ren* or the European idea of the highest good) is questioned in post-metaphysical ages. Within the conceptualistic and nominalistic shift – entering European philosophy by William of Ockham –, the given concepts, such as the idea of the good, of being or truth should no longer be understood as possible expressions of essential or distinguishable properties or qualities, but should rather be regarded as merely external names or titles for numerically defined units of our conceptualizations.

The second dominant domain within post-metaphysical thinking follows a naturalized epistemology of our scientific access in nearly all theoretical disciplines from physics to cognitive sciences. Here the idea of a founding principle is questioned likewise.

Hence, searching for an adequate method to approach major Chinese topics and concepts by referring to contemporary Western philosophy, self-reflection and self-critique is needed: A thoroughly examination is demanded to figure out, whether or not our predominantly prevailing heuristic scheme of a sceptically relativizing or a scientifically naturalizing methodology might at all be prepared for our mutual understanding. Taking into account these post-metaphysical premises of our contemporary Western philosophy, itineraries will not be easily to be found to bridge our different traditions in orient and occident.

7.2 Methodological Questions: The European Fallacy Entering by Translating the Respective Terms?

How to reach an adequate understanding of the idea of the highest good in both cultures? Translating the Chinese Confucian, Taoist, or Buddhist concept of *ren* by the idea of humanity, benevolence, or the highest good or the Dao as way, reason, logos, both translations might be easily misunderstood as a projection of our Platonic-Kantian understanding of the highest principle of reason and morality. As Friedrich Schlegel argued in 1797: If we do not want our philological translation to be just a projection of the wanted or an indication of our honourable scholarship, and than be astonished in a widely childish manner about the miracle, we ourselves have produced, we first of all have to be aware of the double difficulty we face.

The topic of our conference, searching for a unifying principle of reason and morality confronts us with two bridgeless steps in a vast and empty territory. One step stems from our post-metaphysical modern theories to our own classical heritage from Plato to Hegel. Our thesis: only within early European philosophy we find an equivalent concept to the Chinese *ren* or Dao. The second step might still be higher, leading into the area of the Chinese approach to their own ultimate principles, which is hardly sufficiently recognized and profoundly studied in European thinking.

Hence in modern times of Occidental sceptical philosophy the heuristic scheme or systematic equivalent to the Chinese principle of *ren* or

the Dao seems to be missing. To avoid a possible misunderstanding, we will follow a new route to open our post-metaphysical thinking to the Chinese traditions. Just two examples of self-reflection may be named:

First of all we have to take into consideration, that as for an adequate concept of *ren* or Dao, the itineraries into the different traditions of the Chinese philosophy might not lead us – as it is the case within European traditions – to a definition of a possible object or idea, a definite premise or argument or a subject-centred construction, or even a claim for truth in the sense of consensual, coherence, or correspondence-oriented truth-theories. We rather may find forms of philosophizing, which cannot be understood by reference to the concepts of objectivity or subjectivity, by abstract definitions or arguments, but may only be found beyond or apart from such dichotomies like the self and the other, reason and morality, spirit and nature. We my rather find them in an area of in-difference, the in-between-space of the extremes: between leave and do, spirit and nature, etc.

Secondly: The Chinese classical concept of time might not be oriented towards a progress in permanence as in Western modernity, but rather take a circular shape; so that the rules and laws of behaviour might rather be understood as embedded in cosmos and nature, mirroring micro- and the macrocosmic dimensions. Hence it might appear as if human spirit did not remove inasmuch from its natural homestead.

7.3 Creative Designing, Intellectually Condensing, or Conceptually Reflecting Approaches

But yet, this self-critical attitude by referring to the Chinese thinking might be deceiving likewise. Examining carefully the different approaches to the ultimate principles within the respective Chinese traditions, we may distinguish at least three different lines of interpreting the classical texts:

– The almost poetically embedded presentations within the different aphoristic concepts of Confucius, Zhuangzi, Mencius, or Laozi.

- The more intellectually condensed elaborations by different Neo-confucian texts, integrating Daoism and Buddhism into Confucianism (e.g., Wang Yang-ming).
- And finally within modern Chinese metaphysics the conceptually reflecting systematically differentiated approaches.

Astonishing parallels might be found with regard to these Chinese traditions within Western philosophy. However all three types need to be carefully reflected with regard to the specific context of their traditions, in order to avoid a projection or implementation of the wanted into the respective framework and to avoid a mere appropriation of the other.

Thus the conceptually oriented as well as the deconstructive approach of Western heuristics have to exercise some caution, when being confronted with allegoric, symbolic, or poetic forms, inasmuch as the allegorically oriented presentations cannot be hastily transformed into mere concepts of abstract notions.

These methodological problems are similar in both traditions. Thus they are an intra-cultural and inter-cultural challenge likewise. Let us open the horizon for a cross-cultural understanding, searching for a common ground, asking for similarities and differences within and beyond our respective philosophical traditions in order to proceed in a common direction for the sake of a peaceful harmonious world.

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Guo Yi

The Chinese Beliefs and Chinese Values

Establishing the spiritual homeland has become a hot topic nowadays. How can it be built? Definitely by spiritual culture. According to my understanding, the so-called spiritual culture embraces three aspects: aestheticism, morality, and belief. This is only a theoretical classification. In fact, these three aspects are interrelated with each other and it's hard to mark off the boundaries of them. An aesthetic object usually involves factors of morality and belief, and a moral doctrine often involves notions of aestheticism and belief, while a belief also covers aesthetic and moral components. Among these three aspects, belief is predominant and is the leading one. It determines the general style and direction of spiritual culture. There's no doubt that it is also the soul and the core of human's spiritual homeland. Some phenomena in the society, like demoralization, spiritual decadence, etc., all derive from the loss of belief. The fundamental means of establishing the spiritual homeland is to rebuild beliefs. Thus, we need to make clear what belief is and the Chinese belief system.

1. Definition and Classification of Belief

Belief is our strong faith and insistence on the essence of life. It is the source of life meaning and is the norm of people's behavior. It can be classified into final belief and common belief according to its

different levels. The former is strong faith and insistence on the essential significance of life, from which we can attain the supreme freedom, ease, happiness, satisfaction, and peace. I refer to this state as the peak state or peak experience of life. In a sense, it embodies life's final meaning and is man's true spiritual homeland. The latter refers to the faith and insistence on a certain doctrine, a theory, or something else, from which people can attain mental satisfaction to some degree. The mental satisfaction deriving from the pursuit of money and material is temporary and feeble. However, final belief usually manifests itself in a certain doctrine or a theory, which certainly belongs to the category of final belief. Thus, belief, in a narrow sense, refers to the final belief. In a wide sense, it covers common belief. Here we'll discuss the narrow sense of belief, namely, final belief.

Since final belief embodies the fundamental meaning of life and is man's true spiritual homeland, it can be called, from the perspective of value theory, "final value," which has a paramount status in the culture system.

What does final value include? As we all know, the three value categories, the true, the good, and the beautiful, put forward by westerners, have been widely acknowledged. However, just as Qian Mu pointed,

> "These three basic value categories have some defects in terms of its connotation. First, it does not include all aspects of life. Second, some connotations in the theory of the true, the good and the beautiful may be misleading. Third, the Chinese traditional view of the world and life actually differ from the three basic value categories."[1]

In my view, the three basic value categories, the true, the good, and the beautiful, are the values manifested in the various approaches to the peak state of life, but not the values manifested by the peak state of life itself. In other words, they are not the highest and final value.

What value does the peak state of life embody? It can be expressed by *an* 安. We can see the original meaning of an 安 is pacification, quietness, peace, comfort and ease within a family when a man has a woman. Of course it is from the perspective of man. Since the peak

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1   Qian 2004.