

## **Is Soren Kierkegaard a Friend or Foe of Natural Theology? A Chinese Perspective**

**Kai-man Kwan**

Hong Kong Baptist University

### **I. Introduction**

Soren Kierkegaard is called the father of existentialism, which is a philosophical movement that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It continued to develop in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was quite popular in the years after the Second World War, especially as the result of the works of two philosopher-writers, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Existentialism is a diversified movement, and it is by no means easy to define it. Sartre has suggested that "existence precedes essence" should be regarded as the first principle of existentialism but it is doubtful that this understanding of existentialism fits Kierkegaard. In this paper, I adopt a broader understanding of existentialism. It refers roughly to the philosophical movement which rebels against the rationalism and objectivism of modern philosophy, and advocates a "subjective" approach to philosophy. It protests against traditional approach to Western philosophy which is too detached from the problems which are really relevant to human existence. So, in contrast, existentialism dwells on themes like

anxiety, human destiny, and freedom, approaching these problems passionately with the involvement of the self rather than tackling them by technical analysis of the concepts of "humanity," "free will," etc.

Traditional natural theology is the attempt to use natural reason to discover truths about God (or the Ultimate). Since existentialism tends to emphasize the irrational side of man (cf. William Barrett's *Irrational Man*), and seems to be skeptical of "natural reason," it does not sit well with natural theology. In particular, Kierkegaard, for many people, is obviously a foe of natural theology. He talks about truth as subjectivity and faith as intense embracing of objective uncertainty. He tries to show the impossibility and irrelevance of a proof of God. His anti-Hegelianism certainly means a critical stance towards the rational or objective approach to religion. Instead, he embraces the subjective approach to the questions of life and religious truth.

While the above description of Kierkegaard is largely true, this paper will argue that Kierkegaard's work as a whole, regardless of his original intention, is not *in fact* inimical to the project of natural theology, especially for a Chinese mind. The apparent incompatibility of Kierkegaard's work and natural theology stems from a classical conception of natural reason, and an overly rigid understanding of "experience," both of which have deep roots in Western culture. However, for the Chinese, we have a more holistic understanding of reason and experience. We do not accept a strict dichotomy between the evidential and the pragmatic, and we are open to the possibility that "subjective" experiences from our heart, e.g., moral experiences, can reveal the nature of the universe.

## **II. Kierkegaard: Truth as Subjectivity**

Kierkegaard's animosity towards rationalism can be seen from his opposition to Hegel. Hegel is an influential German philosopher who proposes Absolute Idealism—the whole world is seen as the process of

unfolding of the Absolute Spirit. The details of his philosophy need not detain us here. We only need to point out that Hegel is an ambitious philosopher who wants to produce a comprehensive rational system about the real. For Kierkegaard, an absolute system is impossible because it ignores the limitations of reason. In response to Hegel's grand *system* of absolute idealism, Kierkegaard scathingly says that the system cannot house the individual and his passionate concerns, say, for eternal bliss. Since Hegel's system has left out the thinker himself, Hegel is compared to a man who builds a grand hotel but then lives in a shabby hut next to it.

Besides being sceptical about the power of "objective" reason, Kierkegaard also complains that Hegel's "rational" approach distorts Christianity, e.g., viewing the incarnation merely as a symbol for an abstract philosophical truth- the unity of God and man.

Hegel stood for the world as a closed system; his antagonist pointed to grim factors in life and thought which are incalculable. Hegel, with a higher naturalism, dissolved the individual in "bloodless categories"; the other proclaimed the sheer individuality of conscience as it listens to God. Hegel found it possible to approve of Christianity as at all events a first sketch of the all-inclusive metaphysics; the other announced the paradox of God's self-revelation, by its nature an offence to reason, and only to be grasped through the infinite passion of faith.<sup>1</sup>

For Kierkegaard, not only that the Christian doctrine of Incarnation cannot be established by reason; it is also an Absolute Paradox which is repugnant to reason. Kierkegaard heavily criticizes the objective approach to religion. To begin with, he does not regard the project of natural theology, e.g., the traditional proofs of God, as successful. Moreover, he thinks that the historical basis for Christianity cannot provide really significant support for eternal truth. This is the question put by Kierkegaard on the title page of *Philosophical Fragments*: "Is an

---

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 226.

historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure have any other than a merely historical interest; is it possible to base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge?" Kierkegaard intends positive answers to the above questions,<sup>2</sup> but the problem is that historical evidence alone can hardly establish these answers. Otherwise they will face Lessing's ugly ditch. In fact, "one can be a contemporary without being contemporary" and "one may be a contemporary... and yet be a non-contemporary."<sup>3</sup> This means the real contemporary of Christ is not the real contemporary by virtue of an immediate contemporaneity, but by virtue of Faith. So, by faith, each disciple of Christ in different ages can be a real contemporary of Christ. For Kierkegaard, as far as historical knowledge is concerned, such a *nota bene* is more than enough: "We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared to us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died."<sup>4</sup>

More importantly, he believes that the objective approach misunderstands the essence of faith, and it is simply futile: "For if the God does not exist it would of course be impossible to prove it; and if he does exist it would be folly to attempt it."<sup>5</sup> The leap of faith is the better approach: "As long as I keep my hold on the proof... the existence does not come out, ... but when I let the proof go, the existence is there. But this act of letting go ... is a leap."<sup>6</sup> Pojman has a good explanation here:

Knowledge about metaphysical issues is evil for us, because it prevents the most important virtue from developing. For him faith is the highest virtue precisely because it is objectively uncertain, for personal growth into selfhood depends on uncertainty, risk, venturing forth over 700,000

---

<sup>2</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), 137.

<sup>3</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 83.

<sup>4</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 130.

<sup>5</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 53.

fathoms of ocean water. Faith is the lover's loyalty to the beloved when all the evidence is against her. Faith is the soul's deepest yearnings and hopes, which the rational part of us cannot fathom. Even if we had direct proofs for theism or Christianity, we would not want them; for they would take the venture out of the religious experience.<sup>7</sup>

This subjective construal of faith is not exactly surprising, although not entirely uncontroversial. The positivists may also agree with Kierkegaard here. The more surprising move is Kierkegaard's claim that truth, not only faith, is subjectivity. In fact he has provided this definition of truth: "an objective uncertainty held fast in an approximation process of the most passionate inwardness." Unless one adheres to the most extreme form of irrationalism, it is difficult to apply this definition to all realms of truth, especially those of logic and natural sciences. However, I think Kierkegaard is only using a dramatic expression to protest against the other extreme position of rationalism which insists on the separation of subjectivity and truth in all realms of life. So Kierkegaard is mainly talking about life's *essential truth*. This is a kind of truth which can't be attained by detached, disinterested reasoning. Instead it is discovered by passionate self-involvement, by incorporating the truth in one's life in such a way that one's *self* is transformed. Compare these 2 questions: "Is there another planet beyond Pluto?" and "Is he the Mr. Right I am looking for all my life?" Perhaps the former question can be best answered by objective reasoning divorced from subjective interests. However, to arrive at the true answer to the latter question, some kind of passionate self-involvement is unavoidable. ***In this context, the passionate self-involvement is not a debilitating factor but an enabling factor for the way to truth.*** So there is indeed a subjective way to truth but we need to be careful about the meaning of the word "subjective" here. It means the involvement of the subject and not the deliberate disregard of objective considerations.

---

<sup>7</sup> Louis P. Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 71.

This is a moderate interpretation of Kierkegaard's phrase "truth as subjectivity" which some may dispute. They regard Kierkegaard as an outright irrationalist or relativist. They may adduce Kierkegaard's talk about the Absurd, the Paradox or the Contradiction as proof that Kierkegaard is simply not interested in any kind of objective truth. However, it seems a more subtle interpretation of Kierkegaard is possible and C. S. Evans has forcibly argued that the term "contradiction" for Kierkegaard doesn't mean a formal contradiction at least for the following reasons:

1. The term "contradiction" is generally used to refer to "incongruity".
2. Kierkegaard speaks of formal contradiction only in context of a defence of the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction.
3. The uniqueness of the Paradox is emphasized whereas a self-contradiction in the formal sense is not really unique because it can be generated at will.
4. Kierkegaard refuses to grant that Reason has clear understanding of what is God and what is a man. Without such understandings, how can Reason recognize a formal contradiction?<sup>8</sup>

However, we still have to face the apparent rational unintelligibility and unacceptability of the Paradox. Kierkegaard surely denies that reason, as commonly understood in his culture, should be the Judge of the Paradox. Shall we say that Kierkegaard is fleeing from the tribunal of Reason and blindly sticking to his idiosyncratic faith?

I think this interpretation of Kierkegaard is too shallow. His thought is too subtle for this charge. Kierkegaard's greatness lies exactly in his perceptive insight that Reason itself is conditioned by many factors: society, the establishment, and above all the existential situation of the thinker himself. All reasoning is itself an existential act. He challenges that whether it's possible to have a presuppositionless

---

<sup>8</sup> Evans has defended this thesis in various places. For a more recent discussion, see C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason: A Kierkegaardian Account* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), chp. 6.

consciousness. The whole book of *Philosophical Fragments* is devoted to show that a completely new set of ideas is possible as an alternative to Idealism (which believes that basically truth can be discovered within humanity). This is shown by adopting a new presupposition that the Moment can be decisive. He then unfolds the content of this presupposition and arrives at the Paradox. He then points out that the offense to Reason becomes just the thing expected if you look from the side of the Paradox. If God has become man, of course this event is incomprehensible, absurd and improbable to "natural" reason. However, this is exactly what one should expect if this is the truth! So Kierkegaard can even say that the "offended consciousness can be taken as an indirect proof of the validity of the Paradox."<sup>9</sup>

He also talks about the new birth: "It would certainly be absurd to expect of a man that he should of his own accord discover that he did not exist. But this is precisely the transition of the new birth, from non-being to being."<sup>10</sup> This means that whether the new birth is absurd depends on your standpoint. If you have no such experience, the idea naturally becomes absurd to you. However, if you have such an experience and only then as a result of God's revelation, you can speak of such thing. Similarly, Kierkegaard thinks that the idea that God has become man is "impossible" from a human standpoint. "If the God gave no sign, how could it enter into the mind of man that the blessed God should need him?"<sup>11</sup> Hence the "absurdity" of the idea rather bespeaks its divine origin, from the perspective of faith.

This means there is no universal standpoint from which reason can operate: the situation of the thinker has to be taken into account. If we are already sure that there can't be any revelation or such thing as re-birth, the argument above can be dismissed. But how does Reason ascertain this? So if "reason" is interpreted strictly within a positivist or naturalistic framework, then perhaps we can regard Kierkegaard as

---

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 63.

<sup>10</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 45.

an irrationalist. *However, we can also see Kierkegaard's project as a radical questioning of our concept of rationality.* Similarly, Evans distinguishes "the normative and descriptive aspects of reason" or "reason in its concrete and ideal senses." *He rightly points out the possibility that "what is accepted as 'reason' concretely would be a barrier to achieving the goals of reason in an ideal normative sense,"<sup>12</sup> namely, to find the truth.*

### III. A Blind Leap of Faith?

Some worry still remains: if Kierkegaard's argument works, it might seem to allow for too much nonsense, say, the Great Pumpkin. For example, Louis Pojman characterizes Kierkegaard's position as "a combination of his skepticism and belief in the passions as the ultimate key to truth,"<sup>13</sup> and accuses Kierkegaard of prescriptive volitionalism: "it is good to tailor one's beliefs to one's deepest desires."<sup>14</sup> Such volitionalism is arbitrary and ultimately unethical. It's because Pojman believes that a truth-seeking policy with reliance upon reason is the only way to preserve our autonomy. Furthermore, such a policy is the foundation for the well-being of our community.

Well, it remains to be seen in what sense Kierkegaard is a volitionalist. True, he speaks of belief as a free act of will. However it seems misguided to think that Kierkegaard advises us to choose our metaphysical beliefs purely according to our whims and fancies. For example, in the *Philosophical Fragments*, Kierkegaard seems to allow for a harmony between Reason and Paradox: "Reason, in its paradoxical passion, precisely desires its own downfall. But this is what the Paradox also desires, and thus they are at bottom linked in understanding; but

---

<sup>12</sup> Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, 94.

<sup>13</sup> Louis P. Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity: Kierkegaard's Philosophy of Religion* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 115.

<sup>14</sup> Pojman, *The Logic of Subjectivity*, 116.



this understanding is present only in the moment of passion."<sup>15</sup> The relation of Reason to Paradox is likened to that of self-love to love:

Self-love lies as the ground of love, but the paradoxical passion of self-love when at its highest pitch wills precisely its own downfall. This is also what love desires... self-love is indeed submerged but not annihilated, it is taken captive and become love's *spolia opima*, but may again come to life.<sup>16</sup>

One possible interpretation of the above passage is that Reason, in realizing itself, will come to a point where it recognizes its own limit and knows that there's a realm beyond the reach of itself. Although it can't go further on its own, the Paradox can bestow itself in the Moment of Faith. So in this sense, faith is not irrational. But how can Reason come to recognize its limitations? Kierkegaard here speaks of "Reason in its paradoxical passion" and seems to point to a new sort of rational reflection which isn't cool and "objective". Indeed, he seems to talk about a rational reflection upon the thinker's subjective existence: what human existence is and what its meaning is. This is distinct from the objective reason which aims at fitting everything into a system. But in a sense, nothing is more rational than to obey the injunction: "Know thyself." So the project of reflecting, albeit passionately, on one's existence is also rational.

I can't go into the details of Kierkegaard's theory of human existence here. It seems that Kierkegaard believes that by such reflection and development of self, we may come to know that there is the realm of the Eternal. We may also be led to believe that to be truly oneself, one has to believe in the Paradox. If the above interpretation is correct, Kierkegaard is far from seeing faith as an arbitrary leap into the dark. Surely, there's objective uncertainty but the decision to believe has a *certain logic* belonging to the realm of subjectivity (but this logic is by no means coercive). Furthermore, the charge of self-

---

<sup>15</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, 59f.

deception can't be brought against Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard sees clearly the element of risk and he advises us to embrace the objective uncertainty passionately.

Kierkegaard's project raises deep questions about faith and rationality. Nowadays it's widely recognized that rationality is limited by conceptual frameworks. Shall we become relativists, or are we to refine our concept of rationality? It's increasingly recognized that even science depends on some principles which originate from the human subject, e.g., simplicity, coherence. These are described as 'intellectual passions' by Polanyi and 'values' by Kuhn. Of course, it's too hasty to draw the conclusion that these principles automatically become invalid just because they originate from the subject. This is a *non sequitur*. However, these principles are basic in some sense and it is difficult to provide further justification for them. There is a common distinction between a believing which is based on rational principles and one which is based on subjective interests. But is this distinction so sharp? This has been challenged long ago by William James:

*Is it not sheer dogmatic folly to say that our inner interests can have no real connection with the forces that the hidden world may contain?... Take science itself! Without an imperious inner demand on our part for ideal logical and mathematical harmonies, we should never have attained to proving that such harmonies lie hidden between all the chinks and interstices of the crude natural world. Hardly a law has been established in science, hardly a fact ascertained, which was not first sought after often with sweat and blood, to gratify an inner need.<sup>17</sup>*

Indeed, I think such questions and Kierkegaard's questions can't be dismissed out of hand by the rationalists. Moreover, from the perspective of the Chinese traditions, Kierkegaard's questions should be taken seriously.

---

<sup>17</sup> William James, *The Will to Believe & Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1969), 55.

#### IV. The Chinese Traditions and the Subjective Way to Truth

Many commentators agree that one characteristic of Chinese philosophy is the emphasis on life (生命)<sup>18</sup> but the life here does not mean biological life. It primarily means holistic human existence, i.e., human subjectivity. Wu Yi (吳怡) also says, the Chinese philosophy is centred around human life. Only if we use life to understand life, we can appreciate the beauty and vitality of Chinese philosophy.<sup>19</sup> The Confucian emphasis on Ren (benevolence) is well-known but for Confucianists, Ren and humanity can almost be identified.(仁者人也) It follows that for the Confucianists, the questions about human existence and the subject are unavoidable.

In early twentieth century, there happened a wide-ranging debate concerning science and metaphysics among the Chinese scholars. This was sparked off by a lecture by Zhang Jun-mai (張君勱) on "The Philosophy of Life" delivered in February 1923. At that time many Chinese intellectuals were vigorously promoting the learning of Western science because they thought that only Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy could save China from the danger of oblivion. Zhang recognized the importance of science,<sup>20</sup> but was worried about a form of scientism which wanted to subsume philosophy of life under science, or to eliminate philosophy of life altogether. He maintained that the realm of philosophy of life, which was the major concern of Chinese culture, was also very important. So he proposed the thesis that science and philosophy of life belonged to different realms and had very different

---

<sup>18</sup> Zheng-tong Wei, *Introduction to Chinese Culture* (A Chinese Book: 韋政通:《中國文化概論》二版[台北:水牛,1991]), 105.

<sup>19</sup> Yi Wu, *The Life and Way of Chinese Philosophy* (A Chinese Book: 吳怡:《中國哲學的生命和方法》[台北:東大圖書,1994]), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Jun-mai Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture—A Selection of Zhang, Jun-mai's Neo-Confucian Writings* (A Chinese Book: 張君勱:《精神自由與民族文化——張君勱——新儒學論著輯要》[北京:中國廣播電視出版社,1995]), 109. In fact Zhang later became much more enthusiastic about science. In 1948, he has written an essay titled "The future of China depends on scientific research" (Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 577-87). The major reason seems to be the impression made on him by the dropping of the atomic bomb.

characteristics. So they could co-exist peacefully. The differences between science and philosophy of life are fivefold:

1. Science is objective; philosophy of life is subjective.
2. Science is governed by a rational methodology; philosophy of life originates from intuition.
3. Science is analytic; philosophy of life is synoptic.
4. Science aims at causal laws; philosophy of life is related to free will.
5. Science begins with the common phenomena of the objects; philosophy of life begins with the uniqueness of life.<sup>21</sup>

This lecture provoked many angry responses from those who advocated science. For example, Ding (丁文江), a scientist who believed in some form of positivism, wrote the essay "Metaphysics and Science," and proposed a form of scientism or positivism. He believed in "the omnipotence of science" (科學萬能) and wanted to exorcise the ghost of metaphysics (or religion). In response, Zhang charged that Ding was poisoned by the superstitious belief in science.<sup>22</sup> He believed that "scientific epistemology" was not superior to philosophers' epistemology,<sup>23</sup> and he argued vigorously that there was "knowledge beyond science."<sup>24</sup> For example, "How to distinguish faithfulness and unfaithfulness is a question oneself knows best. The three [positivist] criteria proposed by Ding is simply irrelevant. Can we say that because this does not conform to those three criteria, this kind of knowledge has no truth at all? This is related to moral knowledge."<sup>25</sup> Zhang argues the same for aesthetic knowledge and metaphysical knowledge (e.g., knowledge of life and death). All these are knowledge beyond science.

---

<sup>21</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 3-7.

<sup>22</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 12.

<sup>23</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 41.

<sup>24</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 49ff.

<sup>25</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 51.

From the above, we can see that Zhang believes in a form of personal knowledge. He also believes in the importance of the inner realm of the self, and innate knowledge about ethics.<sup>26</sup> In response to the criticisms by materialists like Wu Zhi-hui ( 吳稚暉 ), he proposes the comprehensiveness criterion: a credible worldview needs to encompass various phenomena in the universe, including life, mind and morality.<sup>27</sup> So the scientific perspective is partial; only philosophers can give us a synoptic view of the universe.<sup>28</sup>

We should also note Zhang's appeal to pragmatic arguments. In response to Bertrand Russell's kind of scientific philosophy which tells us that life is meaningless, he points out its practical consequences. If this is so, he thinks, not only the foundation for social organization is destroyed, but there is also no point for humankind to continue to exist in the world. "As long as we live, we have to begin with the belief that 'life is meaningful'. Only then we can provide the foundation for scholarship, morality and politics. People like Russell have put too much an emphasis on the quest for truth; they have ignored the good... Only if we feel that life is meaningful, the task to revive our culture and our nation is necessary."<sup>29</sup> So he argues that we should put equal emphasis on knowledge and morality, the true and the good. He points out that "Eastern people think that the foundation of knowledge and the foundation of morality are closely related. So the two words, righteousness ( 義 ) and reason ( 理 ), are often combined into one, and this provides the foundation of the entire culture."<sup>30</sup> In the West, Zhang would be taken to task for making the above move because he would be seen as advocating wishful thinking.

---

<sup>26</sup> 「孟子之所謂『求在我』，孔子之所謂『正己』，即我之所謂內也。」Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 71.

<sup>27</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 115.

<sup>28</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 119-20.

<sup>29</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 121.

<sup>30</sup> Zhang, *The Freedom of Spirit and National Culture*, 406-7.

Mou Zong-san ( 牟宗三 ) is another Chinese philosopher who resists strenuously the hegemony of scientism and defends the subjective way to know. Since he does not want to deny science, he makes the distinction between extensional truth and intensional truth. The former is independent of the subjective attitude, and can be objectively asserted; the latter is just the reverse.<sup>31</sup> However, both kinds of truth need to be acknowledged. Apart from scientific truth, there is also truth about our life: "Our life is holistic. Why do you only emphasize one aspect, only acknowledge the validity of scientific knowledge, and deny the truth of another kind? Scientific knowledge is only one aspect of human life as a whole. Why do you only say that this aspect is real and true but all the rest is not truth?"<sup>32</sup> The problem with scientism or logical positivism is that it absolutizes one aspect of life and then uses that to deny all the other aspects of life, e.g., morality and religion.<sup>33</sup> But morality and religion are exactly the most important things in life.

Concerning the words uttered by Buddhists, Daoists and Confucianists, "their truth are manifested in subjectivity."<sup>34</sup> While Ren and Dao involve feelings, they are *not only* feelings but also a form of rationality. Only human beings have guilty feelings. However, modern man seems to have no sense of guilt and they do not care about questions of right and wrong. They use science to banish the concept of guilt and reduce moral problems to technical problems. For Mou, this betokens a serious fall of humanity.<sup>35</sup> Modern sciences use various disciplines to study human beings as objects in the same way as they study the atoms. Human subjects are then reduced to external objects. On the contrary, we should study human beings using the existentialist approach. In this way, the real subject is preserved.<sup>36</sup> We should recover

---

<sup>31</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 21.

<sup>32</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 29.

<sup>36</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 30.

the role of the subject as subject. This is especially manifested in the human power to make moral judgment—the power of conscience. If we objectify human beings and refuse to treat them as subjects, we will never realize the existence of conscience.<sup>37</sup>

So the Ren of Confucius is a kind of learning centered around the subject and human life. However, Mou insists that this kind of intensional truth also has universality, a kind of concrete universality.<sup>38</sup> For example, "Ren is a general principle but it is not an abstract concept... Ren can be manifested concretely before our eyes in real lives."<sup>39</sup> (It is the same with filial piety.) The manifestation of Ren is inexhaustible, depending on the concrete situations, e.g. the type of relationship involved- parents, friends, spouses, etc. The practice of Ren is like musical performance. Even if we are playing the same piece of music, each occasion of performance is unique and possesses some elasticity. In the end, Mou urges the Western culture to reflect on the inadequacy of one-sided emphasis on extensional truth and come to appreciate the Eastern emphasis on intensional truth. However, he thinks the Westerners have not yet faced this problem squarely<sup>40</sup> — perhaps not all the Westerners, at least Kierkegaardians can be counted as his ally.

As for knowing, the major method used by Chinese philosophy is intuition, and little emphasis is put on discursive reasoning. In fact, discursive reasoning can be seen as an obstacle to knowing. For example, Chuang Tzu says, "Only when we abandon thinking and deliberation, we start to know the Dao."<sup>41</sup> So the knowledge of Dao

---

<sup>37</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 33.

<sup>39</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> Mou, *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*, 43.

<sup>41</sup> 莊子：「無思無慮始知道。」〈靈臺〉 Another similar saying is: 「黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。」（大宗師）

cannot be acquired by critical or inferential reasoning.<sup>42</sup> In fact we need to make efforts to empty our mind of active thinking (虛靜功夫) until it becomes a clear mirror.<sup>43</sup> In such a state, our mind will naturally reflect the knowledge of Dao, and then we can achieve sainthood. Of course there is also the famous parable about the skilled butcher who can perfectly perform his task, the dissecting of a cow, (庖丁解牛) without depending on his sight.<sup>44</sup> He needs only to be guided by his spiritual intuition or feeling(神會).

The Confucianist Zhang (張橫渠) also believes that the ultimate knowledge of the universe cannot be acquired by strenuous efforts to think but instead by the cultivation of one's self.<sup>45</sup> So the Chinese traditions basically agree that the capacity for intuitive knowing is intrinsic to everyone but at the same time it also needs to be properly cultivated. Knowing and being cannot be separated.

This enormous trust in intuition is hard to make sense of in the naturalistic worldview which posits the dichotomy between the subject and the objective world. Naturally there is also a dichotomy between the inner route to know and the external route to know. In contrast, the Chinese traditions believe in the unity of the subject and the object, and the union of Heaven and humans (天人合一), at least as an ideal.<sup>46</sup> So we again see that the metaphysical foundation will affect epistemology, and vice versa. This connection is spelt out by Wu Yi. He talks about the method of verification by enlightenment (證悟的方法) which also

---

<sup>42</sup> Also see: 「我們的哲學家自始便了解得魚忘筌的道理，不喜歡談太多的理論方法。孔子曾讚歎：『天何言哉，四時行焉，百物生焉』，莊子鑑於『言隱於榮華』，也主張『至言無言』。至於佛學在印度，本來是理論連篇，可是到了中國後……僧肇大呼『忘言』，道生高唱『頓悟』，到了六祖慧能更要『不假文字』，把一切言說，一切理論都拋在一邊。」 Wu, *The Life and Way of Chinese Philosophy*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> 莊子：「聖人之用心若鏡。」〈靈臺〉「至人之用心若鏡。」〈應帝王〉

<sup>44</sup> 「以神會而不以目視，官知止而神欲行，依乎天理。」〈養生主〉。「若一志，無聽之以耳，而聽之以心；無聽之以心，而聽之以氣。」〈人間世〉

<sup>45</sup> 張橫渠：「窮神知化，乃養盛自致，非思勉之所能強。」Also:《中庸》：「誠者，不勉而中，不思而得，從容中道，聖人也。」〈廿章〉

<sup>46</sup> 程明道：「仁者渾然與天地萬物為一體。」



depends on our intuitive understanding and insight. This is an activity of our life-subject which again derives from the life-subject of the universe. This connection is the basis of our capacity for verification by enlightenment: "by abandoning language, intellect and our secular experience, we use our heart to look inside and we use our spiritual eye to see through our life."<sup>47</sup> This is again the subjective method.

While contemporary Western philosophers are widely divided over the question whether morality is objective or subjective, the Chinese traditions firmly believe in a priori moral principles which are deeply rooted in humanity. The possibility of moral knowledge is based on the intrinsic moral capacity of the human subject. Mencius believes that four kinds of moral potentiality ( 四端 ) are intrinsic to the self ( 我固有之 ).<sup>48</sup> Confucius believes that if I aspire to be benevolent, I will become benevolent ( 我欲仁，斯仁至矣 ). This optimistic view certainly presupposes that moral actions are well within the scope of intrinsic human capacity.

This moral capacity is primarily practical rather than conceptual. So the Confucianists believe that we can and should possess moral integrity even if we do not know a word.<sup>49</sup> Moral judgment is based on moral intuition. In fact the distinction between right and wrong is regarded by Mencius as the beginning of wisdom/knowledge.<sup>50</sup> Conscience ( 良知 ) is a kind of knowing faculty and that part of the intellect (in the broad sense) which delivers the distinction between right and wrong.<sup>51</sup> They also believe that moral intuition is independent of learning and deliberation!<sup>52</sup> Moral intuition or introspection is using our heart to observe our heart. The origin of heart and conscience is

---

<sup>47</sup> Wu, *The Life and Way of Chinese Philosophy*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> 孟子：「人之所不學而能者，其良能也；所不慮而知者，其良知也。又曰，仁義禮智，非由外鑠我也，我固有之也。」

<sup>49</sup> 陸象山：「我若不識一字，也要做個堂堂正正的人。」

<sup>50</sup> 孟子：「是非之心，智之端也。」

<sup>51</sup> 王陽明：「良知為知是知非之心。」

<sup>52</sup> 孟子：「不學而能，不慮而知。」

Heaven.<sup>53</sup> So Heaven is both ontological and ethical. In the Chinese worldview, knowledge and morality coexist harmoniously from the very beginning.

According to Fu Pei-rong (傅佩榮), Confucius is not particularly interested in pure logic (e.g. rules of inference) but he sees logic as the presupposition for action, an instrument to guide actions which of course are related to moral judgment. They do not believe in the gap between facts and values because for them humanity (a fact) has an intrinsic inclination to the good (a value). These two are not separable. So the logic of facts and the norms about values are intertwined. The goal is ultimately a stable community and harmonious society.<sup>54</sup>

The Chinese talk about the "knowledge by sight and hearing" (見聞之知), and this may be the closest term to "sense experience." However, the content of hearing here is not mainly the sounds or audible sense data which the Western empiricists have dutifully studied, but the testimony from other people. As for sight, the Chinese readily believe that what we can really see include moral qualities in addition to sensible qualities. This means that we can have moral observations. For example, there is a famous Confucian saying that "when we see the good people, we aspire to be the same with them. When we see the bad people, we reflect on ourselves."<sup>55</sup>

We do not only have moral knowledge, but also knowledge of the Heaven (知天). In fact the two are inseparable. To begin with, our human nature is endowed by the Heaven.<sup>56</sup> So as we develop fully the (moral) potential of our heart-mind, we can know our nature. Once we know our nature, we can also know the Heaven.<sup>57</sup> Confucius says

---

<sup>53</sup> 孟子：「心之官則思，思則得之，不思則不得，此天之所與我者。」〈告子上〉

<sup>54</sup> Pei-rong Fu, *A New Introduction to Confucian Philosophy* (A Chinese Book: 傅佩榮：《儒家哲學新論》[台北：業強，1993]), 57-66.

<sup>55</sup> 「見賢思齊焉，見不賢而內自省也。」〈里仁〉

<sup>56</sup> 《中庸》：「天命之謂性。」

<sup>57</sup> 「盡其心者，知其性也，知其性，則知天矣。」〈盡心上〉 There is a similar route in 《中庸》 20 章：修身→事親→知人→知天。

that he knows the Heavenly mandate at the age of fifty.<sup>58</sup> To know the Heavenly mandate means that one knows both one's destiny and one's mission, and to act to fulfill one's mission in life.<sup>59</sup> Throughout his life, he has diligently searched for the ultimate origin of existence. Although this process is fraught with difficulties, he never blames the Heaven or other people. He also exclaims that while other people may not understand him, it is Heaven who really knows him and understand him.<sup>60</sup> It seems that between Confucius and the Heaven, there is a kind of reciprocal knowing relationship.

Since the Chinese conceive of human existence holistically, knowledge of Heaven is not separable from our emotions and actions. For example, those who really know the Heaven are expected to fear the Heaven (畏天) and to rejoice in the Heaven (樂天) at the same time. Confucius says that while the morally cultivated Gentlemen will fear the Heavenly mandate, the morally underdeveloped people will neither know the Heaven nor fear it.<sup>61</sup> Mencius believes that those who fear the Heaven can preserve their countries.<sup>62</sup> This is not a fear of punishment or bad luck but the fear that such an important task as the Heavenly mandate cannot be fulfilled in our lives. So a disciple of Confucius (曾子) describes his attitude this way, "it is as if I am facing a deep abyss and walking on thin ice."<sup>63</sup> (Although the motivation may not be exactly the same, this is to some extent similar to the attitude of fear and trembling Kierkegaard dwells on at length.)

Paradoxically, the emotion of fear can be combined with the emotion of rejoicing. When Confucius reviews his own life, he can say that he has worked so hard that he can forget to eat, he is so joyful

---

<sup>58</sup> 「三十而立，四十而不惑，五十而知天命，六十而順。」〈為政〉

<sup>59</sup> Fu, *A New Introduction to Confucian Philosophy*, 137.

<sup>60</sup> 「不怨天，不尤人，下學而上達，知我者其天乎？」〈憲問〉

<sup>61</sup> 孔子：君子「畏天命」，「小人不知天命而不畏也。」〈季氏〉

<sup>62</sup> 孟子：畏天者可以「以小事大」，可以「保其國」。〈梁惠王下〉 Also see 《易傳》：易之道，「其道甚大，百物不廢，懼以終始，其要無咎。」

<sup>63</sup> 「如臨深淵，如履薄冰。」

that he forgets all the sorrows, and he is not even aware of his own aging.<sup>64</sup> It is reasonable to believe that this kind of joy derives from his relationship with the Heaven, his knowledge of Heaven. Indeed, since this joyful emotion can transcend his physical needs (eating) and the biological process of aging, it has to have a spiritual and transcendent origin. In fact in *I Ching*, it is already said that "if one rejoices in Heaven and know the Destiny (Mandate), one will not be sorrowful."<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere the Chinese talk about knowing the Heavenly Mandate (one phrase consisting of two Chinese characters—知天命). Here these two characters are separated, and one is said to rejoice in Heaven (樂天) and know the Mandate (知命). Apparently the Heavenly mandate is just one single thing. Rejoicing and knowing are only two aspects of our relationship with Heaven. Emotion is closely related to cognition here or we may say knowing is embodied in our feeling. It is also interesting to observe that the above bears some similarity with the Christian tradition which affirms that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the joy of the Lord is our strength. Just as the Chinese fear and rejoice in Heaven at the same time, the Christians also fear and rejoice in the Lord at the same time.

Of course the fear of and rejoicing in the Heaven need to be manifested in concrete actions: obeying Heaven (順天). Confucius says that he learns to obey the Heaven at the age of sixty.<sup>66</sup> Mencius says, "Those who obey the Heaven will survive. Those who disobey the Heaven will perish."<sup>67</sup> So obedience is integral to knowledge of Heaven. Mencius' saying here may give the impression that the motive for obeying Heaven is purely utilitarian, i.e., to survive, but it is not really the case. For the Confucianists, the major content of the Heavenly mandate is Ren, and they are ready to sacrifice their lives for

---

<sup>64</sup> 孔子：「發憤忘食，樂以忘憂，不知老之將至云爾。」〈述而〉

<sup>65</sup> 《易傳》：「樂天知命，故不憂。」〈繫辭上〉

<sup>66</sup> The interpretation of this phrase (六十而耳順) is controversial. I follow Fu Pei-rong here by understanding this as「六十而順」.

<sup>67</sup> 孟子：「順天者存，逆天者亡。」〈離婁上〉

the fulfilling of Ren.<sup>68</sup> We can see that the Chinese ethical ideal (Ren) possesses a kind of absolute character.<sup>69</sup>

As we have said, knowing and being cannot be separated. Chuang Tzu says, "Only if we have a true person, we can then have true knowledge."<sup>70</sup> We also need to remember that moral intuition is not infallible. To ensure its reliability, our judgment cannot be clouded by our passions. So we need to cultivate our moral personality (修身) by beginning with a right heart (正心) and sincere will (誠意). For the Buddhists, the purification of the heart(明心) is the precondition of an insight into one's nature(見性; or finding one's true self).<sup>71</sup> In fact this is akin to a theme discussed by Kierkegaard's *Purity of Heart*, which is founded on the Christian view that the pure in heart can see God.

Knowing and feeling cannot be separated. Benevolence implies the feeling of empathy(感通之情). If we cannot have empathy with other people, e.g., feeling numb towards others' suffering, this would be against benevolence (麻木不仁), and hence also against humanity. We may even say that for the Chinese, cognitive activity is subordinate to our feelings. When the Chinese talk about "being reasonable," the most natural saying is "conforming to our feelings and our reason" (合情合理). While most Western philosophers will regard "conforming to our feelings" and "conforming to our reason" as two independent, and possibly antithetical, criteria, the Chinese find it quite natural to combine the two into a composite criterion. Moreover, feeling rather than reason takes the front seat there.

The Chinese put a great emphasis on praxis(重實踐). *The Doctrine of the Mean* advises us that learning, questioning, careful thinking and

---

<sup>68</sup> 「無求生以害仁，有殺身以成仁。」〈衛靈公〉

<sup>69</sup> Also see: 「朝聞道，夕死可矣。」〈里仁〉

<sup>70</sup> 莊子：「且有真人而後有真知。」〈大宗師〉

<sup>71</sup> 「對內做到明心以見性……明心就是撥除心中的妄念，見性就是徹悟自己的真我。」  
Wu, *The Life and Way of Chinese Philosophy*, 29.

critical discernment should be followed by consistent action.<sup>72</sup> Wang Yang-ming develops Mencius' emphasis upon immediacy into the teaching that knowledge and action are all of one piece and that there cannot be true knowledge without action (知行合一). Wang asserts the identity of the heart/mind and the principle (Hsin chi li 心即理). Our task is to extend our conscience's innate knowledge to the utmost (Chih-liang-chih 致良知). Tu Wei-ming (杜維明) has good discussions of this process.

He says, "Self-knowledge and self-transformation are not only closely related; they are also completely united."<sup>73</sup> "The way of sanctification...is an increasingly inclusive process. The goal of this process is the ultimate union of the structure of the self ... and the structure of the universe... This process of unification is also a process of verification."<sup>74</sup> "Knowing" in Mencius "does not only refer to cognitive knowledge, but also implies emotional identification or experiential appropriation... the more deeply he knows about his own existence, the more closely he approaches the common source of the human nature and cosmic creativity."<sup>75</sup> Here it seems to be the Chinese counterpart of Kierkegaard's idea of truth as subjectivity. Tu emphasizes that this process includes the integration of both mental and physical dimensions of the self.<sup>76</sup>

Throughout the whole process, one key factor is Cheng (誠) which can be translated as sincerity, completeness, or truth. (This seems to be the opposite of self-deception which Kierkegaard often talks about.) The process of self-transformation begins with a decision and resolution. "The structure of resolution is similar to the structure of Kierkegaard's existential decision: it requires a basic choice which

---

<sup>72</sup> 中庸：「博學之，審問之，慎思之，明辨之，篤行之。」

<sup>73</sup> Wei-ming Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation* (A Chinese Book: 杜維明：《人性與自我修養》[北京：中國和平，1988]), 78.

<sup>74</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 80.

<sup>75</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 81.

<sup>76</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 80-81.

needs to be manifested in practice; it affects the entire human existence, producing qualitative Zhanges; it is a continuous process which requires 'repeated verification'.<sup>77</sup> Tu seems to have appropriated some of Kierkegaard's ideas in his exposition of the Chinese philosophy but he also emphasizes that the analogy with Kierkegaard breaks down at some points.

The Confucianists believe that "this basic choice refers to the inner nature of humanity... it is a self-conscious choice to establish one's spiritual unity."<sup>78</sup> The Confucian transformation is different from Christianity's: "it is not a mutually exclusive leap of faith, but a return to a harmonious co-existence with one's self,"<sup>79</sup> the authentic self. Confucius says that he made a resolution to learn when he was fifteen. What he wants to learn is a self-conscious attempt to transform an existence defined by physiological and psychological characteristics into a life of moral-religious existence.<sup>80</sup> This transformation is akin to Kierkegaard's stages of life but Tu emphasizes that Confucius' resolution is not a mystical feeling about the transcendent God, but the experience of inner self-enlightenment which drives the dialectical development of the self.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, "the resolution is a present action which ties together the necessity of the past experiences and the freedom to create in the future."<sup>82</sup> Here it again parallels Kierkegaard's emphasis on the synthesis of necessity and freedom in the process of becoming oneself.

When Wang Yang-ming talks about the identity of knowledge and action,<sup>83</sup> his intention is to bridge the gap between heart-mind ( 心 ) and *li* (Principle 理 ) which Chu Hsi has allegedly opened up. As Tu

---

<sup>77</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 82.

<sup>78</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 82.

<sup>79</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 83.

<sup>80</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 83.

<sup>81</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 83.

<sup>82</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 84.

<sup>83</sup> 王陽明：「知是行之始，行是知之成。」

explains, "the resolution to become a saint itself is the foundation of the sainthood. Basically it is the necessary and sufficient condition for becoming a saint."<sup>84</sup> This resolution at the same time reflects a self-knowledge and is also an action. This is an action which enables a deeper self-knowledge. This is also a knowing which leads to significant self-transformation. In this inner resolution, the knowing and the action become a unity.<sup>85</sup> However, if the process of self-transformation is stopped, a man is no longer a man. He becomes paralyzed and numb. Becoming the opposite of Ren (麻木不仁), he is like a walking corpse (行屍走肉), lacking both Ren and self-knowledge. I think this miserable state has some parallel with Kierkegaard's spiritlessness. As Kresten Nordentorf explains, spiritlessness is the lowest form of despair. Such a person never comes to himself in *self-knowledge*; "his self does not exist; his innermost being is consumed and hollowed out in the service of nothingness; as the slave of vanity, ... he ceases to be a man."<sup>86</sup>

Again here we can see the intimate link between being and knowing. In line with Kierkegaard's idea, this is also a good illustration of the subjective way to know: "To understand humanity, it is not only to obtain some objective knowledge about it, but it must also involve the practice of this knowledge. In this way, action is not only changing the external world; it is also deepening and expanding self-knowledge."<sup>87</sup>

The Chinese way does have some difference from Kierkegaard's path of self-knowledge. Tu emphasizes that the power to become a saint can be found within humanity,<sup>88</sup> and the goal, according to Wang Yang-ming, is nothing less than the union of the self with the

---

<sup>84</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 86.

<sup>85</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 86.

<sup>86</sup> Kresten Nordentorf, *Kierkegaard's Psychology* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1972), 243.

<sup>87</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 87.

<sup>88</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 89.



Heave and Earth.<sup>89</sup> For Tu, full realization of self must occur in the context of human relationship. So self-realization is not a process of individualization; it mainly is a process of universal sharing or participation (普遍共有).<sup>90</sup> This is another major difference from Kierkegaard.

### V. Subjective Data as Evidence

The subjective way to know would take seriously human experiences apart from sense experience as data. People steeped in Western empiricist traditions tend to dismiss all of them as non-cognitive. I would argue that this dismissal is premature. To begin with, some human experiences are nearly universal, e.g. moral experience. Others may not be so, e.g., existential experiences, religious experiences. But many of them seem to be sufficiently shared by a substantial portion of people and happen recurrently that they can't be dismissed as just freaks. *If* they also fit into a larger picture, then their significance would be further vindicated. It is also admitted that neutral descriptions of such experiences are difficult to come by and they are much more theory-laden than ordinary perceptual experiences. However, bearing in mind that all experiences are theory-laden, this cautionary note is not a sufficient reason for ignoring completely the import of such experiences. Instead, this calls for more critical efforts.

These experiences are data in two senses. Firstly, whether they are cognitive or not, "that these experiences occur" is a *fact* and it demands a decent explanation why these experiences *can* and *do* occur. For example, even if our experience of freedom is an illusion in the sense that there is no such thing as freewill, *this illusion still needs to be explained*. Human subjectivity is part of the real world and any credible worldview has to give subjectivity a due place.

---

<sup>89</sup> 王陽明：「大人者以天地萬物為一體者也。」

<sup>90</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 93.

Secondly, if these experiences seem to disclose on reflection certain truth claims, then it is not clear why these reflective experiential claims should not be accorded at least minimal defeasible evidential force. For example, if my experience of freedom seems so real that I can't help believing that I am free, then am I not entitled to believe this unless there are reasons to the contrary?<sup>91</sup> It just begs the question to assume that these experiences are merely subjective and they cannot tell us profound truths about the reality. For example, concerning existentialism, Casserley writes: "The essence of existentialism is to insist that our own intimate experience of existence in the world (our experience of the reality of our freedom and of the way in which life again and again frustrates our freedom, our experience of hope and fear and unquenchable spiritual need, our experience of life and its inescapable fragility and impermanence as it confronts the necessity of death, our experience of love and its disappointment and disillusion) is the most vivid kind of experience of reality which we enjoy and that it constitutes the proper and necessary point of departure in philosophy."<sup>92</sup>

Casserley also thinks that existentialism is a protest to "the dead rationalism which reasons about everything except the concrete existence which is the most real thing that we know,"<sup>93</sup> and also to "the scientific empiricism which is empirical about everything except about our own existence and which patiently studies and humbly defers to every experience except the most vivid experience of all."<sup>94</sup> The protest seems to me justified.

---

<sup>91</sup> Alston argues that even sense experiences cannot be proved to be reliable non-circularly. There we are also relying on some kind of principle of *prima facie* trust. William Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>92</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 87.

<sup>93</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 87.

<sup>94</sup> Tu, *Humanity & Self-cultivation*, 88.

As explained above, for the Chinese the dichotomy between cognitive experience and emotion is far from obvious. Western scholars like John Macquarrie would agree: "while our senses make us aware of particular objects in the environment, emotions relate us to situations...Through the emotions we 'read' the environment and make the appropriate response ... We can therefore agree with Sartre that 'emotion is a way of apprehending the world'. Elsewhere, he says, 'what an emotion signifies is the totality of the relationships of the human reality to the world'." <sup>95</sup> Similarly, Cooper says, "if we do describe these 'moods' as 'subjective', there are other senses in which they are certainly *not* subjective. They are not, for example, irretrievably 'private' and incommunicable. Nor are they 'merely' subjective, in the sense of having no significant connection with how reality is. On the contrary, they are supposed to be feelings to which ... things are *known*." <sup>96</sup>

## **VI. The Anthropological Argument as an Inference to the Best Explanation**

The appeal to human experiences as evidence for God can be called an anthropological argument. It is best construed as an abduction, or inference to the best explanation. The goal is to compare, with regard to various types of human experience, the explanatory power of theism and the explanatory power of the naturalistic worldview. If a case can be made out that the human experiences considered are coherent with the theistic worldview and they are at least incongruous with naturalism, then the argument provides *some* support for the existence of God. Let  $H_t$  denotes the theistic hypothesis concerning man:

---

<sup>95</sup> John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 55-56; cf. John Macquarrie, *Studies in Christian Existentialism* (London: SCM, 1965), chp. 3.

<sup>96</sup> David E. Cooper, *Existentialism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 18.

$H_t \rightarrow$  Man is ultimately<sup>97</sup> created by God from the "dust" but also in His image with the purpose that he would freely choose to have personal communion with God and other human beings.

Note that this hypothesis is not only a bare theism but a sort of personal theism. The divine purpose of achieving personal communion is taken as part of the hypothesis. Of course it complicates the hypothesis a little bit and the latter clause specifying the divine purpose could be separated as an auxiliary hypothesis. However, I find that this way of formulation can highlight an overriding purpose which will prove to have explanatory power subsequently. It should also be noted here that in my view the *immanence* of God in creation, and in man particularly, is taken as seriously as his transcendence. Although God is not regarded as a constituent of the physical world, a finite thing among many other finite things, he is taken to be "the creative activity that underlies, interpenetrates, relates, and sustains them all. If ... God is conceived as the dynamic personal love who is the ultimate ground of all being and becoming, he could not be apprehended by any of the senses or by all of them together. But he might be known in personal communion, thought, and sensitive participation in experiences like ... depth, dependence, meaning, responsible action, and hope."<sup>98</sup>

God is also believed to be intimately connected with humanity: "Man comes to be through a process, in which God is redemptively involved. Every man, through the dynamics of his action, is carried forward to a crucial option in regard to life, in which he *either* opens himself to the infinite and thus enters into his true humanity *or* locks himself into his finite house and in this way undoes the foundation of his humanity ... the supernatural is present to human life as the possibility of man's true humanity."<sup>99</sup> This of course can be argued to be

---

<sup>97</sup> I leave open whether this creation is performed abruptly or gradually. That means the theistic hypothesis here does not entail Creationism as understood by the American Fundamentalists.

<sup>98</sup> Paul Schilling, *God Incognito* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1974), 181.

<sup>99</sup> Baum in Joseph P. Whelan ed., *The God Experience* (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 124.

implied by the original hypothesis and not an *ad hoc* accretion because God is the ground of the very nature of man, *imago dei*. Furthermore, this way of modeling God also throws light on a great deal of human experiences. For conciseness' sake, I would still just talk about 'theism' but it should be understood in the above way. Let  $H_n$  denotes the naturalistic hypothesis:

$H_n \rightarrow \text{Man is entirely}^{100}$  the physical product of naturalistic evolution.

Given an experiential data  $e_i$ , we can adopt Bayes' Theorem<sup>101</sup> and evaluate  $P(e_i/H_t)$  and  $P(e_i/H_n)$ . If the former is greater than the latter, it would be taken to mean that theism is confirmed by  $e_i$  relative to naturalism.<sup>102</sup> I cannot fully elaborate this argument here. As an illustration of how this argument proceeds, I apply this schema of argument to several types of human phenomena discussed by Kierkegaard below, and discuss whether they are better explained by the theistic hypothesis or by the naturalistic one.

## VII. Anxiety and Despair

Kierkegaard dwells more on experiences which are characterized by negative feelings. For example, there is *Angst* or anxiety, the vertigo of freedom, which reveals the incompleteness of human being, his

---

<sup>100</sup> That means the naturalistic hypothesis here is a *metaphysical* hypothesis which should be distinguished from the scientific theory of evolution. Even if science has established the fact of gradual evolution of life forms and emergence of complexity, this does not in itself warrant the claim that man is *entirely* a physical product. God can be the antecedent cause of the evolutionary process.

<sup>101</sup> I am aware of the various problems associated with the employment of Bayes' Theorem, e.g. the assignment of prior probability. Nevertheless, most of what I say by the formula can be stated independently. If one reject the formal apparatus, he can still treat that as a short form for what I intend to say.

<sup>102</sup> Of course, other alternatives are possible but they should explain all our data at least as well. Anyway, naturalism would commonly be taken to be one major alternative to theism.

non-being and contingency. It is a curious fact that negative feelings can be provoked when all seem so well and pleasurable: "If all we do is sleep and feed, if all we want is the fun of rutting in the ditch, if all that matters is our satisfaction or our happiness, then, these fellow-beasts ask: What does it mean? Disgust. But, why does our nature disgust us? ... What else could we possibly want save that which satisfies our wanting? This disgust is the origin of spirit. It begins, then, as a negation. It is the reaching out beyond ourselves."<sup>103</sup> The case of Tolstoy is a good illustration. He confessed this feeling when he had everything he wanted: "I felt that something has broken within me on which my life had always rested, that I had nothing left to hold on to... An invincible force impelled me to get rid of my existence... Behold me then, a man happy and in good health, hiding the rope in order not to hang myself."

Tolstoy himself found his experience strange because he "ought to have been completely happy" but he was not: "I had a good wife who loved me and whom I loved; good children and a large property... I was more respected by my kinsfolk." Yet he was tormented by these questions: "What will be the outcome of what I do today? Of what I shall do tomorrow? ... Why should I do anything? Is there in life any purpose which the inevitable death which awaits me does not undo and destroy? These questions are the simplest in the world... Without an answer to them, it is impossible, as I experienced, for life to go on. ... the very thing which was leading me to despair – the meaningless absurdity of life—is the only incontestable knowledge accessible to man."<sup>104</sup>

If a cockroach or a pig knows about Tolstoy's questions, would they find a resonance in their minds, or just find him amusing? If you are a naturalist and now have a chance to encounter a highly intelligent alien who comes to visit the earth. Besides expecting much more

---

<sup>103</sup> Michael Gelven, *Spirit and Existence* (London: Collins, 1990), 6.

<sup>104</sup> Leo Tolstoy, "My Confession," in Steven Sanders and David R. Cheney, eds., *The Meaning of Life* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), 15-24.

advanced science and technology, do you expect him to be tormented by Tolstoy's questions? I doubt it. *Homo sapiens* is indeed a curious species.

Suppose we find out that the alien is not only afflicted by abstract and impractical questions like the meaning of the alien's life, but also often has experiences of despair which drive him to the edge of committing suicide (as Tolstoy was tempted to). Wouldn't it be even more curious? After all, the most fundamental and the strongest instinct of a biological species should be the will to survive. According to a survey in Hong Kong, 36% of the students in the primary and secondary schools have thought of committing suicide.<sup>105</sup> In one shocking case, one teenage girl suffering from the breaking up of a relationship wanted to kill herself. Her two teenage friends, who apparently did not have any intense suffering, showed 'solidarity' by killing themselves too. Their actions were indeed more inexplicable than that of the girl who suffered from a broken relationship- but have you seen a cat commit suicide because of a broken relationship with other cats? Humans do have a will to survive but strangely their urge to find love or meaning may at times trump this will.

Despair often results from alienation from oneself, others, and the cosmos. Kierkegaard's analysis (see *Sickness unto Death*) shows that various ways of missing one's true self (e.g., due to living exclusively on the aesthetic plane) will lead to *despair*. Of course, the biological advantages of finding one's true self are far from obvious. If despair can drive one to eliminate one's being, together with *his whole world*, then this experience is not only about this or that event, but seems to reflect a judgment about the Whole, even an experience of the Whole in absence. So according to Marcel, despair is a "total submission to [the] void, in such a way as to allow oneself to be dissolved interiorly by it. The closed time of despair is a sort of counter-eternity, an eternity forced

---

<sup>105</sup> Ming Pao, March 28, 2002.

back on itself, the eternity of hell."<sup>106</sup> Despair seems to be unique to the human species which is constrained by biological necessities but at the same time plagued by the sense of the Eternal.

When we survey these kinds of negative feelings, we can't help surprised by the extravagance of the human psyche. Perhaps such experiences can make a poet, a novelist or a tragic hero. But all these emotions, if not positively "harmful", hardly contribute to our animal survival. It looks more and more that the "natural" can't fathom the depth of the human spirit.

### **VIII. Quest for Meaning, Wholeness and Identity**

The above negative experiences in fact presuppose the spiritual quest and point to the restlessness of human spirit as if nothing finite can satisfy it. Many of us may not explicitly manifest the quest for meaning. However, in our ceaseless activities, strivings and perhaps also our moments of boredom, disgust, or despair, the need to affirm a meaningful existence seems to show forth. This is all the more striking if we put the matter into historical perspective. We may think the quest for meaning is only due to the suffering and fragility of lives in ancient and pre-modern societies. However, in many modern societies, the goals of liberation from material suffering and hardship, sickness and oppression have been significantly achieved. We have got rid of the worst kinds of drudgery and achieved an unprecedented freedom.

So we should expect a great increase in happiness. Yet the modern society is characterised by a sense of alienation, futility and meaninglessness, and not by an increase in contentment. After we are relieved from our more immediate anxieties, we still need to confront our existence as individuals, but, it seems to be individuality in a void,

---

<sup>106</sup> Cited in Aidan Nichols, *A Grammar of Consent* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1991), 158.



with nowhere to go. And *yet we still want to go somewhere*. In the words of Fromm: "the observable data show most clearly that our kind of 'pursuit of happiness' does not produce well-being. We are a society of notoriously unhappy people: lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive, dependent- people who are glad when we have killed the time we are trying so hard to save."<sup>107</sup> So the whole historical experiment seems to show that the 'pursuit of happiness' can't be the final answer to the question of meaning.

The same conclusion can be drawn from reflection on the opposite extreme: experience of extreme suffering and deprivation. Frankl speaks of the "purgatory" which he himself endured in the concentration camp after the loss of the manuscript of his first book:

Later, when my own death seemed imminent, I asked myself what my life had been for. Nothing was left which would survive me. No child of my own. Not even a spiritual child such as the manuscript. But after wrestling with my despair for hours, shivering from typhus fever, I finally asked myself what sort of meaning could depend on whether a manuscript of mine was printed. I would not give a damn for it. But if there is a meaning, it is unconditional meaning, and neither suffering nor dying can detract from it.<sup>108</sup>

So the removal of suffering alone cannot satisfy the will to meaning; nor the inflicting of suffering can quench the will to meaning. The intimation is that if it is to be satisfied, it can't depend on finite and contingent factors.

We have already talked about the quests for identity and wholeness. The quest for identity itself is a puzzling phenomenon. A psychologist asks: "How did man's need for identity evolve? Before Darwin the answer was clear: because God created Adam in His image, as a counterplayer of His identity ... I admit to not having come up with

---

<sup>107</sup> Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 5-6.

<sup>108</sup> Cited in Avery Dulles, "An Apologetics of Hope," in *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, ed. Joseph P. Whelan (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 252.

any better explanation."<sup>109</sup> The search for identity is closely connected with the search for wholeness.

According to Jung, individuation is achieved through systematic confrontation, step by step, between the ego and the contents of the unconscious. For him, the conscious ego has to be distinguished from the Self, the transcendent center of personality, which organizes all the psychic functions, the unknown yet benevolent power to whom the person must submit himself in order to achieve wholeness. Jung also suggests that "Christ" is actually the symbol of the Self. We don't need to endorse the whole Jungian theory to accept his insight that human beings are endowed with a drive to wholeness and integration, and this is the condition for true human fulfilment. Somehow, to achieve genuine wholeness and fulfilment, the ego has to achieve a proper relation with *something other than the conscious ego*. So the quest for wholeness together with the quest for meaning seem to point *beyond* the finite realm by its dynamics.

### **IX. Assessment**

When we consider human experiences, we arrive at a set of data:

- Human beings have a distinct set of spiritual needs.
- Human beings are characterized by a dynamic quest for meaning, wholeness or identity.
- There are human experiences of anxiety, alienation, and despair.

The pattern of spiritual needs and the dynamism can be neatly explained by the spiritual origin of human being: If theism is true, then human subjectivity is indeed made for the Eternal and the Infinite. So it is not surprising to find a human tendency to surpass continually our own achieved satisfactions incessantly. As Evans

---

<sup>109</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York: W.W. Norton. 1969), 40.

points out, "Our very need for meaning is part of that something. What gave rise to a creature with such deep-felt spiritual needs? I can best understand myself as a creature made in God's image, created to commune with God."<sup>110</sup>

The above framework can also explain the experience of despair. If there is indeed an implicit drive to achieve a proper relationship with the Infinite, and this is originating from our *imago dei*, then it is to be expected that such relationship is also the source of our *telos*, our meaning and wholeness. If we neglect this, e.g., by leading an entirely aesthetic existence, we are naturally driven to despair. Indeed the unconditioned seriousness of these experiences can be interpreted as an "expression of the presence of the divine in the experience of their separation from it."<sup>111</sup>

All our existential experiences converge on this observation: the extravagance of the human psyche or spirit *from the naturalistic perspective*. We can't help wonder: why did these particular patterns of archetypes, particular capacities for peak experiences and our craving for infinite love, etc., emerge? Man did not make up the structure of his own psyche. However, the convergence of human psychological structures and theological framework is striking:

the psyche is an endlessly convoluted form, full of phenomena which have little obvious relation to survival. The positive function of religion in primitive societies is often pointed to as the reason for its development. Religious beliefs, it is said, comforted man, stabilized society and offered primitive explanations for mysterious phenomena. Since the contrary may also be asserted with equal force (religion frightened man, caused stagnation in society and spread superstitious misinformation), *the argument for the utility of religion fails to explain the extraordinary energy which has poured into the evolution of the human psyche and its various theophanies. Far from having developed*

---

<sup>110</sup> Stephen Evans, *Existentialism: The Philosophy of Despair & the Quest for Hope* (Dallas, Texas: Zondervan, 1984), 116.

<sup>111</sup> Schilling, *God Incognito*, 120.

*along clean, functional lines, the psyche seems a singularly extravagant anomaly.*<sup>112</sup>

Maybe this is a fluke of the evolutionary process? I am doubtful. Firstly, I deny that such "explanations" have much *positive* explanatory power. Secondly, we can assemble a large number of "signals of transcendence" which point in the same direction.<sup>113</sup> A "fluke explanation" may be acceptable for several of them but it becomes increasingly *ad hoc* and unlikely if such "flukes" accumulate in a determinate fashion. So the more coherent theistic explanation is indeed preferable.

Schilling, after a similar survey, asks, "Why should we unquestioningly accept what is subject to examination by the senses as alone definitive of reality? It is fair enough to ask that religious assertions be judged by what happens in the world, but the world as it presents in day-to-day human experience is much broader and deeper than that known to the senses, and many things are happening there which demand other criteria of truth. In that world are I-Thou relations of friendship and love, appreciations of beauty, claims of conscience, and intimations of a presence calling forth ultimate concern. To rule these out as irrelevant to our human quest for dependable knowledge of the world because they do not fit a preconceived norm entails a drastic and unsupportable impoverishment of our existence." Therefore: "If the key prescribed does not fit all the doors of human experience, it is better to look for another key or keys than to maintain categorically that all doors but one have nothing behind them."<sup>114</sup>

I admit that for parsimony's sake, perhaps several pieces of the data can be discarded without plausible explanation. That the whole lot which reinforces one another should be dismissed is implausible.

---

<sup>112</sup> Tenfelde Clasby, "Jungian Archetypes and the Transcendent Image," in *The Existence of God*, eds. John R. Jacobson and Robert Lloyd Mitchell (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 88; italics mine.

<sup>113</sup> See Kai-man Kwan, *The Rainbow of Experiences, Critical Trust, and God: A Defense of Holistic Empiricism* (New York: Continuum, 2011) which is an entire book devoted to this argument).

<sup>114</sup> Schilling, *God Incognito*, 187.

Moreover, it seems to be the case that "human experience, when its inner order and coherence are drawn out by reason, proves to have a theistic order and coherence that are only fully explicable in terms of the reality of God. ... It is... a cumulation of experiential cues (many of them apparently... There is, it seems, an irreducible plurality and a richness in the experiential indicators of God, just as there is in the texture of experience itself."<sup>115</sup> The idea is that if we look at our diverse experiences from the theistic perspective, they seem to interlock with one another and enhance one another in view of the divine purpose.

This is all the more significant when the rival hypothesis  $H_n$  seems to fail to exhibit coherence with these data of human experiences. It is doubtful that it is compatible with the fact of (libertarian) freedom. Its categories are more or less incongruous with those of the human experiences. Still more significant is its failure to exhibit the consilience of the data: it has to appeal to reductions, *ad hoc* hypotheses, denial of the prima facie data, "fluke explanations," etc. On  $H_n$ , these diverse human experiences are just *disparate* excrescences and epiphenomena. So for each phenomenon it has to cook up a tailored-made "explanation". If we take all the data together and consider  $P(e_1, e_2, \dots / H_n)$ , this probability will quickly dwindle if all the explanations of the data are disparate and independent.<sup>116</sup> I have argued that it is otherwise with  $H_t$ . Naturalism could still be true; yet it does not fare very well in the coherence test against our human experiences.

Before drawing the conclusion, let us consider again the range of relevant experiences: "The psyche in open-ended desiring; the spirit in its transparency to truth; the *zoon logikon* or 'speech-using animal' who finds the language of perfection on his or her lips; the sense of the fragility of beings; the witness of mystical encounter; the inner

---

<sup>115</sup> Nichols, *A Grammar of Consent*, 1.

<sup>116</sup> It seems to me the basic problem is that we can easily conceive that evolution can throw up a more prudential, pragmatic being without transcendental temptation, existential quest, etc. We can grant that it is still conscious and rational, e.g., Mr. Spock in Star Trek. (Assuming evolution can explain consciousness and rationality.)

contradictions of the human being that call for a resolution from beyond themselves; the imperiousness of conscience; the existential demands of becoming a self; the phenomenon of hope; the surprise of joy. Are these merely facts about the human condition, or are they significant facts, facts which, when interpreted in terms of each other, become signs of, pointers to, the reality of God?"<sup>117</sup> I think it is indeed striking that the whole range of data has a consilience in relation to a theistic worldview.

### **X. Conclusion: Towards a Holistic Empiricism**

When Kierkegaard denies the validity of natural theology, he seems to assume the *classical conception of reason*, i.e. reason is built on infallible foundations and inference can confer certainty. According to this conception, not only religion, but also many moral and historical truths can't be proved. Even in the West, similar and other kinds of critique have led to the demise of narrow empiricism and foundationalism. Now many modern philosophers call for a more modest definition of reason which, say, recognizes the validity of inference to the best explanation and cumulative argument. Under this new conception, it may not be true to say religion has whatsoever no rational support.

In any case, human experiences are all "subjective" to some extent, and subjective experiences, which Kierkegaard's analysis of human existence has highlighted, should be taken seriously as metaphysical data relevant to the rational assessment of worldviews. Furthermore, if we expand the concept of experience to include moral experience, existential experience and religious experience (to which Kierkegaard actually appeals), reason and passion are no longer mutually exclusive categories. Richard Swinburne has proposed the Principle of Credulity (renamed by me as the Principle of Critical Trust) as a fundamental

---

<sup>117</sup> Nichols, *A Grammar of Consent*, 173.

principle of rationality which accords all these experiences some prima facie evidential force. I have extensively defended this epistemological approach, inclusive empiricism, in Part I of my book.<sup>118</sup> If this approach is plausible, then the subjective way of knowing is further vindicated. The major thrust of the Chinese traditions seems to be an ally to this approach.

Of course, not all Chinese scholars are happy with the Chinese traditions, especially those who deem modernization important. For example, Wei criticizes Chinese philosophy for its lack of critical analysis and arguments, which, in his view, have led to much dogmatism and obscurantism.<sup>119</sup> In a later work, he approvingly introduces Wu Zhi-hui's critique of intuition and conscience: they should be controlled by the intellect and not be regarded as something mysterious. Without the help of the intellect, intuition becomes clueless, senseless and bankrupt.<sup>120</sup> Wei concurs, "The major manifestation of the intellect is knowledge. However, the Confucianist approach to morality excludes knowledge from the very beginning. So conscience becomes the final basis for morality."<sup>121</sup> Wu Zhan-liang (吳展良) is also critical of the Chinese conservatives' rejection of Western rationalism. He thinks that this would make the implementation of the rule of law, science and democracy, the separation of church and state and the respect for human rights all difficult. This is a kind of Counter-Enlightenment which is detrimental to the process of modernization.<sup>122</sup>

I think Wei's criticism is misleading. In fact he is denying the independent realm of moral knowledge. This seems to be too positivist.

---

<sup>118</sup> Kwan, *The Rainbow of Experiences, Critical Trust, and God*.

<sup>119</sup> Wei, *Introduction to Chinese Culture*, 108.

<sup>120</sup> Zheng-tong Wei, *A Critical Evaluation of Chinese Philosophical Thought* (A Chinese Book: 韋政通：《中國哲學思想批判》[台北：水牛，1992]), 256.

<sup>121</sup> Wei, *A Critical Evaluation of Chinese Philosophical Thought*, 256.

<sup>122</sup> Zhan-liang Wu, "The Starting Point of Contemporary Chinese Conservatism: Liang Shu-ming's Thought on Creative Creativity and His Criticism of Western Rationalism," A Chinese article: 吳展良：〈中國現代保守主義的起點：梁漱溟的生生思想及其對西方理性主義的批評〉，載劉述先編：《當代儒學論集：傳統與創新》[台北：中研院文哲所，1995]), 78-80.

Wei has also exaggerated the role of empirical knowledge in ethics. Moral intuitions are still indispensable. Wu Zhan-liang has a very simplistic analysis of the roots of the success of Western culture. I agree that for the success of the rule of law, science, democracy, and human rights, we do need to promote some form of *rational spirit* but it is a mistake to attribute the success of all these to *rationalism*. For example, it is notoriously difficult to find a purely rationalistic foundation for human rights. On the contrary, it is at least arguable that the idea of human rights at least partly derived from deep religious values.<sup>123</sup>

I think empirical knowledge and intuitive/subjective knowledge are not mutually exclusive. It is true that the Chinese traditions have paid too little attention to empirical knowledge in the past<sup>124</sup> but the emphasis on the subjective way to know is a wisdom that should not be abandoned either. Wu Yi even thinks that in comparison with Western philosophy, Chinese philosophy occupies a more important role and shoulders a greater task concerning the shaping of the future culture of the world.<sup>125</sup> I am less optimistic than Wu Yi about the role of Chinese philosophy but I certainly agree that both Western and Chinese traditions can join hands in the defense of a holistic human existence, including holistic ways of knowing.

While in the West sometimes we contrast theology from above with theology from below, Cheng Chung-ying thinks that contemporary Confucianists need to use both the top-down approach (上學下達) and the bottom-up approach (下學上達). The former refers to

---

<sup>123</sup> See Kai-man Kwan, "Can Christian Theology Provide a Foundation for Human Rights?" *CGST Journal* 43 (July 2007): 205-28; Kai-man Kwan, "Human Rights without God: Can Naturalism Provide the Foundation for Human Rights?" *CGST Journal* 47 (July 2009): 157-80 for more discussions of these problems.

<sup>124</sup> For example, see: 「莊子深感宇宙的道理奧妙莫測，不可窮究，便說：『六合之外，聖人存而不論』。可見他們對於純粹的知識問題，似乎都沒有太大的興趣。……墨子書中的墨經是討論知識問題的，但它們的存在乃是為了解決兼愛非攻的問題。… 中國哲學史上連這一點僅有的知識論，也只是曇花一現。……也不講究捕捉外在知識的工具——理論方法。」 Wu, *The Life and Way of Chinese Philosophy*, 9.

<sup>125</sup> Wu, *The Life and Way of Chinese Philosophy*, 36.



rational a priori exploration (introspective exploration beginning with the moral conscience), and the latter refers to empirical facts and proof. "Both are equally important, and are mutually supportive and fulfilling."<sup>126</sup> "Besides scientific knowledge we also have subjective knowing and experience, but this kind of knowing cannot replace scientific knowledge."<sup>127</sup> So Cheng is proposing the integration of the scientific way of knowing and the subjective way of knowing, and I agree this is the right direction to go. In my recent book *The Rainbow of Experiences*,<sup>128</sup> I have tried to outline a kind of holistic empiricism which takes seriously various kinds of human experience at the same time, including sense experience, moral experience, aesthetic experience, religious experience and so on. Of course, further exploration of this framework is much needed but this has to await another occasion.

---

<sup>126</sup> Chung-ying Cheng, "The Foundation of Contemporary Neo-Confucianism: The Synthesis of Benevolence and Humanity," (A Chinese article: 成中英：〈現代新儒學建立的基礎：「仁學」與「人學」合一之道〉，載周群振等著：《當代新儒學論文集·內聖篇》[台北：文津，1991])，120.

<sup>127</sup> Cheng, "The Foundation of Contemporary Neo-Confucianism," 129.

<sup>128</sup> Kwan, *The Rainbow of Experiences, Critical Trust, and God*.

## ABSTRACT

Kierkegaard is called the father of existentialism, & existentialism tends to emphasize the irrational side of man. Kierkegaard talks about truth as subjectivity and faith as intense embracing of objective uncertainty. For many people, he is obviously a foe of natural theology. However, this paper will argue that Kierkegaard's work as a whole, regardless of his original intention, is not *in fact* inimical to the project of natural theology, especially for a Chinese mind, which has a more holistic understanding of reason and experience. We are also open to the possibility that "subjective" experiences from our heart, e.g., moral experiences, can reveal the nature of the universe.

I first argue for a less extreme interpretation of Kierkegaard, & then show that the Chinese Traditions are in fact congenial to the idea of the subjective way to truth. I further defend this approach by arguing that human experiences should also be treated as evidential data. Then I outline the Anthropological Argument for God, using human experiences as evidence. I conclude that both Kierkegaard & the Chinese traditions converge on the legitimacy of the subjective way to truth, & it is not just compatible with natural theology, but can also contribute to the cumulative case for God.

## 撮 要

祈克果被稱為存在主義之父，而存在主義比較重視人非理性一面。祈克果提倡「主體性是真理」和「信心就是熱情地擁抱客觀的不確定性」等理念，因此，很多人都認為他是自然神學的敵人。然而，本文會論證祈克果的整體作品（無論他原來的意圖為何），其實並非與自然神學水火不容。特別對中國傳統而言，我們對理性和經驗都有更整全的理解，我們也對主體經驗（如道德經驗）能揭示實在真相的可能性，持開放的態度。

我首先會提出對祈克果一個較溫和的詮釋，然後指出中國傳統與尋找真理的主體進路是吻合的。我論證人類的主體經驗也應該視作證據，接着在這些經驗的基礎之上，勾劃支持上帝的人類學論證。我的結論是，祈克果與中國傳統不謀而合，都維護尋找真理的主體進路的合法性。這種進路不單沒有與自然神學矛盾，更能對支持上帝的累積論證作出貢獻。