

This is the text of my presentation in the International Conference “Kant in Asia 2” (KIA2), Hong Kong Baptist University, 17th-20th December, 2016. I am grateful to the Organizing Committee of the Conference for permitting me to publish it online.

これは、2016年12月17-20日、香港浸會大學に於ける国際学会“Kant in Asia 2”(KIA2)での発表の原文である。同学会組織委員会のご好意により、電子的公開を許可された。そのことに謝意を表します。 氷見 潔

I

The original word for “critique” (Ge. “Kritik”) is the Greek “κριτική” which is an adjective derived from the verb “κρίνω.” “κρίνω” means: separate, put asunder, or distinguish. Therefore, “κριτική” means: able to discern. We have reasons for believing that Kant was aware of the word’s Greek origin, when he titled his major work the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant defines “critique” in the work as follows:

... this (sc. critique as the third step following the dogmatic and the skeptical) is not the censorship but the critique of pure reason, whereby not merely **limits** but rather the determinate **boundaries** of it—not merely ignorance in one part or another but ignorance in regard to all possible questions of a certain sort—are not merely suspected but are proved from principles.

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From this statement, we recognize that Kant understands “critique” as the procedure that human reason, in investigating its own faculties, discerns the knowable from the unknowable and thus determinately proves its own boundaries.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* is divided into two main parts: the “Transcendental doctrine of elements” and the “Transcendental doctrine of method,” of which the former is significantly longer and includes exhaustive arguments. The “Transcendental doctrine of elements” is divided into two sections: the “Transcendental aesthetic” and the “Transcendental logic.” The latter is in turn divided into two subdivisions: the “Transcendental analytic” and the “Transcendental dialectic.” In the “Transcendental aesthetic,” Kant considers the *a priori* contributions of the forms of the sensibility, space

and time, to our knowledge. In the “Transcendental analytic”, he considers the *a priori* contributions of the pure concepts of the understanding, the categories, to our knowledge. Thus, he verifies the generality and the necessity of the synthetic judgments *a priori* and defends scientific knowledge against empiricism as well as David Hume’s skepticism deriving from it. In the “Transcendental dialectic”, Kant exposes the spurious contributions of the ideas of pure reason to our knowledge and, thus, discredits the inferences of the traditional metaphysics that Christian Wolff’s dogmatism expounds. Hence, we have reasons for characterizing the “Transcendental aesthetic” as well as the “Transcendental analytic” as the constructive parts, the “Transcendental dialectic” as the destructive part of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

However, Kant explains in the “Transcendental aesthetic” that space and time are pertinent to mere appearance. In other words, he argues that space and time show things not in themselves, but only as they appear to us. In the “Transcendental analytic”, he also restricts the use of the pure concepts of the understanding to sensible data, explaining that they are applicable only to what is given to us in the experience in space and time. Therefore, in these two parts, he places boundaries between the knowable and the unknowable and discerns the former from the latter. Then, in “Transcendental dialectic,” he refutes the cognitions of traditional metaphysics because it disregards the boundaries and assumes to know what is unknowable. Kant declares the topics of traditional metaphysics, the immortality of the soul, the world as a whole, and the existence of God, to be mere spurious cognitions. The *Critique of Pure Reason* culminates in the rejection of the metaphysical tradition’s authority.

However, we must not assume that the work results in thorough destruction. On the contrary, it provides human reason with a new model of metaphysics built upon the debris of traditional metaphysics. Although Kant discredits the latter, he acknowledges that the immortality of the soul, the world as a whole, and the existence of God are the objects required to satisfy the natural human disposition. Thus, they are somehow affirmed. In this context, Kant obviously emphasizes the distinction between the unknowable and the unthinkable. Unknowable does not necessarily mean unthinkable. There are numerous of thinkable things that are unknowable. The immortality of the soul, freedom as the first cause of the world-process, and the existence of God are at least thinkable, because human reason can formally and indefinitely relate its pure concepts or ideas to them, regardless of the restriction to the sensible experience. Therefore, in so far as they are required for human life, their reality should be recognized in another way than the theoretical. The consideration of the theoretical use of human reason has demonstrated that these things are unknowable. The substitutive consideration of

another, that is, the practical use of human reason will be able to provide them, as unknowable but thinkable, with a new kind of credibility. Thus, Kant manages to discern and to place the boundaries between the theoretical and the practical use of human reason.

In 1788, seven years after the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant published the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the second work of his critical philosophy. In this work, he explicates the practical use of human reason. The principle peculiar to this realm is the moral law, which we can regard as the axiom of practical reason. Morality consists in the human will's voluntary compliance with the moral law. The immortality of the soul, the freedom of the will, and the existence of God are required for morality. They are recognized as the postulates of practical reason. The postulates "are not theoretical dogmas but presuppositions having a necessarily practical reference and thus, although they do not indeed extend speculative cognition, they give objective reality to the ideas of speculative reason in general (by means of their reference to what is practical) and justify its holding concepts even the possibility of which it could not otherwise presume to affirm." (*Practical Philosophy*, Cambridge edition, p.246). The immortality of the soul, the freedom of the will, and the existence of God are affirmed on the condition that our human will voluntarily complies with the moral law which human reason imposes on itself. Thus, Kant succeeds in replacing traditional metaphysics with science, a new model of metaphysics that is based on the moral faith of human reason. In 1787, one year before the appearance of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he already indicates his own confidence in the preface to the second edition of the *First Critique*:

...Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith; and the dogmatism of metaphysics, i.e., the prejudice that without criticism reason can make progress in metaphysics, is the true source of all unbelief conflicting with morality, which unbelief is always very dogmatic.

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II

Therefore, we can regard the motto, "discerning the knowable from the unknowable," as representing the spirit of critical philosophy. Confucius had already stated the same motto approximately 2,300 years before the appearance of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

The Master said, 'Yu, shall I tell you what it is to know. To say you know when you know, and to say you do not when you do not, that is knowledge.

子曰、由、誨女知之乎、知之爲知之、不知爲不知、是知也。

The Analects, 論語 II. 17

We can justly say that this passage succinctly represents the spirit of critical philosophy. It is also noteworthy that the admonition is directed to Yu, or Tzu-lu 子路, one of Confucius's ablest disciples who has an inclination toward hasty judgment and is suggestive of a dogmatist.

One may wonder if we can consider Confucius a critical philosopher, since it is difficult to reconstruct his philosophical thought as a systematic whole from the fragmentary statements recorded in the *Analects*. However, we should consider his life as the background for his teachings. Then we can imagine him to be seeking truth through the method of critique and recognize him as a precursor to Immanuel Kant. It is said that Confucius came from a family of *ju* (儒), the priests that presided over the ancestor cult with incantatory performances. In the ancient East-Asian society, the ancestor cult was the most important institution that cultivated humanity. While governed by convention, it was blended with superstitious and dogmatic elements. Confucius as a young *ju* was studious in his efforts to discern the knowable from the unknowable. His reason winnowed the true, for humanity valuable cognitions from the mere spurious ones, affirming the former in the light of the practical use of reason, from the viewpoint of morality. Thus he succeeded in making a new model of *ju* as philosopher. He once spoke to a disciple about his intention:

The master said to Tzu-hsia, 'Be a gentleman *ju* (君子儒), not a petty *ju* (小人儒).'

子謂子夏曰、女爲君子儒、無爲小人儒。

The Analects, 論語 VI. 13

As the moral law is the highest principle of practical reason for Kant, Confucius considers the *t'ien ming* (天命 Heaven's Decree) the highest principle for human practical reason. Morality consists in the human will's voluntary compliance with the *t'ien ming*, and the cardinal virtues, such as *li* (禮 the observance of the rites) and *jen* (仁 the benevolence), that stem from that compliance, are regarded as the consequences of replacing the traditional dogmata with new moral philosophy. In a well-known passage of the *Analects*, Confucius reminisces about his personal development, progressing from the critical study of ritual code to complete morality:

The master said, 'At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line.'

子曰、吾十有五而志乎學、三十而立、四十而不惑、五十而知天命、六十而耳順、七十而從心所欲、不踰矩。

The Analects, 論語 II. 4

The statement, which Confucius uttered when Huan T'ui in Sung made an attempt on his life, indicates that his belief in the *t'ien ming* as the principle of morality is unshakable:

The master said, 'Heaven is author of the virtue that is in me. What can Huan T'ui do to me?'

子曰、天生德於予、桓魋其如予何。

The Analects, 論語 VII. 22

However, we can interpret the following passages as indicating how resolutely Confucius rejected supernatural knowledge and concentrated his efforts on mundane moral consideration:

The topics the Master did not speak of were prodigies, force, disorder and gods.

子不語怪力亂神

The Analects, 論語 VII. 20

Chi-lu asked how the spirits of the dead and the gods should be served. The Master said 'You are not able even to serve man. How can you serve the spirits?' 'May I ask about death?' 'You do not understand even life. How can you understand death?'

季路問事鬼神、子曰、未能事人、焉能事鬼、曰敢問死、未知生、焉知死。

The Analects, 論語 XI. 12

Confucius admonishes here again Chi-lu, which is another name for Tzu-lu, against the hasty assertion of the existence of the deities as well as the afterlife, or the immortality of the soul. However, we must notice the difference between Confucius

and Kant. As I previously stated, Kant manages to affirm the reality of metaphysical objects, the freedom of the will, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, through the postulates of practical reason. He asserts, although in another perspective than that of theoretical knowledge, that God exists, the human will is free, and that the soul is immortal. In contrast, Confucius refrains from affirming metaphysical objects, as the previously mentioned passage shows us. He seems to encourage his disciples to the devotion to the *t'ien ming*, regardless of the effects. We can probably say that, as a moral philosopher, he preserves more skeptical characteristics than Kant. However, this difference must not be made too significant. Although Confucius does not propound any postulates, he obviously regards devotion to the *t'ien ming* as involving the confidence of the freedom of the will. We can confirm that from the latter half of his aforementioned reminiscences: 'at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line.' As for the existence of the deities and the immortality of the soul, Confucius declares their reality in the performance of rites:

'Sacrifice as if present' is taken to mean 'sacrifice to the gods as if the gods were present.' The Master, however, said, 'Unless I take part in a sacrifice, it is as if I did not sacrifice.'

祭如在、祭神如神在、子曰、吾不與祭、如不祭。

The Analects, 論語 III. 12

If a gentleman *ju* performs the rite for the ancestor cult, it appears as if the deities as well as the souls of the ancestors were present. This "as if" should not be taken to mean a spurious fabrication, but to affirm their real presence to the moral person, the gentleman *ju*, in his dutiful act. Therefore, the participation in the rite is a way for Confucius to assure himself of his obtained morality. Thus, we can see that Confucius's confidence in the reality of metaphysical objects is vividly represented in an almost intuitive form. We should appreciate that Confucius's confidence, in comparison with Kant, is so firm that he has no need to think of something like the postulates of practical reason.

Furthermore, we can point out that Confucius's approach to the end object of the moral act is much more positive than that of Kant. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant mentions the highest good as the end object of the moral act, or of the will determined by the moral law. The highest good implies the completion of morality in the human

being and its deserved consequences for the world. Its realization is theoretically not cognizable, yet it is something the moral law unconditionally requires. Thus, the highest good is necessarily affirmed. Now the existence of God and the immortality of the soul are required for the highest good, and they are necessarily affirmed. Therefore, from the logical viewpoint, at least two of the postulates of practical reason are drawn through the mediation of the highest good, and this can itself be regarded as a postulate, to which the two should be as secondary postulates subordinated. Confucius's positive approach, which contrasts that of Kant, can be recognized from the following passage:

Yen Yüan asked about benevolence. The Master said, 'To return to the observance of the rites through overcoming the self constitutes benevolence. If for a single day a man could return to the observance of the rites through overcoming himself, then the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his. However, the practice of benevolence depends on oneself alone, and not on others.' ...

顏淵問仁、子曰、克己復禮為仁、一日克己復禮、天下歸仁焉、為仁由己、而由人乎哉、

...

The Analects, 論語 XII. 1

Confucius assures Yen Yüan, his most excellent disciple, that the deserved consequences for the world (= 'the whole Empire would consider benevolence to be his') will be directly drawn from the individual completion of morality. His attitude could be regarded almost as optimistic. However, he does not make a detour, as Kant does with the "postulates". For Confucius, the human will's compliance with the *t'ien ming* is accompanied with the confidence in the freedom of the will, the existence of the deities and the immortality of the soul, and the deserved consequences for the world, "the highest good" in the Kantian sense, result necessarily from the moral act of the individual.

To conclude our considerations of Confucius's position on the questions of human knowledge which merge into inquiries after wisdom (philosophy!), we would like to mention one more passage from the Analects that can be regarded as the summary of his position, while the passage first mentioned (II. 17) stated his principle to deal with the questions:

Fan Ch'ih asked about wisdom. The Master said, 'To work for the things the common people have a right to and to keep one's distance from the gods and spirits

while showing them reverence can be called wisdom.’ Fan Ch’ih asked about benevolence. The Master said, ‘The benevolent man reaps the benefit only after overcoming difficulties. That can be called benevolence.’

樊遲問知、子曰、務民之義、敬鬼神而遠之、可謂知矣、問仁、子曰、仁者先難而後獲、可謂仁矣。

The Analects, 論語 VI. 22

Knowing that the metaphysical objects, the deities and the souls or the spirits of the ancestors, are unknowable, the gentleman *ju* strictly keeps his distance from them. However, at the same time, he shows them genuine reverence, because he is convinced of their presence in the rites of the ancestor cult. His mind is filled with the virtue of benevolence. He dedicates himself to moral acts to push forward to the realization of the highest good despite innumerable difficulties. His knowledge is proved through the critique. Thus, it deserves to be called wisdom.

III

Confucian thought formed the foundation for East Asian philosophy. In the modern ages, from the latter half of the 19th century forward, Confucian legacy helped East Asian people in embracing Western philosophical thought. In Japan, for example, people had the benefit of Chinese classics, a large part of which is comprised of Confucian literature, in transferring the vocabulary of Western philosophy into Japanese. Among the Western philosophers, Kant is one of the most esteemed by Japanese people. In translating as well as in interpreting Kant’s philosophy, they referred to Confucian thought, as they recognized in some degree the similarities between Confucius and Kant. However, most interpreters seem to have averted, consciously or unconsciously, public exposure of their reference to Confucian thought. Their pride as scholars of Western philosophy may have prevented them from exposing their dependence on Eastern philosophy. Therefore, up to the present, there have not been so many comparative studies of Confucius and Kant, and people have not been enough aware of the similarities between both philosophers.

I would like to propose that we acknowledge Confucius’s similarities to Kant and recognize him as the precursor to Kant as a critical philosopher. Our positive approach will significantly contribute to encouraging the fruitful dialog between Confucian and Kantian thought as well as to deepening the understanding of each philosopher

respectively. Furthermore, we can achieve the necessary footing to integrate Eastern and Western philosophical thought into a comprehensive whole.