

中華佛學學報第 4 期 (p361-378) : (民國 80 年), 臺北: 中華佛學研究所, <http://www.chibs.edu.tw>
Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal, No. 04, (1991)
Taipei: The Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies
ISSN: 1017-7132

A Review of Metaphysics: East & West

t

Kenneth K. Inada

Professor, SUNY at Buffalo

p. 361

Summary

The world has indeed become one, but nations and cultures of the world are still at variance with each other, each adamantly maintaining its own position. Geographical, racial, social and psychological barriers are hard to come down. Yet, people are in contact with each other and must live together. There must be a unifying factor or force to show the way to harmonious relationship. One of the ways, perhaps, is to reassess the nature and function of metaphysics. So as we are in the last decade of the 20th century and will soon enter the 21st century, it might be a good idea to review the metaphysical foundations of East and West.

The metaphysical foundations are important clues to understanding cultural differences. Heretofore, the concept of metaphysics has been understood in

the traditional sense of substance, object, subject, world, space, time, etc. and many have been turned away from it because of its technical language and consequences.

In this essay, I argue for a novel type of metaphysics: an organic metaphysics. The ideas, indeed elements, of organic metaphysics are seen abundantly in Chinese and Buddhist thought. Some of these are the concept of change, yin-yang phenomenon, non-action, non-being, vacuity, humanity, constant mean, wheel of life, emptiness, Buddha-nature, non-self and compassion. The true understanding of these must inevitably lodge in an organic metaphysics since these terms simply defy ordinary logic and sensibility.

p. 362

One of the great assets of an organic metaphysics is that it helps one to overcome dichotomizing one's experience and the world. This habit of dichotomization in perception is so ingrained that it will take a huge effort and time to resolve it. One bright note here is that meditative discipline, a contribution of the East, is picking up steadily in the West. Similar efforts must be promoted to benefit both the realms of man and nature.

p. 363

As the 20th century comes to a close, it would seem appropriate to have a general review of the metaphysical foundations of both East and West. The review of course cannot be comprehensive nor exhaustive but will attempt to cover the main points in both sectors so as to indicate certain fruitful areas of discourse that might be pursued.

Where the 19th century West has been metaphysically climactic, especially in the philosophy of Hegel, it ended appropriately enough with Nietzsche who, as many scholars have commented, tolled the death knell to Western metaphysical understanding. True enough, the 20th century opened up with

a strong distaste for entities as such and discourse on them. In a sense, the Western philosophical world had matured sufficiently to see the pitfalls of engaging in metaphysical entities and understanding based on them. And in another sense, although science had started off with the substantive treatment of nature within a general Newtonian world, it slowly but gradually came to the realization that the substantive treatment framed within absolutistic metaphysics either skewed or limited the understanding of matters within the rapidly growing scientific field. This became all the more obvious since the acceptance of the evolutionary nature of things. If elements are then unfixed or non-static by nature, then a new world of understanding had dawned.

The paradoxical new situation however was that man's ideas could not keep up with the world of changing tangible entities. That is to say, because change is a more elusive and difficult concept to grasp than permanence, human minds began to concentrate on the obvious tangible entities which seem to give the impression of durability and stability. Our minds and perceptions could not simply get away from the precision and power of mathematics as a model. Somehow the intangible nature of ideas got lost in the perceptual shuffle for objective understanding. The inclination for the tangibles and permanence won out decisively. This has the story of materialism, East and West, where the false substitution of the stable for the instable began to rise and dominate the very lives of men.

If such is the case, what has man East or West done to alleviate the condition ?

p. 364

Not much, to be sure, but East nor West could ill afford to remain silent and passive for long. The time to act is long overdue.

In rapid succession, starting with the new Einsteinian physics through indeterminacy principles and quantum physics and to present day sub-atomic or particle physics, we have seen the rapid deterioration of substance-oriented physics. The irony of it all is that the non-physical world has been awfully slow in keeping up with the discoveries in the physical world. That is, there is an inherent inability on the part of human beings to fit in or adapt to the on going changing phenomenon in nature. As a result, a

tremendous lag, a kind of cultural or ideological lag of monumental proportion has arisen.

In a sense, this lag is a kind of built-in phenomenon based on biological function. That is to say, where the sense faculties are able to distinguish and report honestly their respective perceptions or perceptual data, their contents have been interpreted by the mind pretty much along peripheral lines. In consequence, the understanding we have of the perceptual data have been superficial and fragmentary. This kind of perceptual understanding has been going on for quite some time but it was rendered more obvious in the modern period ever since the appearance of Cartesian dualism. Descartes' famous dictum, *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I exist) is the climax of man's attempt to crown human reason or mind over the total nature of human perceptions. It was the triumph of mind over body but with a vengeance unbeknownst at the time. For human beings still belittle the value of their senses in comparison to the mind in understanding anything. The widening of the gap accelerated during the rise of the sciences and is still widening; in the meantime the sciences in general go on their work with confidence and aloofness. Yet in the 20th century we have begun to see signs of displeasure from the sciences, especially in particle physics and the behavioral sciences, which found themselves hampered by limitations and lacunae in obtaining definite answers to the conditions in the nature of things. The reason for this is that the realm of the tangibles alone does not inform all that there is in nature. Thus the so-called non-rational or irrational realm which heretofore

p. 365

had not figured in human understanding had to be taken into consideration. Gradually, the subject or perceiver had to be included in the overall structure of perception. It is recalled that Sigmund Freud, one of the great modern thinkers, led the search for answers in the inner workings of the mind in order to add new dimensions to the nature of perception. He brought to the fore the function of the unconscious, a truly innovative idea neglected so long by man. In retrospect, though, it would seem that this psychological coup was but the beginning of the search for the fuller dimensions of being that combines both the subjective and objective realms. We are at this point in East-West discourse.

Though far from any success in our search for total perceptual understanding of things, we must take stock of past achievements, especially in Asia proper, and center our attention on the two great and continuous civilizations of India and China. Although these civilizations are not at their glorious splendor of yesteryears, they are still formidable and retain much of the essentials of the great moments of human endeavor that propelled them to their great heights. We need to take a closer look at these essentials; indeed some of them are quite novel and cogent today, especially in respect to their guidance in understanding and intimating with the nature of holistic perception.

It may sound like a contradiction in terms but, first of all, it would be necessary for us to attune ourselves to a kind of organic metaphysics which lends itself to fluidity and resiliency. In other words, we must conceive of a metaphysics which is not limited to rigid conceptual understanding oriented in merely spatial dimensions. For in dealing with reality, experiential reality in particular, it is necessary that a metaphysical description and understanding be truly open, unfixed and indeterminate in any way, such that it is able to accommodate more than what the senses report. Earlier it was said that the sciences had to incorporate the non-rational or irrational realm. Now it must be asserted that this realm must be given a more precise focus and function. Indeed, it will soon be clear that the Western and Eastern conceptions of the non-rational are not always speaking in identical terms. But the important

p. 366

point is that the Eastern view of the non-rational is part and parcel of a metaphysics that promotes a complete unadulterated nature to perception and understanding. This is an entirely new metaphysics for the West to ponder on; indeed, this so-called novel organic metaphysics is uncommon and unknown in the West for the most part. Its presence in Eastern thought however cannot go without notice, especially for the fact that it has shaped Eastern civilization. It is in brief the very foundation of what is the East. Still, it is difficult to grasp and remains obscure because of its foundational nature in ordinary experience, i.e., it is the very basis upon which perception takes place in dynamic ways. In other words, whenever there is perception under ordinary metaphysical understanding, we can only describe it in terms of the substance or elements involved in it but the substance or elements in

and of themselves do not constitute the perception itself. That is, perception includes the substance or elements but in addition much more content. The "much more content" refers to the openness of perception to which one must focus. This is a challenge but it also creates a paradoxical situation in the organic metaphysical perception of things. So while Eastern experience is essentially built on this novel metaphysics, Western rationally deducible nature in perception.

The foregoing discussion on the dynamic foundational nature of experience relative to organic metaphysics is necessarily difficult to fathom at least on first encounter, but it deserves more patient attention in light of exposure to Eastern thought and culture. Let us explore the Eastern tradition and see how its rounded nature of metaphysics come into play. Take the case of China, for example. The Chinese from time immemorial had sensed the movement of the world, inclusive of man's activities, as involving a balanced, rhythmic flow that does not at any time go into extremes. They simply called it the Tao (道) the Way of the nature of things. But the concept of the Tao is not the easiest to describe nor to comprehend; in fact Taoist philosophy put a stop to all analysis by stating clearly that the Tao is ultimately indescribable and undefinable. Stating so, the Chinese did not abandon all talk or search for it. Its initial elusiveness and complexity were but the basic challenge for one to intimate with it.

p. 367

The very first verse or chapter of the Tao Te Ching reveals that the Tao is two-faceted: one facet is indirect and relates to human endeavors in the realm of the senses, the other in subtle and profound ways refers to the realm beyond human endeavors. But the "gates" to both facets are always open, if only one has the proper basis of perception to function on. Like the function (用) and substance (體) dynamic inherence, the senses and non-sense realm reveal different natures but both are infrastructural and united. They constantly derive meaning and subsistence from each other.

For a closer look at the phenomenal dynamics based on the Tao, the Chinese came up with a most ingenious symbolization, i.e., the yin-yang (陰陽) phenomenon. When the mind focuses on understanding the phenomenon, it seems inevitable that the phenomenon itself will be divided into elements or two mutually exclusive principles and that these two are placed in dynamic

relationship. Indeed they are in dynamic relationship but not as separate or independent entities. There is no dualism involved here, nor is there a monism for that matter. These terms, dualism and monism, are rigid metaphysical absolutes which the Chinese did not conceive of from the very beginning. This is not to say however that there had not been any dualistic interpretation later by commentators in and out of China.

The yin-yang, as hyphenated, depicts reality in the flow without any division or lacuna. The only time it seems to be separated is when the mind attempts to decipher the course of function by way of either yin or yang dominance. But that is strictly a theoretical accounting and a far cry from the way reality reveals itself. So when the mind deals with the function of reality, it already removes itself from that reality by its dichotomous nature, thereby reducing reality to mere conventional knowledge. The mind however is a necessary component in the perception of reality and functions completely within the yin-yang phenomenon. In consequence, the mind in its normal function cannot really understand what is happening except after the consummation of the event or events. Put this amounts to a post mortem analysis of the momentary dynamic existence exhibited by the yin-yang phenomenon.

p. 368

The yin-yang phenomenon is arguably one of the finest representation ever made by man in coming to grips with the dynamic nature of things. This is the Oriental way of explaining the simple changes (易) by retaining the all important fact of constant proportion, rhythm and harmony in the rise and subsidence of momentary events. Thus, to define the yin-yang phenomenon in terms of two opposing pairs, such as, positive and negative, man and woman, light and darkness, etc., is totally off the mark. Rather, the phenomenon depicts in very subtle ways how one facet dominates without subduing or destroying the other and in turn reverses its role by laying dormant and potent until the next moment. This series of ascendance-dominance-descendance in infinitesimal scale or degrees in either direction is an inviolable perpetual course of nature. This is the basic source for the resiliency, flexibility, softness and viability manifested in

each moment's existence and it is the challenge to each of us to capture those traits, if not completely then in close approximation, in our everyday activities.

True, the Tao and yin-yang phenomenon are very close to present scientific conception of the movements of atoms and sub-atomic elements. What is important here however is that the Chinese have beautifully expressed the Tao and yin-yang phenomenon in their ways of life long before any scientific analysis and confirmation had appeared. All the more then that the West must discover the East to work in tandem on the essentials of human experience.

Another key Taoist concept that has played a crucial role in the Chinese metaphysical frame of mind is the seemingly innocuous concept of non-action (無爲). This concept had given the Chinese mind the necessary basis for harmonizing man's effort within the framework of the world, an effort which is not wholly and positively one-directional, nor does it function within the cause-and-effect scheme of things. That would be too plain and simple. The Chinese non-action still results in things being done or created but not in the one-dimensional sense. Its work is done in the total, hence rounded, sense of taking into consideration every aspect of the experiential event in the making. Thus, as the positive nature or issue is not identified as such the event

p. 369

will fulfill itself by integrating everything within its purview and leaving nothing unattended. This is the simple natural way (自然); it is the way of man also.

More significantly, this concept of non-action laid the foundation for the understanding of the subtle, non-apparent nature of experience. In this sense, it is affiliated with the concept of the Tao and serves as a kind of connecting link with the concept of non-being(無). Non-being is not a negative concept pitted against the positive concept of being (有), nor does it have a separate existence. Dimension-wise, perhaps it is the same as being for it is always co-extensive with the latter's nature of existence or, from another aspect of things, it is larger than being for it is the very source of being. Yet, in the final analysis, it is an immeasurable quantity. Because of its non-observable

nature, it remains subtle and elusive to human minds but in essence it is that which effectuates or produces being, i.e., all phenomenal existence. It is not possible to go beyond or behind it because there is literally nothing there. It is simply the basis of all beings. We might go a step further to assert that it is the basis of all beings in the becoming process, the cyclic process of evolving non-existence to existence to non-existence, etc. So long as there is becoming, non-being will always be involved in the production of beings. In this respect, it is the fountain of life and the foundation of all phenomenal life.

The concept of non-being is little, if any, appreciated in the West because of the overly involvement in the positivistic nature of experience and scientific inquiry. Science generally has no room for the non-positive nature simply because the positive dominates the scene of becoming in its measurable quantity. It would simply go against the grain of scientific methodology to introduce unobservable aspects of being and becoming. This view however has been challenged in contemporary particle physics as stated earlier. Nevertheless, the average person goes on living in the realm of positive and tangible quantities, without regret or remorse, since there is hardly any visible cause for concern. And if damage were done, it would be attributed to the malfunction of the quantities in that realm, while the non-positive and

p. 370

non-tangible quantities will continue to remain in the background. The sense or spirit of regarding for non-positive and non-tangible quantities of being is a crucial point here. To the dogmatist or cynic who does not believe in the presence and function of the non-positive and non-tangible quantities, there is no answer. But to a curious skeptic who wishes to explore and fulfill his or her life in novel ways that will result in wholesomeness and harmony, there is hope and possibility.

Generally speaking, the Chinese mind was largely molded by the great systems of Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism crystallized the concept of humanity (仁) and its implications to such profound depths that the Chinese could no longer dismiss it from their daily consciousness. For a single concept to be so powerful and dominant in human consciousness is so rare that it would have to be held not only in wonder and awe but also as a singular achievement of mankind. Much of this achievement however is

unappreciated or simply lost because of humanity's non-tangible quality. Confucianism naturally came up with cognate and supportive human virtues, such as, propriety (禮), righteousness (義), trustworthiness (信), wisdom (智), altruism (恕) and loyalty (忠) to bolster and propagate the nature of humanity but these virtues, like all other human virtues are again non-tangible, which easily flash across one's consciousness without any penetrating and sustaining force. Yet, the overall triadic metaphysical framework of heaven-earth-man together with the infrastructural relationship from the emperor down to the nuclear family, the latter of which with its own mini infrastructure, had kept the Chinese mind alert and alive to the actualization of the profound nature of humanity and other virtues surrounding it.

Taoism, in a word, provided the Chinese with an attitude toward life which is extremely natural and simple but profound. To be a Taoist recluse in search of truth of existence was but an example of the length to which the Taoist taught on achieving naturalness. In this, they ridiculed the Confucian formalism, conformism and objectivism in regard to general learning and social behavior. In the final analysis, though, Taoism served beautifully as a

p. 371

vital complement to Confucian humanism with its emphasis on the basic naturally flexible and soft ingredient in the way of life.

It was of course the Chinese genius to incorporate Buddhist doctrines within their already ennobled life of Confucianism and Taoism. Where on earth could one find a highly civilized people with a well developed way of life gradually giving way to a foreign ideology and, in the process, come up with an appreciably greater understanding of human nature and life? What China accomplished during the heyday of Chinese Buddhism in the T'ang Dynasty has changed irrevocably not only Chinese thought and culture but also touched the lives of contiguous countries, such as, Korea and Japan, including the Southeast Asian countries. It was a singular feat not to be duplicated anywhere in the world. At this point in time, Far Eastern culture took on its own distinctness aided by Korean and Japanese contributions in their own respective ways. What then are the Buddhist doctrines or essentials which the Chinese absorbed so readily ?

As one would expect, the first attraction to Buddhism is the psychological factor: the nature of universal human suffering(苦). It covers every phase of a human being from birth until death, the only exception being the utter eradication or conquest of the elements that gave rise to it. Since volumes have been written concerning the nature, rise and conquest of suffering, especially dealing with the Four-fold Noble Truth, the discussion will gloss over this area and merely state that this important psychological factor gave the Chinese mind a better look at how human experience functions. Heretofore, human behavior was looked upon, generally speaking, from an externally oriented metaphysical framework--the familiar triadic heaven-earth-man relationship, the Tao, the yin-yang phenomenon, dynamics of change, humanity, propriety, non-action, vacuity and harmony. But now the focus turned from the external to the internal constitution of man. Buddhism inverted the situation such that it was all in a person's power to solve one's own problem of suffering. The power of course came ultimately from systematic and disciplined meditation. This is not to say that the Taoists did not engage in meditation in order to achieve

p. 372

quietude and vacuous existence. Perhaps, because of the meditative factor, the early Taoists were attracted initially to Buddhism. Be that as it may, the crucial point here is that Buddhism now presented to the Chinese mind a truly exciting and absorbing metaphysics of human experience. Within this metaphysical context, we are able to appreciate the Buddhist principles or essentials in action.

The Buddhist structure of perception consists in the five aggregates (pañca skandha, 五蘊), namely corporeality (rūpa, 色), feeling (vedanā, 受), primary image (saṃjñā, 想), run of imagery (saṃskāra, 行), and clear conscious thought (vijñāna, 識). The soundness of this structure of perception lies in the continuous flow of perceptual data from the corporeal realm to consciousness. This is no surprise since Buddhist psychology follows closely the discipline of yoga from start to finish. The historical Buddha's enlightenment was but an obvious result of perfecting a unique form of yoga. Thus the yogi starts with self-examination of one's defiled nature, understands and arrests it, and finally eradicates it. This process must heed to the continuity of perception from contact with the outside world,

through the bodily processes, and eventually to the conscious realm. Otherwise, any meditative exercise would quickly prove ineffective by being disjointed where the organic nature of being would not only be soiled but warped with gaps or lacunae everywhere.

This basic Buddhist psychological ground appealed to the Chinese, especially the Taoists, who proceeded to incorporate other Buddhist essentials to their quest for peace and harmony. It was further developed and crystallized into the famous wheel of life (pratītya-samutpāda, 緣起) in twelve segments. In a way it depicts the wave-like phenomenal saṃsāric life (輪迴), i.e., the continuum of suffering due to the desires and attachments thereof. It also instructs that the suffering states can be removed as the desires and attachments cease to grasp the being. The psychological ground in brief is foundational to the understanding of suffering and the ultimate realization of enlightenment.

The foremost Mahayana Buddhist contribution is the concept of emptiness (śūnyatā, 空). It is close to but not identical to Taoist vacuity (虛) and

p. 373

non-being (無), although within certain limits both seem to be expressing similar phenomena of experience. Vacuity is closer to the concept of void, and non-being to the status of non-existence prior to phenomenal existence. Emptiness, a not too happy English term for the Sanskrit śūnyatā, is actually depicting the state of fullness of being, that despite or in spite of the occluded nature of experience (saṃsāra, 輪迴), the realm of emptiness or purity can be achieved. This status of experience is a clear reminder that Buddhist principles or essentials are non-dichotomous through and through. Ignorance (avidyā, 無明) or the conventional nature or truth (saṃvṛti-sat, 世俗諦) may exist and persist but it does not clash with the state of illumination (vidyā, 明) or the supreme nature or truth (paramārtha-sat, 勝義諦). They function within the selfsame realm of existence. This is made possible by the nature of emptiness.

Ontologically speaking, for example, emptiness is the state of ridding one's being of all forms of defilement. In this way, all perceptual data would be in

a more flexible and resilient ground. Without emptiness, the data would be rigid and unable to move and adjust readily to different conditions. It serves as an ontological cushion, so to speak, upon which variant perceptual forms rest, thrive and express themselves. In a sense, it is the lynchpin of existence or experience, an ontological principle responsible for all clear and easy experiences. Naturally, only a few are gifted in capturing this very principle of being because the vast majority are so caught up in the perceptual data that they are unable to intimate with the grounds of the data themselves.

Another great concept of Mahaayaana Buddhism is Buddha -nature (Buddhaksetra, 佛性). This concept together with emptiness have laid the foundation for the vast and extensive nature possible in experience just as the term, Mahayana (大乘), implies. It has made experiential content cover more grounds than ordinary experience permits. This means that in ontological terms, Buddha-nature refers to a boundless ground or basis for enlightenment. All this sounds very metaphysical and it is but in a truly existential sense. Buddhist psychology clarifies not only the inner ways of a person but also unifies the external ways of a man-in-nature as well. This is the basic

p. 374

premise upon which human relationship functions, i.e., the initial establishment and resolution of meditative discipline already contains an opening to the vaster and extensive nature of being in contact with the external realm. In this way, there is no inner and outer realms of existence. It reveals, in another way, how the Buddhist non-self doctrine (anātman, 無我) prevails in the Mahayanistic way. It also affirms forcefully the nature of compassion (karuṇā, 慈悲) of the Bodhisattva way of life (Bodhisattvacaryā, 菩薩行).

The essentials of Buddhism we have discussed so far are quite amenable to traditional Chinese thought. In particular, the Confucian concept of humanity and constant mean (中庸), Taoist concepts of the Tao, non-being, non-action, and the yin-yang phenomenon are all malleable and fluid. They easily fit into an organic metaphysics of mankind as related to nature. We simply do not have the space to go into a more detailed analysis on how Buddhist and Chinese doctrines harmoniously blend with each other.

Here we are concerned more about how Eastern and Western thought might be able to converge on metaphysical grounds. For, in any East-West discourse, we must seize on the most fruitful and conducive phase in the enterprise. This phase is metaphysics, not epistemology or ethics, for it is foundational to man's understanding in such a way that it underlies both epistemological and ethical deliberations. Moreover, metaphysics is comparable to the role of mathematics in the sciences, i.e., it forms the basis for a universal language tying in all fields of scientific endeavor. But here we are not involved in a universal language dealing with science and technology. Rather, we are dealing with the ultimate question of human nature and function, both of which would of course by extension involve science and technology and not the other way around. That is, the present age is so replete with data on science and technology that concern for human nature and function are relegated to secondary position or importance, if at all, and thus the erosion of the human domain goes on unabated.

The hope then is for a revival and renewed effort on metaphysical understanding. In this century, the logical positivists have done a tremendous

p. 375

service by presenting us with the clarification of language in use and the verifiability theory of meaning, but at the same time, they have clearly marked off the non-metaphysical areas of thought. The movement was a logical conclusion to the rise of scientific philosophy and the adherence to the traditional conception of metaphysics. The movement also revealed the limitations of its enterprise, the principal one of which is the denial of metaphysics in pursuing its verifiability theory of meaning. This generated a paradoxical situation in which the empirical verification involved traditional metaphysics but which it set out to deny in the first place.

The two great Western metaphysicians of human experience are Immanuel Kant and Alfred N. Whitehead. Both are landmarks in the sense that Kant capped the Newtonian world and Whitehead the Einsteinian world. Kant wrapped up his metaphysics by the three transcendentals--aesthetic, analytic and dialectic, but in the process he left a gaping hole between the dialectic and the aesthetic and analytic. This is permissible under the Newtonian framework which sharply distinguished between the realms of man and God,

a sort of an extension of the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon. Indeed, the distinction was brilliant and original but then it purposely left the uncertainties, antinomies paralogism, alone in order to leave the door open for faith, as Kant readily admitted. What started out to be a holistic metaphysics ended up in disjointedness and alienation.

Where Kant arrived at a deadend in metaphysics because of a basic disconnection in experience, Whitehead fared better with a world connected through and through. Unknowingly, Whitehead, based on Einsteinian Relativity Theory, had developed a cosmology quite close to Buddhist Hua-yen thought of mutual penetration and mutual identification of the elements of experience. Even God in its primordial and consequent natures functioned within the inner dynamics of this cosmology. He was always guided by a profound synoptic vision of the nature of things, albeit Western and largely Platonic. He cleansed Western thought of some categorical errors, such as, the bifurcation of nature. In all this, he brought Western philosophy closer to a

p. 376

global nature and intercourse with the East.

Kant and Whitehead, and many others in the West like Heidegger and Wittgenstein, have brought global sense of philosophy to a higher plane. Yet, it seems that Western thinkers in general have not been able to accommodate basic Eastern thought, such as, emptiness and non-being, into their epistemology and metaphysics. Kant's three transcendentals cannot handle them, nor can Whitehead's concept of creativity, Bergson's temporal reality, Heidegger's being-in-the-world or Sartre's existential nothingness.

In our enterprise today, we must be wary of past mistakes in imposing high sounding but irrelevant metaphysical theories on human nature and function. We must not, for example, introduce strictly non-human forces into human experiential content. Should there be any forces, they must conform to and comprise the very nature of experiential content itself and not be something totally external or alien. With this in mind, the organic type of metaphysics is advanced. This type is connected with the ontological nature of things where the term, ontology, is not restricted to the traditional metaphysical view of treating entities, including the self, as separate and independent. For,

in the final analysis, there are no entities floating in mid-air. Vacuous existence is mere thought and has no credence in any life or experience.

It goes without saying that to see things from within a system locked in a dichotomous framework, is very difficult, if not impossible. This is because any resolution may turn out to be another example of a dichotomy or a further refinement of the existing dichotomy.

It certainly is about time that we look earnestly at ourselves as a vital organism which extends out borderlessly to the surrounding world. For example, the Buddhist wheel of life is not internally bound but extends to the entire external world reported by perceptual data, however invisible and inconsequential some aspects of the data may be. It is about time also that our perception be holistic in the sense that the inner and outer realms are not treated separately or dichotomously. These realms should collapse or are strictly non-divisive except that the mind lapses or lags behind in a sort of

p. 377

perceptual habit of dichotomization.

In pursuing this habit of dichotomization, we may go a step further to assert that notions, such as, unity, oneness and totality are generally mental constructs which do not ultimately have anything to do with the nature of things. Yet, it must be admitted that we normally perceive things dichotomously or fragmentarily. This means that there must be some corrective measures implemented to compensate and balance our perception into a holistic nature. Meditative discipline is one such important measure and, although the vast majority of the people are not attuned to its worth, being wary of its method and consequences, many Westerners are presently engaged in it in centers throughout the world. This is indeed an auspicious sign. It should ease the way toward an acceptance of an organic metaphysics of being.

The main thing is to take on a spirit of openness and flexibility. There are already abundant and proven Eastern principles of life which could easily blend with Western thought and culture. The challenge—the meeting and blending of the two cultures—is ever present and should result in benefits to both man and nature.

東西方形上學的評論

稻田龜男

紐約州立大學水牛城分校教授

提要

世界確實已經變成一個了，但世界上的國家和文化仍然千差萬別，誰都堅持自己的立場。不論是地理、種族、社會或心理上的障礙，都很難加以拆除。不過，人是群居的動物，必須生活在一起。如何達成和諧的關係，一定有一個統一的因素或力量。其中有一個方式，可能就是重估形上學的性質和功能。處於二十世紀最後十年的我們，即將進入二十一世紀，此時來檢討東方和西方的形上學基礎，不失為一項好主意。

形上學基礎是了解文化差異的重要線索。形上學概念向來都是以實質、客體、主體、世界、空間、時間等傳統意義來瞭解，由於專有名詞太過艱深，許多人就掉頭而去了。

在本文中，我提出新的形上學，有機體的形上學。有機體形上學的觀念（其實就是要素），在中國和佛教思想裏俯拾皆是。譬如，無常的觀念、陰陽的現象、無為、無生、虛無、人性、中庸、輪迴、空、佛性、無我和慈悲。如果想真正瞭解這些名詞，不可避免地一定要放在有機體形上學的架構內，因為它們破除了一般的邏輯和知覺。

有機體形上學有一項很特殊的優點：它可以幫助我們避免將我們的經驗和世界劃分為二。這種在認知上二分法的習慣，可以說是根深柢固，必須費很大的勁和努力才能消除。這裡很值得一提的是：坐禪訓練，這項東方的貢獻，正在西方蔚成風氣。同時，為了利益人類和自然界，我們也必須作相同的努力。