



CHINA STUDIES

SELECTED
PHILOSOPHICAL
WRITINGS
OF FUNG YU-LAN

Fung Yu-Lan



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

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PREFACE

It is a great luxury for a scholar in his late years to be able to compare his writings in the form of a complete work and see them published. This situation depends on a combination of various factors, many of which are beyond human control. In this sense I consider myself fortunate. The People's Publishing House of Honan, my native province, is compiling my writings in a collection called *The Complete Works of the Hall of Three Pines*, the first volume of which has already been completed.

The whole series being published in Honan is written in Chinese. This includes Chinese translations of work originally written in English. Concurrently, the F.L.P. in Beijing is compiling an English edition, which will be a valuable complement to the work of the People's Publishing House of Honan.

The first article in the second part of this volume is entitled "Why China Has No Science." The publishing of this paper marked the beginning of my academic career. It was a paper read in 1922 before a biweekly conference of the Philosophy Department of Columbia University. The last article is a speech presented in 1982 before the convocation of an honorary degree on me by Columbia University. This speech is a brief review of my academic career. Sixty years have passed since the beginning of that career.

The writings are many, but there is a central theme like a tapestry running through the collection. This is the strong belief that China is an ancient nation with a new mission. The new mission is modernization.

The Chinese Communist Party is leading the Chinese people in building socialism in a Chinese style: That is just the meaning of the new mission as I understand it. According to my understanding the Chinese style is not like the colour pasted on a product from the outside. It is determined by the physiological factors within.

The ancient Chinese culture is an inherent factor determining the Chinese style. When the modernization of China is completed, China will be both ancient and modern, both old and new. This is the fulfilment of my belief that China is an ancient nation with a new mission.

This is the whole ideal that I have struggled for. The writings in this volume are part of this struggle.

Fung Yu-lan
January 12, 1987

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LIFE IDEALS

INTRODUCTION

(1) Philosophy and Life

In *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, Josiah Royce said:

Philosophy, in the proper sense of the term, is not a presumptuous effort to explain the mysteries of the world by means of any superhuman insight or extraordinary cunning, but has its origin and value in an attempt to give a reasonable account of our own personal attitude towards the more serious business of life. You philosophize when you reflect critically upon what you are actually doing in your world. What you are doing is of course, in the first place, living. . . . Such a criticism of life, made elaborate and thoroughgoing, is philosophy.¹

No doubt this gives a fair account of the origin of philosophy, but perhaps it may not be a fair account of philosophy itself. It is true that man philosophizes only when he begins to criticize life, for otherwise he will simply make what Chuang Tzu called the "Happy Excursion" in the universe like "the fishes that forget each other in the great river and great lake," with consciousness neither of the environment nor of himself. It is only when life is not quite satisfactory that he begins to be self-conscious and to ask why; to ask why is to criticize existing conditions and thus to philosophize. He does all these because he must, not because he will.

But although this is true, there is still a question: Is philosophy criticism itself? It seems better to say that philosophy is not criticism as such, but the standard of criticism. It is obvious that the criticism of a thing presupposes a standard, ideal or actual, which the thing criticized is either different from or opposed to, otherwise the criticism would be meaningless. Lao Tzu said: "When

¹ Josiah Royce, *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, New York, 1910, pp. 1, 2.

all the world knows the beautiful is beautiful, it is already ugly; when all the world knows the good is good, it is already bad."¹ But it may be equally said that when all the world knows the ugly is ugly, it is already beautiful; when all the world knows the bad is bad, it is already good; for, as Plotinus said: "It is impossible to say, 'that is not the good,' without having some sort of knowledge of the good or acquaintance therewith."² So in order to criticize the ugly, we need the beautiful, ideal or real, as the standard; to criticize the bad, we need the good, ideal or real. In the same way, to criticize actual beauty we need as a standard an ideal absolute beauty; and to criticize the good, we need an ideal absolute good. Now to criticize actual life, do we not need an ideal life as a standard? Philosophy is the concrete picture of the ideal life and a philosopher is one who draws this picture. Here is the difference between literature and philosophy. Literature criticizes life by taking some standard of criticism for granted. So the contribution of literature towards life is often more negative than positive; its purpose is rather to point out the wrong and the false than to tell the right and the real. But the business of philosophy is precisely to build a system of the right and the real. Plato said:

In heaven, I replied, there is laid the pattern of such a city, and he who desires may behold this, and in beholding, govern himself accordingly. But whether there really is or ever will be such an one is of no importance to him; for he will act according to the laws of the city and of no other.³

Philosophy is to give the pattern not only of a city, but of life. If philosophy needs any definition, it may be defined as the ideal.

(2) The Idealization of Nature and the Idealization of Art

But the ideal is not, and cannot be, created or discovered, independent of the actual, by the philosopher in his inspired moment. As shown by Royce, philosophy is not to explain any

¹ Lao Tzu, *Tao Teh Ching*. Sec. 2.

² Plotinus, *Complete Works*, tr. by K. S. Guthrie, 1918, Vol. III, p. 748.

³ Plato, "The Republic," 592, tr. by B. Jowett.

mystery, and a philosopher is not one who has any superhuman insight and extraordinary cunning. The philosopher may build a city in Heaven, but the stones and the bricks he must draw from earth. His ideal pattern after all must be constructed with the material of actual experience. As William James said:

We can invent no new forms of conception, applicable to the whole exclusively, and not suggested originally by facts. All philosophers, accordingly, have conceived of the whole world after the analogy of some particular feature of it, which has particularly captivated their attention.¹

If philosophy is defined as the ideal, to philosophize may be said to idealize, that is, to idealize some feature of the world as we actually experience it, so that it may become the ideal pattern for life as a whole.

What are the more conspicuous features of the world that we actually experience? There are two features or contrasting states of experience, the distinctiveness of which is universally the most obvious. Aristotle said:

The things we see can be divided into two classes: those which are the product of nature, and those which come from causes other than nature. Thus, it is nature that produces the animals and the varied parts of which their bodies are composed; it is also nature that produced the plants, and the simple elements such as earth, fire, and water; for we speak of these things and others like them as existing solely by the fact of nature. For all the things which we indicate present a great difference in relation to those which are not the product of nature. All the natural beings carry with themselves the principle of movement and rest. Some may be endowed with the movement of locomotion in space, others may have the internal movement of growth and decay, and finally some may have the simple movement of alteration and modification in the qualities they possess. About these motions it is not the same with those things which we call the product of art.²

Huxley said:

It may be safely assumed that, two thousand years ago, before Cæsar set foot in southern Britain, the whole countryside visible from the

¹ William James, *The Pluralistic Universe*, New York, 1912, p. 8.

² Aristotle, *Physics*, II, I, tr. from J. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire's French translation, Paris, 1862, Vol. I, pp. 39, 40.

window of the room in which I write, was in what is called "the state of nature." Except, it may be, by raising a few sepulchral mounds, such as those which still here and there, break the flowing contours of the downs, man's hands had made no mark upon it; and the thin veil of vegetation which overspread the broad-backed heights and the shelving sides of the coombs was unaffected by his industry. It is as little to be doubted, that an essentially similar state of nature prevailed, in this region, for many thousands of years before the coming of Cæsar; and there is no assignable reason for denying that it might continue to exist through an equally prolonged futurity, except for the intervention of man.¹

Three or four years have elapsed since the state of nature to which I have referred was brought to an end, so far as a small patch of the soil is concerned, by the intervention of man. . . . In short, it was made into a garden. At the present time, this artificially treated area presents an aspect extraordinarily different from that of the land as remains in the state of nature, outside of the wall. . . . That the "state of art," thus created in the state of nature by man, is sustained by him, would at once become apparent, if the watchful supervision of the gardener were withdrawn, and the antagonistic influences of the general cosmic process were no longer sedulously warded off, or counteracted. . . . It will be admitted that the garden is as much a work of art, or artifice, as anything that can be mentioned. The energy localized in certain human bodies, directed by similarly localized intellects, has produced a collocation of other material bodies which could not be brought about in the state of nature. The same proposition is true of all the works of man's hands, from a flint implement to a cathedral or a chronometer; and it is because it is true, that we call these things artificial, term them works of art, or artifice, by way of distinguishing them from the products of the cosmic process working outside man, which we call natural, or works of nature. The distinction thus drawn between the works of nature and those of man, is universally recognized; and it is, as I conceive, both useful and justified.²

It is easy to see that what Aristotle and Huxley called nature and art are exactly what the Chinese philosophers called the natural and the human. As Chuang Tzu said: "What is nature? What is human? That the ox and the horse have four feet is nature; to

¹ Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*, London and New York, 1914, pp. 1, 2.

² Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics, and Other Essays*, pp. 9-11.

halter the head of a horse or to pierce the nose of an ox is human."¹ Thus, the ancient Oriental thinker made the same distinction between nature and art that Aristotle and Huxley did. This helps to show that it "is universally recognized." As one of the characteristics of man is to make tools,² so as soon as he was introduced to this world, he began to make them. And as soon as some of them were made, there was art as over against nature. It is no wonder that the two states of the world are universally experienced, and their distinction "is universally recognized." Who has not seen the difference between the state inside the garden and that outside it? Who does not know the fact that the horse and the ox are "born free, but are everywhere in chains"? If the common people are not consciously aware of the two contrasting states in the world, it is only because they are too familiar with them.

Since philosophy is the idealization of certain features of the world as we experience them, and since the most conspicuous features of the world are the state of nature and the state of art, it is only reasonable to expect that the history of philosophy will prove that some philosophers have idealized nature and others have idealized art. The history of philosophy shows that no philosopher is so blind as to be completely unable to see the bare fact that man's present condition is a mixture of good and evil, of happiness and suffering.³ In fact, as shown in the above quotations, men begin to philosophize only when they feel that the world is not so good as they wish. So philosophers do not differ in seeing the facts, but only in the way of criticizing them. Some attribute the present goodness of man to his original nature, and consider the present evil as due to his artificial change. According to them,

¹ *Works*, tr. by H. A. Giles, London, 1889, p. 211.

These three quotations have been given simply to show the clear contrast between the state of nature and the state of art. They have nothing to do with the evaluations of the three authors concerning the two states. Chuang Tzu's philosophy is an idealization of nature; Huxley's philosophy is an idealization of art; Aristotle's philosophy is a reconciliation of nature and art.

² Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, tr. by A. Mitchell, New York, 1911, p. 137.

³ As we shall see, even those who said that evils are "appearances" must see the 'appearances.' That there are evils is a fact; that they are "appearances" is the philosopher's interpretation of the fact.