



金岳霖全集

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金岳霖
全集

Tao, Nature and Man

本文是作者 1943—1944 年访问美国期间撰写,生前未发表,标题为编者所加。

——编者注

Preface

During the academic year of 1943—1944 I accepted the invitation of the State Department of Washington D. C. to visit America. It was a great pleasure to me to meet many persons whom I would not otherwise have met and to be acquainted however haphazardly with the climate of America opinion. But whenever the idea that something was also expected of me in return managed to emerge above the level of my consciousness, I was preyed by a guilty sense of woeful inadequacy for the job on hand. Although a professor merely professes, and needn't profess more than Protestants nowadays protest, yet there should be a subject which he could offer as a sort of cultural barter. I have taught logic and epistemology in China for a number of years, but to talk about either in America would be merely carrying coal to Newcastle. I am not a Sinologist; and to settle problems of Chinese history in term of the West System would be quite beyond my capacity. I was interested in introducing Chinese ideas to America, but here again I was hardly the person to do it, people much better suited to the work either could be persuaded to do so, or else like Dr. Hu Shih had already been doing so for quite a

number of years. I have certain ideas. It is distinctly immodest of me to air them anywhere; fairness however requires me to pass them as my own rather than to attribute them to the thinkers of the past merely to burden them in the end with perhaps untenable thought. In the following pages I am giving in English a much abridged version of a book published some years ago under such was conditions in China that not only it is not found in libraries, but also I myself haven't a single copy. The bulk of this following was done in the peace and quiet of Lowell House, Cambridge, and in the Oriental Institute, Chicago. I have added a chapter on Nature and Man which is not in original book in order to bring ideas somewhat out of the unpopular level. Whether or not the book is worth writing or publishing, it gives me at any rate an opportunity to express my gratitude to Harvard University, to the University of Chicago, and above all to the Department of State of America.

Stuff*

I

Let us take what we ordinarily call a particular thing or object, for example, the magnolia in the side palace of Lo Saio T'an, near to the lake, in the Summer Palace in Peking. We have already described and located for you a particular object; it is located in a well known Palace in a well known City and it is classified under the catalogue of magnolia. Those who had paid special attention to that tree will recall its "shape" and "character" and the place it is located; to them nothing further need be said. They may take an excursion into their past experiences, and if their recollections were vivid, they would see that tree in their mind's eye. But to those who do not remember or never have seen the tree before, nothing avails so far as a substitute for direct experience is concerned.

Suppose that some of them do not know what a magnolia is

* 原稿没有第一章的标题,也没有第一节的标号,这里的标题和第一节的标号“ I ”为编者所加。——编者注

or how it looks like. We might say a lot of things which are trees of this particular tree since it does belong to the family of magnolias. But while these statements are true of that magnolia, they are not uniquely true of that magnolia. There are ever so many magnolias for which these statements are equally true, for example, the two magnolias in front of The Library of Congress. Thus while these statements tell us what a magnolia is like, they do not indicate the shape of that magnolia, or its age or its size, or how many trunks it has or whether its trunks are straight, etc. To get at that particular magnolia, something else is needed. If we were scientists or literary men we might describe that tree in greater detail, not merely in answer to the questions listed, but also to questions that might be asked along other lines. If words fail, we might be tempted to draw, and if drawings are inadequate, we might resort to photographs. But how are we to be sure that the picture was taken in Peking other than in Hollywood. It seems obvious that no matter what we do, we are doomed to failure so long as revealing the "thatness" of that magnolia is concerned. While we are convinced that as a matter of fact there is no other tree exactly suited to the description or the drawing or the photograph, we are at least equally convinced that the possibility of there being one can not be denied. The question of possibility is not one that is contingent before a conglomeration of related facts; any thing that is not contradiction is possible. The minutest description of an x may possibly be equally adequated for y ; x is $\varphi, \psi, \theta, \dots$ and y is $\varphi, \psi, \theta, \dots$ are not contradictions.

Americans who are so accustomed to mass production will grasp the point more easily than the Chinese.

We were speaking of describing that magnolia tree. Description is made of abstract ideas which are instruments for segregating one universal or a set of universals from any universal or any set of universals. To say that a fine apple is red may be perfectly true, and if true, it rules out certain possibilities such as for instance that it is green. It keeps you in ignorance about other possibilities, for instance it may be large compared to other apples, or almost perfectly spherical unlike other apples. Neither size nor shape is revealed by the proposition that it is red, its function is to single out one universal, to leave the rest untouched and to rule out certain possibilities. The usefulness of abstract ideas should not be minimized, they are the basis of communicability of experiences. Particular experience can not be communicated. I can not ask you to meet at the station a friend of mine whom I have known for years but whom you have never met or seen by just mentioning his name; I have to describe him in abstract terms, to say for instance that he is tall, has a lot of white hair, or that he stoops and is a bit lame, etc.... and trust to the probability that there is not another man of the same description at the train. Descriptions are eminently useful, but they do not always prepare you for your experience of the described objects. To say that a certain tree is a tall magnificent magnolia does not prevent you from having surprises when you are confronted with that tree and see it to be "that" tall and "that" mag-

nificent.

A particular thing or object is never merely either one universal or a set of universals. The Winston Churchill is one of the most colorful personalities of their age, but describe him as much as you like, and no matter how adequate and full you aim your description to be, you merely arrive at a combination of universals, a sort of Churchillianity which may possibly be shared by another Englishman or American. Neither is Aristotle the sum totle aristotelianness. The usual reaction to the joke that all Aristotle's books were written by another man of the same name is that no difference is made; this is so because we are merely his readers not for instance his wife in a monogamous society; if we were we would pay more attention to one of them than to the other. And though it is hardly imaginable that there could be two Aristotles exactly alike, it is by no means impossible that aristotleness is shared by many, each one of whom is a particular individual. Since each one of them is a particular object sharing a common set of universals, no particular object in so far as its particularity is concerned is ever merely a set of universals. Hence no description in terms of abstract ideas will ever reveal the particularity of a particular object.

Besides description we employ other means to get at particular objects. The very first sentence with which we started our discussion makes use of proper names in order to get at the particular magnolia we have in mind. Particular objects might be named or pointed to or refered to in terms of ordered frames. To

point things out is probably the easiest, the most convenient since with regard to most things we don't bother to give names. But pointing to is an operation that requires co-temporal and cospatial experience. You can not point to the past any more than you can point to an unnamed and unreferred tree and ask a friend in a distant city to appreciate its shape and color. Naming has certain advantages; names stick faithfully to the things named. John Doe might have been thin and now he may be fat; but fat or thin, he remains John Doe. When a particular thing can not be pointed to or is not named, it is often referred to in terms of ordered frames. The most frequently used ordered frames are that of time and space. A thing at such and such time and place particularizes the thing mentioned. In particularization, sometimes one implement alone is used, but more often a combination of these implements together with descriptions is necessary. This is what we have done with the particular magnolia tree in our very first sentence.

But implements of particularization are only applicable to a particular or a name of particulars and strictly speaking not applicable to particular things or objects. A particular is different from an universal only from the point of view of its particularity, not from the point of view of its being an object. Even a pattern of particulars is only a pattern of aspects. As aspects, particulars do not have the substantiality, the actuality and the potentiality of particular things or objects: A set of universals does not constitute an object, neither does a set of particulars, since, neither has got what we ordinarily call "body". Perhaps if we invoke

the aid of time, we can see more easily that a particular is different from a particular thing or object. Particulars do not repeat, once they are gone, they are gone for ever; whereas in particular things or objects there is something that persists endurance. Implements of particularization merely enable us to get of particulars and strictly speaking not particular things or objects. Let us return to that magnolia with which we started. It is forever changing. And yet in so far as its particular shape and character at any particular moment are concerned, they can not change, since they don't endure. A succession of different sets of particulars has indeed taken place and may even serve as a criterion for our observation of change, but none of the sets has changed into any other. There is something that has changed and so far that thing has been illusive.

When we describe we are segregating universal or universals, when we point to or name or refer to ordered frames, we indicate particular or particulars. As we have already said there is in that magnolia something that is neither an universal or a set of universals, nor a particular or a name of particular. There is a certain "thatness" that eludes both description and indication which for the sake of convenience let us call expression. There is then something in every particular thing or object, a "thisness" or "thatness" or an x that can not be expressed. Mt. Everest is comparatively permanent, but ever in this case it is constantly and continually undergoing a series of changes which is simply another way of saying that in or around

or about “it” there is a succession of different sets of particulars or of different realizations of sets of universals. I am smoking now, the cigarette in my hand is extremely mysterious; its paper came from a factory out of materials that were plant life receiving nourishment from the sun, the water and the earth, its tobacco could be similarly traced, but surely wateriness or sunshineness or earthiness have not been transformed into cigaretteness: there is something that went through are these as if a man changes from his uniform into his business suit. As I know, the cigarette gradually disappears, some of it takes the form of smoke and soon merges into the air, some of it has turned to ashes, and the remaining becomes crumbled up in my ash tray. The “identity” of the cigarette seems to have disappeared and yet if the situation were as simple as that we would find it quite meaningless to say that “this” ash was a part of “that” cigarette. There must be something that goes through cigaretteness and ashness almost as if a student changes from a sophomore into a junior.

Some of you may think in terms of modern physics and interpret the inexpressible x as electrons. You may say that what constitutes this or that particular object is a particular bunch of electrons and is therefore expressible. But this evidently is not what is meant. A particular collection of particular electrons is indeed expressible; in so far as it is particular, it can be indicated, and in so far as it realizes an universal, it can be described. But what underlies both the collection and each of the particular electrons is still the inexpressible x . In urging the above argument you have