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Tu Weiming, Liberal Education, and the Dialogue of the Humanities

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Most teachers in universities and anyone working in a school, in particular, are likely to have felt the profound pull of the institution they work in. Commitment to the life of the school, where one becomes busy not just with what one is teaching but with the pastoral care of students and with the intrusive requirements of administration, can easily become all-absorbing: schools can seem complete worlds-in-themselves. So too, school leaders and policy-makers can become so preoccupied with the seeming necessities of the task at hand, so steeped in a habitual busyness, that they can lose sight of the contingencies of their practice and the principles that guide them. It can then be peculiarly edifying to contemplate the way things are done in another culture. For example, teachers in the UK or the USA in the 1960s could look with some amazement at their colleagues in France, working within the rigidities of the centrally imposed curriculum, in ways that might have unsettled assumptions on both sides, while contrasts in the teaching of particular subjects – say, the creative arts in contemporary Western culture and the tradition of calligraphy in the East[i] – can reveal in relief the contours of a practice that will otherwise remain unnoticed. As the latter example begins to indicate, comparisons can be all the more rich where they are not just between contemporaneous policy jurisdictions but across time, revealing contours in one's own practice that would otherwise remain obscure and challenging assumptions that might otherwise remain sacrosanct.

For reasons that are not unconnected, comparative approaches to philosophy can similarly be valuable in disturbing settled beliefs or exposing the contingency of theoretical and sometimes metaphysical assumptions. Yet the difficulties here are not to be underestimated, especially because such exposure seems to demand an external viewpoint, a position from which such contingencies can be dispassionately considered. Hence, there is the notorious tendency not to go back far enough, as it were – surreptitiously to cling onto a framework of thought within which another way of thinking can be contained, weighed up and evaluated, and in a sense rendered exotic. When it comes to Western reception of classical Chinese philosophy, few have done more than Donald Hall and Roger Ames to address these problems, and their influential writings have done much to render them tractable (see especially Hall and Ames, 1995). They have succeeded in part through their identification of the contrasting problematics in which philosophy is understood and pursued: they artfully upstage the Western tradition, and ironize its fundamentalist aspirations, by characterizing it as the second of these problematics. Distinguishing features of this problematics are *inter alia* the beliefs that there is a beginning and, hence, perhaps a creator of the universe, and that it makes sense to think of an external, god's-eye perspective on this (that is, a perspectives on perspectives, a stepping outside time and contingency), which together install a certain objectivism. The contrast between this external, supposedly non-contingent perspective and the relative

perspectives that are the product of the human condition engenders an anxiety over the relation of appearance to reality and opens the way to scepticism in its modern Cartesian forms (about an external world, about other minds). This is not, of course, to say that all Western philosophers are objectivists but to affirm that such are the terms of the problematics in which the questions of philosophy typically arise and are pursued, including where they take the form of beliefs that it endeavours to overcome. By contrast, the first problematics, that of the Chinese traditions, is characterized by its acceptance of the multiplicity of perspectives, with no inclination towards the external understanding envisioned in the West. Hence, the being of a thing is not rooted in its objectivity (the "thing in itself") but rather in fluid relational capacities, with no assumption that, beyond these, there must be some transcendent reality (say, that of the Platonic forms).

In the light of this, it will be a task of comparativists to offload the historical and conceptual baggage that stands in the way of their recognizing and coming into a way of thinking alien to their own. In *Anticipating China: Thinking through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture*, Hall and Ames take as a running theme the need to jettison the "useless lumber" that blocks the way to thinking in terms other than one's own. In keeping with the pragmatist sympathies of their project, this is a phrase drawn from John Dewey's "From Absolutism to Experimentalism", in which he writes autobiographically of his own experience as a philosopher. Indeed, one of the epigraphs Hall and Ames take for their book, is drawn from the following, closing words of Dewey's essay:

> [I]t shows a deplorable deadness of imagination to suppose that philosophy will indefinitely revolve within the scope of the problems and systems that two thousand years of European history have bequeathed to us. Seen in the long perspective of the future, the whole of western European history is a provincial episode. I do not expect to see in my day a genuine as distinct from a forced and artificial, integration of thought. But a mind that is not too egotistically impatient can have faith that this unification will issue in its season. Meantime a chief task of those who call themselves philosophers is to help get rid of the useless lumber that blocks our highways of thought, and strive to make straight and open the paths that lead to the future. Forty years spent in wandering in a wilderness like that of the present is not a sad fate—unless one attempts to make himself believe that the wilderness is after all itself the promised land (Dewey, pp. 26-27).

In an interesting essay on Hall and Ames' work and cognizant of the encroachments of this "provincialism", Warren Frisina qualifies his considerable appreciation with the criticism of what he takes to be an unresolved tension within their approach: "As they describe their method, either we are outside a culture looking in, using whatever tools we can find to help us sort through what seems strange and what seems familiar, or we

are insiders, unable to render fully contingent the categories we use for understanding ourselves and the world" (Frisina, 2018, p. 573). My suggestion, which I shall try later in this discussion to substantiate more fully, is that their framing of this dilemma itself betrays a commitment to some kind of neutrality of viewpoint that, by their own lights, is not possible and that anxiety over this risks dulling the point of the exercise. For there is value in exposing oneself to the friction between ways of thinking - their mismatch, their differing discursive styles and textures, their ways of passing one another by.

It is into this problematics of comparative philosophy and education that I want now to introduce the enormously influential figure of Tu Weiming. Over the course of some fifty years, he has come to be recognised as a leading exponent of the current new wave of Confucianism. Moreover, he is someone who has gone out of his way to build bridges between traditions.

Tu's life and illustrious career has spanned countries and continents, and it has been shaped by major political upheavals. Having spent his early years in Kunming, Yunnan Province, China, he moved to Taiwan with his parents in 1949 at the age of ten, at the time of the Chinese Revolution. Although he did not formally study Confucianism as a child, he has spoken warmly of the fact that he grew up in an environment strongly influenced by Confucianism. While his parents were well-educated, the nanny with whom he spent much of his time was not: yet, in her words and actions, she embodied Confucian values. Thus, although Tu did not study the Confucian classics during his childhood, he was brought up immersed within a Confucian cultural environment. At the time when he went to Taipei Municipal Jianguo High School, the Taiwan government was advancing a form of national moral education with a strong emphasis on Confucianism. Some of the teaching stimulated Tu's interest, and he subsequently set about pursuing the study of Confucianism at Tunghai University in Taiwan, studying with the "New Confucian" philosophers Mou Zongsan and Xu Fuguan. He was successful enough to be awarded a Harvard-Yenching Institute scholarship, enabling him to study at Harvard University, where he completed his Masters and PhD degrees in East Asian studies. On the strength of this background, and beginning in 1967, he went on to hold academic positions at Princeton University and the University of California at Berkeley, and served as a professor at Harvard University from 1981-2010. Since then he has held academic positions at Beijing University and at Peking University, while retaining the title of Research Professor and Senior Fellow of the Asia Center at Harvard University. As these moves indicate, Confucianism and Tu's contribution to its interpretation have in recent decades gained increasing recognition in modern China itself.

Tu has also committed himself to practices of dialogue between cultures and between traditions of thought, and his efforts in this respect are much to be admired. Yet there are attendant risks to such practices, and it is in part to these that this chapter gives attention. Tu's work has come under criticism from more purist interpreters of Confucianism, amongst whose objections has been the claim that translations of key Confucian terms into Western language raise problems that are virtually insuperable.

There is also reason to think critically about his work in relation to broader questions regarding the nature and possibilities of dialogue between traditions, along lines intimated by my opening paragraphs. I have written elsewhere about problems of translation in philosophy and education, attempting to face up to "untranslatables" but not acquiescing in "insuperability" (Standish, ; Yun and Standish, 2018;Cassin, 2014); here my concern is rather with practices of dialogue. Much of Tu's work can reasonably be seen as an exercise in comparative philosophy, and, against this now familiar feature of the global philosophical scene, his achievements and high profile raise in distinctive ways questions about how the purpose and substance of comparative philosophy are to be understood.

It is abundantly clear that questions of education are central to Confucianism and to Tu's own development of Confucian lines of thought. In order to bring this into focus, and specifically in the light of questions about dialogue and comparative philosophy, I propose to begin by considering a fairly recent lecture series at Georgetown University entitled "Confucianism and Liberal Education for a Global Era: Lectures with Tu Weiming", which took place in 2013.[ii] The paragraphs that follow, then, provide a gloss on what Tu has to say in his keynote lecture.

Confucianism and Liberal Education

Tu begins the lecture by drawing a distinction between Confucianism and the thinking of other major civilizations and worldviews. In Greek philosophy, Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, there is the aspiration to thinking about the world as a whole, as if from some external perspective and in cosmological terms. Confucianism, by contrast, concentrates on what is in the world. While the Greeks reflected on the ultimate reason of reality and other religions on what is transcendent of the world and what is not, Confucius preferred a reflexive thinking about thinking. *Tian* (heaven, sky) is not other-worldly or transcendent but relates rather to the human ability to think beyond the actual, to think in terms of possibility. The Confucian way is, then, the tradition of the scholar, the engaged intellectual, with Confucius himself being seen not as founder but rather as a great exponent and transmitter of the art. The project is not based on any dogma, and the learner is not to emulate but instead to be inspired.

This brings Tu to the question of what Confucian learning is for – whether it is to be understood as for the self or for others. Certainly, it is not for the sake of "the people", in the sense of associated with Mao Zedong. On the contrary, authentic learning is learning for the sake of the self, involving heart and mind, and it a building of one's character. Self-cultivation of this kind requires that each person – from the high to the low – see this learning as the root, and as a task and challenge for all. It is this-worldly learning, committed to concrete principle and concrete humanity, and the self, within this picture, is understood always as the centre of relationships. At the centre, autonomy and dignity are required in establishing oneself as an independent human being who is, nevertheless, necessarily in relation to others. In these relations, the human being is not isolated. A critical issue

for Confucianism is, then, the relation between the private self and the self in the public domain. Going beyond the privatised self is the project, and this is to be understood as a move beyond egoism, parochialism, ethonocentrism, and nationalism. It is the way to be human, which is misunderstood, in Tu's views, as anthropocentric, and for which he prefers the term *anthropocosmic*.

The basic ethical principle is reciprocity, which is a kind of care for the other characterized by the Golden Rule in the negative – the so-called Silver Rule: do *not* do to others what you would have them *not* do to you. Hence, the recognition of the other is an extremely important principle of communication. It is necessary to go beyond the Silver Rule, however, towards a positive humanist commitment: I must help others to establish themselves. Such help should not, however, become a kind of preaching. Thus, Tu does not want to be considered an advocate for Confucianism, still less an evangelist. The precept is rather that one should *not* impose one's own truth on others.

On this view, it makes little sense to talk of the cosmos as created, and human beings are not creatures. They are engaged in the cosmic process as participants. Only the most true human beings can fully realise themselves. If they can do this, they can realise human nature. And *if* they do this, they are taking part in in a transformation between heaven and earth. The human consists in this cultivation of true potential as co-creator in this cosmic process. Heaven is creativity in itself, and it is omnipresent and omniscient. Our responsibility is to make heaven present in the world now.

The fully cultivated human being will have to cultivate three things: their own character, autonomy, and self-understanding; the disposition to serve the wellbeing of everyone (in a manner that can be seen as proto-democratic, with people more important than the state); and a sense of responsibility to the transcendent. All this includes responsibility to future generations. Because human beings suffer from an affective surplus and a calculative deficit, there is a need for wisdom and for some form of spirituality – brought together in a process of continuous self-refinement.

Confucianism is and must be adaptable. It is a broad holistic humanistic vision, and so is compatible with all major spiritual quests. Thus, there can be Confucian Jews, Confucian Buddhists, Confucian Hindus. . . In the course of Tu's work with Kofi Anaan in 2001 and UNESCO in 2004, it was agreed that a conception of human flourishing based upon shareable core values to which all spiritual traditions could subscribe to should be promoted, and that this would require the development of a new *language of global citizenship*, incorporating ecological consciousness and a commitment to international order. There is no doubt that the resurgence of Confucianism is of significance for politics in China and in the world as a whole, and it is worth reflecting on the political importance of dialogue. Too often political dialogue degenerates, as is evident in the history of Sino-American "dialogues", which have sometimes been less a matter of genuine dialogue than bargaining, confrontation, and even aggressive condemnation.[iii] Hence, Tu is making a plea for more genuine dialogue,

along the lines he finds expressed in the work, for example, of Amitai Etzioni, Robert Bellah, and Francis Fukuyama.

Following Tu Weiming's lecture, José Cazenove asked a question to the effect: What kind of liberal education do we need in our global age? The dominant conception of a liberal education refers especially to Renaissance humanism. A key figure in this was the "Renaissance man" – that is, the person of refinement and accomplishment across the range of the arts, humanities, and sciences. And this was understood as arising from a recovery of the ancient classics – and, hence, was clearly Western-centred. If we now need a liberal education that brings together all of humanity, how is this to be constructed? In what ways will this facilitate a global dialogue?

Tu's remarks in response begin by alluding to contemporary education in China itself, but he quickly steers his answer towards a broader defence of the humanities. In China, as he puts it, many people are good at quantitative analysis, but not at qualitative analysis. It *is* a choice whether you develop your intelligence in music or in science, but the development of ethical intelligence is not a choice: it is something no human being can afford to ignore. Liberal arts education should be about how to live an ethical life. This has to do, as we began to see earlier, with a kind of immanent transcendence: one can understand heaven through self-knowledge. Human beings are not creatures, but co-creators. "God", as outer reality beyond human comprehension, has to be interpreted again and again.

On the strength of this, Tu identifies three main principles that should govern education. First, it must comprise breadth and refinement. Second, the priority must be for education in matters of quality, not just in forms of quantitative analysis. Third, education must be oriented towards knowledge that is comprehensive. Yet the idea of comprehensiveness should not be taken to imply some kind of totalized perspective or any notion of completeness. We must not confuse data with information, knowledge with wisdom. To be hybrid, ecumenical, is a good thing. The art of listening, which has become increasingly difficult in recent times, is to be encouraged because it enhances intellectual horizons. It is one of the means necessary to the confrontation with radical othersness, and thereby to the enhancement of one's own self-reflexivity. Yet this is not a eulogy to the wisdom of age: in fact, older people must learn from the young because the young are open to more possibilities. At the heart of this vision, then, there is a paradox, which has ontological and existential dimensions. All, it is said, are sages, and yet no human being can become a sage. The first statement is ontological, and the second existential. As the latter indicates, learning can never be complete. We never create heaven, we are children of heaven, and we earn the right to appreciate heaven.

Cazenove's question prompts the making of connections with the idea of a liberal education, and plainly Tu's response endeavours to meet this demand, while retaining the terms of Confucianism. But there is a need to say something more directly and explicitly about the idea of a liberal education. While Cazenove's point of reference is the figure of the Renaissance man and, perhaps, the university, we can helpfully turn to a more recent expression of the idea where the focus is more on schooling.

This is an idea that has been influential on contemporary practice, albeit that some of its central tenets have become invisible or at least obscured with the onslaught of performativity and the pervasive culture of accountability. I am referring in particular to that restatement of the idea of a liberal education that is associated especially with R.S. Peters in the UK and Israel Scheffler in the USA. While the spirit of a liberal education is strongly present in both authors' work, it is Peters who has the more systematic account, which I shall briefly sketch.

Central to this ideal of education is the question of content: what is it that education is to pass on and why? Peters' response to this question is formulated in terms of the centrality to the curriculum of initiation into worthwhile pursuits. In *Ethics and Education*, in a series of ascending stages, he builds a conception of what this might mean. What is it that human beings enjoy? They enjoy physical pleasures such as food and sex. These are important aspects of experience, but they are cyclical desires and limited as a result. At a next level, we find enjoyment in such activities as sports and games. These offer scope for the progressive development of skill and understanding of the game, and they can provide remarkable arenas for the display of human excellence. But they too are limited in that the playing of a game, even the achievement of prowess, has little bearing on wider aspects of one's life. It will be of help only incidentally in one's personal relationships, in the work one does, or in one's broader social and political life. It contributes little to the development of judgement or wisdom in life as a whole. At a further level, however, Peters identifies what he calls "theoretical activities". He has in mind such intellectual pursuits as the study of history or physics, which we might otherwise think of simply as academic subjects. These forms of non-instrumental enquiry are, in the first place, not cyclical: one does not have to jettison what one knows in or order to add something new; and in fact what one does come to know and understand becomes the means for further pursuit of the subject; moreover, there is no shortage of the object being pursued – indeed, the further one advances into the subject, the greater one's appreciation of what there is still to learn, generating a desire that intensifies the more it is pursued. This line of reasoning appears to be sufficient to demonstrate the superiority of such activities over the others considered, but the affirmation of their worth depends also upon a more controversial claim to the effect that the person who has been intiatied into worthwhile activities of this kind will find what they have learned extending beneficially through their practical lives – that is, through their personal, social, and political responsibilities and engagements.

Initiation into worthwhile activities is an important point of emphasis in the idea of a liberal education, and Peters expresses it well. But to anyone with Confucian sympathies, the manner of approach in the argument just rehearsed is characteristically Western. We are to imagine an individual with desires who ascends through a series of stages from appetite to the intellect. The relation to others comes into the picture insofar as it sustains those higher practices that are theoretical activities. Indeed, Peters goes so far as to say that the love of theoretical activities is superior to the love of a person because persons are finite and theory is not! Plainly it is the case also, then,

that this initial foray into what is perhaps the driving idea behind this restatement of the idea of a liberal education has led us into a discourse that is different in style and tone from that of Tu's restatement of Confucianism, and in due course I shall return more directly to these question of these differing registers of thought and argument. But let me first say a little more about the position developed by Peters and his colleagues.

The somewhat nuanced remarks by Tu regarding breadth and comprehensiveness find echoes in the idea of a curriculum that embraces all the "forms of knowledge", a term associated especially with the work of Peters' colleague, Paul Hirst. The epistemological commitment driving Hirst's position is that knowledge is not all-of-a-piece but arises in different forms, which is illustrated by the fact that a chain of reasoning in chemistry is other than one in history, for example. While this is no barrier to interdisciplinary enquiry (these subjects could be brought together, say, in research into the preservation of manuscripts), a purportedly logical point is being made about the nature of reason itself. Hirst equivocates a little over the exact number and character of each of the forms of knowledge. Moreover, while in his classic statement of these views, he goes on to claim that an initiation into each of these different forms of reasoning, with the distinct bearing each has on the world as a whole, serves as the best preparation a learner can have for the practical life as well, later, under the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre especially, he retracts these claims. He maintains, however, his commitment to the epistemological position outlined above, a position that has had a significant influence on policy and practice in schools.

Hirst's work reveals a tension that runs through this version of the idea of a liberal education between its inheritance of, on the one hand, ideas of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill and, on the other, ways of thinking that reach back to classical times and find articulation, contemporaneously, in the writings about education of Michael Oakeshott. It is a telling point, then, that Hirst's most influential paper culminates in and concludes with an extended quotation from Oakeshott's essay "The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind" (1959):

> As civilised human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. Of course there is argument and enquiry and information, but wherever these are profitable they are to be recognized as passages in this conversation, and perhaps they are not the most captivating of the passages. . . Conversation is not an enterprise designed to yield an extrinsic profit, a contest where a winner gets a prize, nor is it an activity of exegesis; it is an unrehearsed intellectual adventure. . . Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance,

> and in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which, in the end, gives place and character to every human utterance (in Hirst, 1965).

It is a matter of some curiosity that Hirst reorders the sequence of the sections of text separated by the ellipses and that he does this without explanation. But the passage is nonetheless moving, and it is rightly celebrated as a powerful expression of liberal education in this aspect.

Yet in the decades that followed, it was the other line of influence, associated more obviously with liberalism in the familiar political sense, that quickly gained the upper hand. The guiding idea of liberalism in this sense has its *locus classicus* in Mill's *On Liberty*, originally published in 1859. Mill writes:

> The object of this essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can rightfully be exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant (Mill, 1978, p. 9).

The positive principle that is the correlate of this restriction is that people should be allowed to do what they want to, provided that it does not harm others. This emphasis on autonomy as the absence of constraints turns into an ideal where what one does is rationally ordered, in line with Kant's account of freedom as requiring the ordering of the passions by reason. Robert Dearden's influential paper "Autonomy and Education" laid the way for intensified emphasis on the ideal of autonomy as a central aim of education, and under this line of influence the ideal came to be expressed not just as "autonomy" but as "rational autonomy". The work of John White, Eamonn Callan, and Harry Brighouse, for example, as well as the more obviously political philosophy of Matthew Clayton and Adam Swift, can clearly be seen in the light of these lines of influence and, hence, in relation to the massively important impact of John Rawls. The vision of education embodied in Oakeshott's writings, which extends back to Plato's Cave, has, thus, been partly eclipsed by those who most vociferously promoted the liberal ideal.

The above quotation from Mill should reinforce the point that the idea of human being implicit in liberalism and liberal education of this kind is not close to the emphatically relational ontology found in Tu's thinking. Similarly, its conception of reason and the educated person is more explicit but plainly more restricted than the Confucian evocation of wisdom in the figure of the sage. On the latter, consider the following remarks by Tu:

> Confucius once insisted that the right kind of learning – the sort handed down by the ancient sages – was not learning to please others but "learning for the sake of one's self". This message is not an individualistic, romantic assertion about one's existential right to be unique. The rights-consciousness prevalent in modern Western culture is alien to the Confucian tradition. By advocating learning for one's own sake, Confucius did not suppose that the human self is an isolated or isolable "individuality". . . The "individualists" in ancient China were apolitical but not anti-social. Like Confucius, they understood the self as a connecting point for relationships, an inseparable part of a network of human interaction (Tu, 2010, pp. 310-311).

These remarks open the way to revealing two further points of contrast with the idea of a liberal education outlined above. First, where liberal education emphasizes the impersonal, in its advocacy for theoretical activities, the Confucian approach is to turn towards the self. This is not to suggest anything self-indulgent or narcissistically introspective but is perhaps closer to the *epilemeia heautou*, the care of the self, of which Socrates speaks – which has more to do with a recognition of the weight of responsibility one has for one's actions and for who one is, and is thoroughly ethical in kind. Confucian education is an explicitly ethical education. In this, it finds its feet, so to speak, in ordinary daily affairs. Hence, as a second point, where theoretical activities are abstract, the Confucian approach emphasizes embodiment and is centred in familiar and everyday experience. "Elementary learning" is addressed to a realization of the body, and this in due course lays the way for the "great learning", which entails "the sort of self-cultivation that aims at the 'embodiment' of all levels of sensitivity" (p. 311). Both levels of education seek to enhance a refined self-awareness. The ritualistic elements of learning, which help to prepare elementary learners for transition to the next stage, should not be seen as a rigid shaping of behaviour and thought, a socialization in conformity, anymore than a training in calligraphy is intended to produce identical reproductions, but rather as providing the instruments of self-expression and communication through which they can come to participate in their own socialization and contributor creatively to society's development. But to put this in these terms – of "society's development" – is to fall short of the range of this idea and of the part education plays in the "great transformation". This term applies not primarily, or not exclusively, to education and the human being, but to the way the world becomes, and the term used earlier, "anthropocosmic", is intended to draw attention to the fact that we are not creatures but co-creators in the cosmic process, according to a Heavenly Principle (*tianli*) that involves the human being in an ethic of responsibility:

> The Confucian statement in the *Analects* that human beings can make the Way great, but the Way cannot make human beings great may lead to the false impression that human beings act as creative agents on their own. The injunction is rather that we human beings are obligated, by a sense of awe and reverence, to make ourselves

> worthy of what the Heavenly Principle empowers us to do as partners. The *Doctrine of the Mean* (Book XXII) states that through self-realization human beings actively participate in the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth and thus form a trinity with Heaven and Earth. Accordingly, we can rise above our earthly existence by cultivating the virtues inherent in our nature (p. 345).[iv]

In "The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism", Tu has turned this principle towards the current environmental crisis, and he redescribes the role of the Confucian scholar in more contemporary and democratic terms:

> The Confucian idea of the concerned scholar may benefit from the wisdom of a philosopher, the insight of a prophet, the faith of a priest, the compassion of a monk, or the understanding of a guru, but it is the responsibilities of the public intellectual that is the most appropriate to the embodiment of this idea (p. 397).

The idea of the public intellectual is also itself given a significant democratic twist in that this is said to be a role that is incumbent on all citizens. He acknowledges that a significant factor in the environmental threat that Chinese economic growth poses has been the narrowing of Confucian thinking through its misappropriation, especially during the 20th century, in authoritarian policy and a utilitarian mindset: a "limiting and limited secular humanism" has "legitimated social engineering, instrumental rationality, linear progression, economic development, and technocratic management at the expense of a holistic, anthropocentric vision" (pp. 392-393). In this context, Tu has emphasized the need to change the language that prevail in Chinese culture – modes of discourse that are themselves barriers to dialogue of the kind he energetically seeks to advance.

Thus, we come back to the "deplorable deadness of imagination" that Dewey laments. These modern Chinese forms of obstruction to paths of thought – their narrowing of the language - resonate in some degree with resistance in the West. The difference in rhetorical form between modern philosophical writing in the liberal tradition and that of the *Analects* is obviously a major barrier to the reception of the latter today. It is one of the achievements of Tu that he has developed a register of expression that partly overcomes this yet maintains its adherence to the Confucian tradition. It is no coincidence that his advocacy incorporates also a robust defence of the arts and humanities in education, and indeed this is crucial to the internal relationship he sees between education and wider political aims. While his advocacy in this is very much to be admired, I want to take issue in some degree with his own views regarding language. To lay the way for this, let me first air some reservations over the way that dialogue emerges in his work.

Dialogue and language

The Georgetown Lectures that we have been considering provide an example of dialogue in a form that is familiar enough in the academy, and they demonstrate successfully some of the possibilities of comparative philosophy. It is a feature of Tu's philosophy, however, that his efforts to inform and to make connections have extended well beyond the university, in, for example, his work with Kofi Anan, the UN Secretary General. I want to consider a product of his collaboration with Daisuki Ikeda, the Buddhist philosopher, peacebuilder, and educator, and founding president of he founding president of Soka Gakkai International. In 2011, their dialogue issued in the jointly authored book, *New Horizons in Eastern Humanism: Buddhism, Confucianism and the Quest for Global Peace*.

The book is a congenial dialogue between highly influential thinkers representing different worldviews, both originating in the East. The authors are pleased to find harmony between their respective worldviews, and the political sentiments and moral principles expressed are eminently worthy. The following exchange, in which dialogue is explicitly discussed, is indicative of the book as a whole:

> Tu: The many wise aspects of Buddhism you have discussed give me an opportunity for more fundamental reflection on Confucianism, my own tradition. This has renewed my awareness of the importance of dialogue.
> Ikeda: Dialogue is indeed an important form of seeking, of improvement, and of creativity. Confucianism is the soil in which the traditional Chinese spirit has grown. Engaging in dialogue with one of the greatest contemporary Confucian scholars is certain to build an enduring bridge of Sino-Japanese understanding.
> Tu: Thank you for your compliment. My knowledge about the Confucian heritage – for example, Confucianism in Japan – is quite limited.
> Ikeda: You are too modest. I am aware of your great interest in Sino-Japanese relations (Tu and Ikeda, 2011, p. 114).

The passage indicates also the spirit of mutual admiration that characterizes the dialogue. Moreover, there is frequent recourse to aphorisms of the form: "One should study as though there were not enough time, yet still feel fear of missing the point"; "A person who can bring new warmth to the old while understanding the new is worthy to take as a teacher"; and "Do not be concerned that no one recognises your merits. Be concerned that you may not recognise others." In a sense there is nothing to object to in the substantive principles and virtues that are extolled, and they might prompt the reflection that the partners in the dialogue revere. But is this enough? Is it not rather the case that dialogue here has become a rhetorical form that, in its monotone of harmony, risks anaesthetizing thought where most it is needed.

Consider, as an illustration of the problem, one of the most well-known passages in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Polonius, a close advisor to the Danish king, is bidding farewell to his son. Laertes is about to leave for

Germany, where he is to study philosophy. This is the fatherly advice that Polonius gives:

> Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
> . . .
> Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice;
> . . .
> Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
> . . .
> This above all: to thine ownself be true,
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.
> (Act 2, Sc. 3, 547-566)

The passage, with its regular rhythm and series of imperatives, has a directness and simplicity that makes it eminently memorable. These are amongst the most quoted lines in Shakespeare, and, at least when they are first heard, they are likely to be taken as the expression of reason and responsible fatherliness. But as events transpire in the play, Polonius turns out not to be the model of moral propriety that he portrays here, and – more importantly perhaps – the "good advice" that hear imparts proves inadequate, even a barrier to confronting, the problems that Hamlet will face. What is familiarity, and how is vulgarity expressed? What is it to listen, and what to speak - to speak, say, for oneself, in one's own voice? What, amidst this series of judgements, is one to imagine to be the occasion for reserving judgement or the form that this might take? And, above all, what is it to be true to oneself? What is the self and what would constitute being true to it? Would this necessarily be a good thing? The point is that Polonius's words, however worthy they may be, are not adequate to the realities of experience with which the play grapples, and their memorable rhetorical form is part of the problem. In the reassurance of the aphorism, there is reasonableness and good measure, but this is also the subduing of life – morality subjugated to a kind of normalisation. Shakespeare knows this and plays on the seductive quality of the right-mindedness that is here so neatly expressed. The dialogue between Tu and Ikeda must surely be sophisticated in various ways, but rather than opening new connections, it deadens the imagination, installing a new provincialism that blocks the highways of thought. Is this not the manifestation of the forced and artificial, integration of thought of which Dewey warned?

Dewey himself was not without his limitations in this respect, and his own experience in Japan led him to barriers in the range of his own thinking (see Saito, 2019, 2020). In his visit to Japan, from February 9 until April 28, 1919, the principles of mutual understanding and universal democracy beyond national and cultural boundaries that he espoused were severely tested. The move towards democratization was soon to give way to a new nationalism and militarism, and he left the country in disappointment. During the short period of his stay, he struggled to penetrate below the surface of the culture. "Japan is a unique country," he remarked, "one whose aims and methods are baffling to any foreigner' (Dewey, 1982, p.

171). He communicated with Japanese liberal intellectuals but realized that 'such higher criticism is confined to the confidence of the classroom' (p. 174). In the minds of ordinary people, any aspiration to democracy was shouldered out by nationalist sentiment, and it was impossible to communicate his idea of democracy as a personal way of living, was dominated by nationalistic sentiment. Dewey noticed everywhere the obstacles to "the development of an enlightened liberal public opinion in Japan" - "the conspiracy of silence", patriotism, and the institutional religion that prevented "critical thought and free discussion" (Dewey, 1983, pp. 257-257) – and he was troubled by the authoritarian, nationalistic ethics indoctrinated in elementary education (Dewey, 1982, pp. 167-168). He was struck and confused by the inconsistency involved in Japanese modernisation, where he found a combination of the 'feudal' and 'barbarian' ethos of the warrior with the worship of western industrialisation (160–161). As he put it, 'There is some quality in the Japanese inscrutable to a foreigner which makes them at once the most rigid and the most pliable people on earth, the most self-satisfied and the most eager to learn' (168).

In my view Dewey's limitations are to be found in aspects of his own prose-style, which, although it has its powerful and moving moments (as seen in the quotation around which the present discussion has circulated), is inclined towards a kind of flatness. I have referred to this elsewhere as a homeostatic quality, which is indeed in keeping with the general tenor and substance of his thought (see, for example, Saito and Standish, 2014). Tu's style is, of course, very different, but again I find that there is a kind of continuity – a serious-mindedness that tilts towards earnestness, and an inclination towards the defence of general, good an sound principles that does not always vivify the troubled fabric of human experience. Pragmatism – perhaps Dewey's pragmatism rather than say William James's – has been haunted by the question: does pragmatism have a tragic sense? My impression is that, for all the undoubtedly sincere concern with the most serious problems – locally, politically, globally – that one finds in Tu's Confucianism, and with due acknowledgement of his elegant command of English, there may some barrier to the finding of a language in which this tragic dimension might be better realized.

In the light of this comment, I shall conclude with some brief remarks about Tu's championing of the humanities and his criticism of aspects of anglophone philosophy.

Philosophy, language, and the humanities

In his Preface to *The Global Significance of Concrete Humanity*, Tu writes:

> My teaching experience at Princeton University and the University of California at Berkeley further convinced me that unless the practitioners of Anglo-American philosophy, fashionable at universities in North America at the time, transcended the epistemological and linguistic turns, they could not fruitfully address fundamental questions confronting American society, let alone the human condition. When I chaired a committee reviewing Berkeley's

> Philosophy Department in the 1970s, one of my recommendations was to insist, as a way of broadening the reach of the American philosophical curricula, at the two sides of the Atlantic be bridged. I did not even mention the Pacific. It was obviously [*sic*] that the ocean extending all the way to the "Far East" was too wide for the "analytical philosophers" to leap across (pp. xx-xi).

These in some ways enlightened remarks express a sense of philosophy's broader significance and the suspicion that the subject, in becoming more technical, might become scientistic. But they also betray a misunderstanding of at least some of what these developments in the subject was achieving, especially in respect of its concerns with language. One aspect of the linguistic turn was that language was no longer taken to be just a means of communication, which, when used well, would make meaning transparent. Another was the realization of the great many things that we do with words – in particular, the recognition that language is not to be reduced to the proposition, and that in any case expressions, including propositions, have a performative force to them that is not to be evaluated purely in terms of their truth or falsity. The advances in thinking about these matters, especially in the later Wittgenstein and in J.L. Austin have open the way for recognition of the extent to which human lives and reality in general are to be understood in terms of human expressiveness. There was something stunted in the earlier turn to language, as found in the work of the logical positivists, and there is something stunted in a different but related way in the moral proprieties and assurance of Polonius's advice to his son. The philosophers I have named and Shakespeare himself are alive to the significance of what we do with words.

It is abundantly true that Tu draws attention to differences in the connotations and significance of Chinese expressions in Confucian thought and to the problems of their being translated into English. This is important to the power of what he has to say, however much he may offend Confucian purists by venturing to translate at all! But what is going on here is something like the provision of a glossary of terms – undoubtedly of great use in making the ideas more clear but maintaining a kind of distance from the struggle, as I have referred to it, that is internal to language, to English or Chinese.

I emphasise this point because I believe this struggle for meaning to be close to what the humanities are about. The humanities are different from the sciences in that the objects of their study are not the brute givens of nature but the already linguistic behaviour of human beings. As linguistic, that behaviour is already conditioned by an openness to interpretation: literature, history, anthropology, and philosophy are essentially concerned with the meaning-making of human beings. And Tu says much that supports the view that, because of this, the humanities have a more fundamental role than the sciences, in that it is through them that one can address broader questions about what is of value, about what makes a good life or a life good, and about what a just society might be like. Such has been the concern of philosophy since ancient times, East and West.

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[i] For a compelling discussion, see Shoko Suzuki (2007).
[ii] Available at: https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/events/confucianism-and-liberal-education-for-a-global-era. Accessed: 4 December 2019.
[iii] In the context of this focus on dialogue, it is interesting to recall the opera *Nixon in China*. This somewhat surreal and eerie work was commissioned in 1987 by the director Peter Sellars, with a libretto by Alice Goodman and music by John Adams.
[iv] For further discussion, see Tu (1989), especially pp. 77-79..