

**Limited Distrust of Reason as a Prerequisite of Cultural Convergence:
Weighing Professor Lao Sze-kwang's Concept of the Divergence between
“the Confucian Intellectual Tradition” and “Modern Culture”¹**

(以“对信任理性的保留”为中西文化会通的先决条件：
论劳思光教授关于“儒学”与“现代文化”分歧的看法)

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Abstract: Professor Lao Sze-kwang 劳思光 views “the problem of ‘the future of Confucian learning’” as that of how to “put China in the world,” and my paper views the latter problem as that of how to realize a central goal of the modern Chinese intellectual world: resolving the contradictions between Chinese and Western thought (*huitong Zhong-Xi* 会通中西). Like Professor Lao, I see these contradictions as inseparable from an epistemological disagreement, the contradiction between what Lao calls “modern culture’s....distrust of reason” and that idea of a “rational will” basic to Confucian learning—in my terms, the disagreement between the epistemological pessimism developed by the Great Modern Western Epistemological Revolution (GMWER) and the epistemological optimism of mainstream Chinese philosophy, modern and premodern. I also agree that the way to resolve this disagreement is to turn both these epistemologies into objects of critical reflexivity (CR). In Lao’s terms, one has to ask which aspects of these two epistemologies are “closed,” i.e. relevant only to a limited segment of the historical past, and which are “open,” i.e. “more universal in significance.” One can then affirm the latter, discard the former (*qushe* 取舍), and so revise the cultural patterns of humankind.

I somewhat differ with Professor Lao, however, in regarding “closed” but persisting aspects of both these epistemologies as the major obstacle to resolving the contradiction between them. In other words, Lao, like not a few other Chinese philosophers (such as Tang Junyi 唐君毅, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, and Jin Yuelin 金岳霖), suggests that the currently most serious deficiencies of epistemology around the world are found in Western thought, not in the Confucian tradition and the rest of Chinese philosophy. Conversely, the Western academy regards Chinese epistemology as backward, and thus the dialogue between Chinese and Western epistemology has reached an impasse. In my view, however, these two mainstream epistemological trends both entail difficulties awaiting further study.

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¹ I am most grateful to Professor Stephen C. Angle for his critical examination of this essay. His comments were invaluable. Solving the problems he alerted me to, however, will take efforts far beyond this paper.

To study these difficulties, I begin with two assumptions. First, I adopt one of Tang Junyi's basic ways of defining the shared agenda of all philosophies, namely, analyzing the relations between three categories, "existence," "knowing," and "moral-political norms." Second, whether or not these relations have an objective, universal nature, their meaning cannot be divorced from their semantic character, that is, from their articulation as parts of a particular historical discourse.

With these two assumptions, one can criticize not only the "closed," epistemologically optimistic belief of the modern Chinese intellectual mainstream that moral-political norms can be deduced from knowledge about what exists but also the "closed," epistemologically pessimistic, Humean belief that there is no logical or meaningful connection between moral-political norms and knowledge about what exists. Once both epistemologies are analyzed semantically, it becomes clear that in both cases, the ideas of existence, knowing, and moral-political praxis are semantically interdependent. Deciding which epistemological approach is justified then is a matter of describing each pattern of semantic interdependence and debating which pattern makes more sense.

Moreover, the outcome of this debate has important implications for the substantive content of political philosophy, especially for the revision of Western liberalism. Yet any such effort to resolve the contradiction between these two epistemologies will be painful, requiring Chinese as well as Western intellectuals to relinquish some perspectives traditionally dear to them, and originally in their eyes outside the possibility of controversy.

Keywords: Great Modern Western Epistemological Revolution (GMWER), epistemological optimism, epistemological pessimism, discourse, culturally inherited rules of successful thinking (ROST), critical reflexivity (CR), "middle ground" (Richard J. Bernstein)

内容提要：劳思光教授将“儒学的未来”这个问题视为如何“把中国摆在世界里面”的问题，而本文则把劳氏所讲的问题看为如何让中西文化或哲学会通的问题。与劳氏一样，笔者以为中西文化或哲学之间的矛盾，与一种认识论性的分歧是分不开的，即劳氏所谓“当代思潮”的“对于理性的不信任”（即西方近代认识论大革命的“悲观主义认识论”）与儒学的“理性意志”（即“乐观主义认识论”）的冲突。笔者同意，化除这个矛盾的方法，在于把这两个认识论转化成反思的对象；用劳氏的说法，就是审视这两个理论哪里“封闭”、哪里“开放”，然后以取舍的方法会通中西，藉此修改人类的文化模式。

然而，笔者的观点与劳氏并不完全一样。笔者以为，对会通的主要障碍，正是这两个认识论各有其“封闭”之处；换言之，劳氏和不少中国哲学家（如唐君毅、牟宗三、金岳霖等）一样，觉得中西认识论现时最严重的毛病，在于西方思想方面，而非在于儒学和其它的中国哲学。与此同时，西方学术界又以中国认识论为落后，因此令中西方的沟通对话处于胶着状态而停滞不前。笔者以为，其实双方均各有问题，有待详加研究。

为了分析双方“封闭”之处，本文由两个前提出发：（一）沿用唐君毅对哲学课题常用的一个看法，即“存在”、“认识”以及“价值”这三个范畴的相互关系；（二）无论这些关系是否有客观性和普遍性的意义，它们均不能超过其语义性（semantic）的意义，即它们在某历史性话语（discourse）中的意义。

根据这两个前提，我们不仅能反驳中国乐观主义认识论“价值”能从“存在”演绎出来的“封闭”说法，同时也反驳了休谟式的悲观主义认识论“价值”跟“存在”无关的“封闭”说法。本文强调的，是价值、存在及认识这三个范畴在语义上互相依赖的本质；至于哪一个认识论最合理，则端视哪种方法能最恰如其分地分析这种互相依赖的情况。

再者，上述论争的结果，对政治哲学尤其是自由主义的修正，有重要的影响。然而，无论从什么思路去会通中西，这个取舍过程必定是痛苦的，因为中国知识分子也好、西方知识分子也好，都必须舍弃一些本来珍而重之、不可动摇的观念和信仰。

关键词：西方近代认识论大革命，乐观主义认识论，悲观主义认识论，话语，从某文化继承的思想规矩，反思能力，居中的境界

1. Diverging Definitions of Cultural Divergence

A central feature today of the intellectual scene east and west continues to be the dialogue between Alex Inkeles, with his thesis of the increasing “convergence” of all modernizing societies, and Samuel P. Huntington, with his emphasis on the persisting divergences between culturally different civilizations.² Undoubtedly referring to an important aspect of global history, the thesis of convergence has come in a variety of forms ranging from Inkeles’s sociological view emphasizing the cultural-political repercussions of technological change to Tu Wei-ming 杜维明’s argument that Confucian ideals implicitly converge with those of the West’s Enlightenment, the widespread modern Chinese belief that global history is moving inexorably toward an era of Great Oneness (*datong* 大同), or the perspective of New Confucian philosophers like Tang Junyi and Mou Zongsan, who viewed convergence as a necessary ideal that can be realized only if philosophers make clear how the world’s different philosophical traditions all shed light on a single set of logically unified truths (*huitong* 会通). Such convergence may or may not imply some unification of customs and norms, but it certainly entails significant consensus about how to discuss clashes of political interest logically.

Either way, however, convergence today is largely a goal, not a current reality. This is especially so in the case of cultural patterns. True, Hong Kong, New York, Tokyo, Taipei, Shanghai, Paris, Teheran, and Bombay look remarkably similar if one just eyeballs the world

² Alex Inkeles, *One World Emerging: Convergence and Divergence in Industrial Societies* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998); and Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

that fascinates Thomas L. Friedman of *The New York Times*, the “flat world” of automobiles, airport culture, the internet, and Starbucks. Such economic globalization, however, coexists with divergent religious and metaphysical traditions still central to societies throughout much if not all of the world. “Mosques, Starbucks Found in Saudi Arabia” reads the heading of an article in the December 10, 2006 edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. If secularization means accepting John Rawls’s view that one’s ultimate beliefs about human life, as opposed to scientific propositions, are not susceptible to being judged as true or false, much if not most of the world’s population is still unsecularized, persistently “delusional” (to use Rawls’s term) in following divergent forms of religious fundamentalism providing them with incongruent definitions of what is absolutely sacred and true.³ To use Friedman’s metaphors, far more numerous than the people enjoying their Lexuses, those treasuring their olive trees still have a great deal to say about the course of history.

Moreover, basic divergences persist even between sophisticated, seemingly secularized philosophical trends east and west that all emphasize the same general ideals, such as freedom, equality, and modernization. To be sure, disagreement is anyway the rule in all arenas of philosophical discussion, whether domestic or international. As I tried to argue in *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, however, there is a fundamental difference between disagreements within the context of a culturally shared discourse and two discourses the culturally inherited premises of which greatly differ. Admittedly, this distinction is a matter of degree and of interpretative judgment. I would nevertheless maintain that the textual evidence I have assembled supports my point.⁴

This is not to ignore the moments in the world’s modern history when intellectuals in one cultural setting enthusiastically affirmed a foreign doctrine expressed in another, as in China during the 1920s, when Hu Shi 胡适 insisted that science combined with John Dewey’s pragmatism answered all basic philosophical questions and Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 similarly affirmed Marxism. Yet such Chinese philosophers recommending a Western doctrine of course recognized the existence of contemporaneous Chinese trends resisting their recommendation. Moreover, as is now widely recognized, their very affirmation of Western values was part of an outlook ambiguously related to the values of their own, non-Western tradition.

As for unambiguous divergences between culturally different philosophical circles, they are illustrated by not only parochialism but also prominent writings explicitly focusing

³ For interesting comments on the global prevalence of religious fundamentalism today, see Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2004). For Rawls’s view that it would be “delusional” to seek a “true foundation” for any “comprehensive doctrine,” not to mention a religion, see John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) p. xx. The epistemology from which Rawls derived his fundamental political norm, i.e. “reasonableness,” is discussed in Thomas A. Metzger, *A Cloud Across the Pacific: Essays on the Clash between Chinese and Western Political Theories Today* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2005), ch. 10.

⁴ Metzger, *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, chs. 1–14.

on these divergences and the goal of overcoming them. By “parochialism” I mean the many discussions in China and the United States today carried on by intellectuals who are preoccupied only with the philosophical problematique of their own culture’s intellectual tradition; barely know any language foreign to their intellectual tradition; have only a vague understanding of philosophical trends outside their own civilization; are confident that the nature of these can be fully summed up by vague, macroscopic terms like “Confucianism,” “liberalism,” or “modern culture”; and are sure these trends present no challenge to their own beliefs. Such parochialism or “epistemic smugness” is an enormously important cultural tendency, whether in China or the United States. Ensuring the persistence of cultural divergence, it is usually overlooked by proponents of the convergence thesis, many of whom are themselves unknowingly parochial in the above sense.

For me, however, the most interesting manifestations of divergence between culturally different philosophical traditions are found in the writings of philosophers explicitly preoccupied with cultural divergence as a problem to be overcome. Such writings have appeared in the West, going back at least to F. S. C. Northrop’s *The Meeting of East and West*,⁵ but they have been much more important in the modern Chinese intellectual world.

One distinctive example is the thought of Professor Liu Shuxian 刘述先. He welcomes divergence as making possible a “pluralistic ... open” global philosophical arena that should lead to “the merging of Chinese and Western philosophical wisdom” (112).⁶ Liu’s view thus accords with the modern Chinese mainstream quest for “the philosophical unification of all valid ideas” (*huitong*). His perspective also is another Chinese way of legitimizing intellectual pluralism as a transitional historical process gradually revealing overarching truths. This paradigm is the main Chinese alternative to the dominant Western way of justifying pluralism, J. S. Mill’s concept of pluralism as the form of public discussion dictated by the incorrigible fallibility of the human mind.⁷

Liu’s perspective, however, is distinctive in its rejection of any a priori assumption that, in this eventual “merging” of Western and Chinese wisdom, Chinese wisdom has to play the proactive role. As Sun Yat-sen said, it is up to China to “save China and save the world.” This tradition-rooted outlook defining China as the proactive agent of global salvation has been the mainstream Chinese paradigm of cultural convergence in modern times.

⁵ F. S. C. Northrop, *The Meeting of East and West* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1946). For more examples, see Stephen C. Angle, “Zhongguo zhexuejia yu quanqiu zhexue” 中国哲学家与全球哲学 (Chinese Philosophers and Global Philosophy), *Zhongguo zhexue yu wenhua* 中国哲学与文化 1 (May 2007): 239–256.

⁶ See Liu Shuxian, “Zhongda ruzhe yu wo zai xueshu shang de yuanyuan” 中大儒者与我在学术上的渊源 (The Confucians of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Origins of My Scholarship), in Cheng Chung-yi 郑宗义 (Zheng Zongyi), ed., *Xianggang Zhongwen daxue de dangdai ruzhe* 香港中文大学的当代儒者 (The Modern-age Confucians of The Chinese University of Hong Kong; Hong Kong: New Asia College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006). All page numbers in my text refer to this book.

⁷ On various Chinese ways of conceptualizing pluralism, see *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, pp. 665–666.

Among the many ways this paradigm has been expressed are Tang Junyi's concept of "the nine realms," which puts the Confucian vision of virtue above all other religious and intellectual modes of thought, and a statement made around 2000 by the famous Mainland intellectual Li Shen zhi 李慎之: "As a Chinese, I believe that, in principle, the core philosophy of Chinese culture can open up the best path to resolve China's cultural crisis and that of the whole world."⁸ This paradigm obviously collides with the equally tradition-rooted Western view that Western civilization, where God first revealed Himself, embodies that commitment to freedom and rationality toward which the whole world should converge.

In this way, then, Huntingtonian divergence between civilizations is evident in their divergent ways of conceptualizing divergence and the way to realize convergence. This is bad news for those many of us east and west who believe that considerable convergence in values, a "global ethic," as Tu Wei-ming puts it, is needed to build up a peaceful, stable world community. If people can agree only on the existence of divergence, not on its nature, how can they carry on fruitful intercultural discussions about how to pursue convergence?

Clearly, the first step in pursuing convergence is not to reiterate the general ideals, like feminism and tolerance, that indeed are affirmed in a good part of the world and to assume that the proactive agent of convergence will be either Chinese or Western. A more useful first step is to explore the disagreements that prevent further convergence and so have to be cleared up if values are to converge enough to facilitate calm discussion and peaceful compromise when complex, emotionally-charged conflicts of interest occur. And central to these disagreements is disagreement about how divergence should be described and how it can be overcome.

2. Lao Sze-kwang's Analysis of Divergence

To make clearer the nature of the latter disagreement, I shall here describe and then explain how I agree and disagree with a particularly important Chinese analysis of the divergence between "modern culture" and "the core meaning of Confucian learning," an analysis with which the eminent scholar Lao Sze-kwang (Lao Siguang) tried to sum up the insights he had accumulated over many decades studying the history of Chinese philosophy and its relationship with Western philosophical trends. Professor Lao presented this analysis as a keynote lecture delivered at the "International Conference on Contemporary Confucians of The Chinese University of Hong Kong: Ch'ien Mu [Qian Mu 钱穆], T'ang Chün-i [Tang Junyi], Mou Tsung-san [Mou Zongsan], Hsu Fu-kuan [Xu Fuguan 徐复观]," a meeting held December 20–23, 2004 and organized by the Department of Philosophy of The Chinese University of Hong Kong.⁹

⁸ Ibid., p. 147. The Li Shen zhi quote is from *Huangyan wenhua yanjiu* 黄炎文化研究 13 (January 2000): 8. Tang Junyi's thought is discussed in ch. 2 of *A Cloud Across the Pacific*.

⁹ For Professor Lao's keynote speech, see Cheng Chung-yi, pp. 1–15.

Admittedly, calling his lecture “Assessing the Thought of the New Confucians from the Standpoint of Contemporary Intellectual Trends,” Professor Lao did not begin by pointing to cultural divergence and asking how to lessen it. His starting point was the question at the heart of this conference’s agenda: What is “the future of the Confucian intellectual tradition (*ruxue* 儒学)” (1)? That is, were the New Confucians correct in holding that ideas taken today from this Confucian tradition can shed an indispensable light on today’s global problems? Did the New Confucians succeed in turning the “Confucian intellectual tradition” into a living, important contemporary philosophy commanding the attention of the most prestigious philosophical circles in the West?

For Professor Lao, however, this “Confucian intellectual tradition” was central to “Chinese culture,” and the key challenge today facing “Chinese culture,” and thus the Confucian tradition, was how to help China avoid being “a China in a state of opposition or disconnection with the world,” that is, how to “put China in the world” (1).

For Lao, then, what scholars call cultural divergence was indeed a current problem to be solved, but even in the very definition of this problem, he diverged from Western views. Most emphatically, in his eyes, convergence, that is, being “put in the world,” would not be accomplished by just intensifying the processes of globalization and cultural diffusion so prominent today where he himself lives, Hong Kong. Still more emphatically, it was not a matter of China’s following in the footsteps of Taiwan by thoroughly institutionalizing capitalism and democratizing.

Rather than beginning with Huntington’s or Inkeles’s interest in empirical trends, Lao perceived divergence mainly as a normative problem, the relation between “modern culture,” which he described as flawed, and the “core meaning of the Confucian intellectual tradition” (*ruxue de hexin yiyi* 儒学的核心意义), which he saw as an outlook that might be useful in rectifying “modern culture” (12). To the extent that intellectuals could show how this “core meaning of the Confucian intellectual tradition” could rectify “modern culture,” they would help “put China in the world.” Thus the current “state of opposition” between “China” and “the world” would be overcome as Chinese retrieved an ancient Chinese wisdom and turned it into a globally influential philosophy, using it to correct “modern culture.” In other words, Lao’s paradigm of convergence converged with Sun’s, not Inkeles’s: Right thinking would “save the world,” and the possibility of finding it depended on a unique Chinese cultural resource. China would not be “in the world” until the world was healed by it and thus recognized its wisdom. As Joseph R. Levenson saw long ago, in the conceptualization of the new global community by the modern Chinese intellectual mainstream, humanity is divided into different civilizational entities, not only nations; the key question is which entity plays the role of teacher, which, that of student; and China must find a way to play that of the teacher, not only that of the student.

In Lao's eyes, however, his own approach to the problem of cultural divergence was based on objective realities knowledge about which had been obtained by using reason. In other words, Lao's essay expresses an unqualified belief in the ability of reason to identify not only the macroscopic entities and trends making up global history but also the goals which humankind should pursue, as well as the decisive causal role of philosophical ideas in the pursuit of these goals. This belief has been basic to just about all of modern China's ideologies and philosophies, a way of thinking I elsewhere called "discourse #1."¹⁰

Thus, what Levenson saw as an "emotional" need to play the role of teacher of the world Lao saw as a normative conclusion implied by the objective nature of global history. Conversely, from the standpoint of the modern Western intellectual mainstream illustrated by the writings of not only Levenson but also innumerable Western intellectuals like Max Weber and S. N. Eisenstadt, the normative conclusion implied by the objective nature of global history was that Western modernity was the model for the world, while from Lao's standpoint, this Western perspective was part of a flawed intellectual trend currently dominating the modern world. The relation between Lao and Levenson is paradigmatic for the whole relation between the modern Chinese and the modern Western intellectual mainstream: Each regards the other as at least partly out of accord with the objective nature of things.

For Lao, reason revealed, first of all, that humanity exists as a number of "cultures" with various aspects, such as "value problems" which "religious consciousness" can address (13), the need for a certain positive "social life," and other obvious needs (14). Lao implied that the most important need is for a "theory" or "doctrine" guiding the development of a particular culture. A theory or "major intellectual trend" (*sichao* 思潮) can even "negate" a "culture" (8). Often if not always, the content of a theory can be simply summed up. The latter methodological point is widely accepted in the Chinese world. It was implied by how Lao actually described "modern culture" (6).

Second, any theory "of course involves both a thesis and an antithesis" (*zhengfan liangmian* 正反两面). On the one hand, "every theory has its closed element" (*fengbi de chengfen* 封闭的成分), "limitations" imposed by its "historical context." If these "closed elements" are "emphasized," a theory becomes afflicted by "flaws" (*maobing* 毛病) and "of course quickly loses its effectiveness." On the other hand, at least some theories, such as those of the Confucian tradition, "have some universal meaning." This is their "open element" (*kai fang cheng fen* 开放成分) (15, 10, 2).

Third, "when a culture has developed up to a certain point," it is necessary to "discard" (*chaichu* 拆除) "closed aspects" overemphasis on which has caused the theory to "become ineffective." Discarding these "closed elements" entails a "consciousness of liberation" (*jiefang yishi* 解放意识). But such a consciousness must be combined with a "consciousness of the need to construct" (*jianshe yishi* 建设意识), to "create" (7).

¹⁰ See *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, especially ch. 1.

Fourth, the “creative” pursuit of cultural construction must build on those ideas with “universal meaning” (12). Unsaid in this lecture but obvious to Lao and his audience, “modern culture” also involves some “open elements” with “universal meaning.” So Lao joined the New Confucians and the Tsinghua 清华 School in looking for a new synthesis of Chinese and Western values, a mutual borrowing of “open elements” on the part of China and “modern culture.” As these two make use of each other’s wisdom, they can create the world which China can be “put in.”

Applying these universal laws of cultural, historical development, Lao explained what kind of mutual borrowing should be effected. He found that the New Confucians confronted a “major contemporary intellectual trend” that mixes together “modernity and postmodernity” (5). That is, “modern culture,” which “produced a modern world,” is still important, but this “major contemporary intellectual trend negates the culture of capitalism or modern culture” (8). Thus this trend has exemplified “the consciousness of liberation” from the travails of capitalism, but, with only a few exceptions, such as the later thought of Jürgen Habermas, it has failed to generate “consciousness of the need to construct” (7–8).

Moreover, “modernity” as well as “postmodernity” have become intertwined with a “mistrust of reason,” a term Lao used to refer to what has also been called “the epistemological turn” or the Great Modern Western Epistemological Revolution. As Lao noted, this was a movement that limited the scope of knowledge (as true and justified belief about what is objectively so) or even denied the very possibility of knowledge and proclaimed “the end of philosophy.” Directly evoking the central formulations of Neo-Confucianism in past centuries, Lao said that with this modern perspective, “there arose the problem, so to speak, of reason’s lacking any way to be securely put down (*andun* 安顿)” (12).¹¹

As Lao saw it, this could not but lead to a “fragmentation” of political discussion blocking the rise of a “consciousness of the need to construct.” That is, many of the individual moral-political aims of postmodernism, such as female liberation, make sense, but none of them can be used to “cover (*longzhao* 笼罩) the problem of culture as a whole” (10). Lao here was alluding to how this “fragmentation” precludes the formulation of that overarching philosophical system which the modern Chinese intellectual mainstream has always viewed

¹¹ For this use of *andun* in Zhu Xi’s writing, see Thomas A. Metzger, *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China’s Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 71. For overviews of the Great Modern Western Epistemological Revolution (GMWER), see my *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, pp. 37–50; “New Confucian Philosophy and the Global Philosophical Problem of Culture,” in Cheng Chung-yi, pp. 26–35; and the definitions of “epistemological optimism” and “epistemological pessimism” in Mo-zi-ke 墨子刻 (Thomas A. Metzger), “Daotong de shijiehua: Lun Mou Zongsan, Zheng Jiadong yu zhuiqiu pipan yishi de licheng” 道统的世界化：论牟宗三、郑家栋与追求批判意识的历程 (Turning the Idea of a Uniquely Chinese, Ancient Source of Absolute Wisdom into a Global Search for Knowledge: On Mou Zongsan, Zheng Jiadong and the Unfolding Quest for Morally Critical Consciousness), *Shehui lilun xuebao* 社会理论学报 5.1 (Spring 2002): 121–129. Karl R. Popper earlier used this pair of terms but in a basically different way, as some have failed to notice.

as the key to successful national development and cultural transformation (*tixi* 体系, *liguo zhi dao* 立国之道).

At the same time, the “mistrust of reason” coexisted, illogically enough, with continuing confidence in science, and this led to a poorly concealed “scientism,” which suffered from the fallacy of reducing the human to no more than a physical phenomenon (9).

All in all, then, as a mix of “modernity” and “postmodernity,” this “major contemporary intellectual trend,” with which Confucian thought had no choice but to contend, had three major flaws: the well-known ills of scientism; due in large part to a “mistrust of reason,” a spirit of liberation uncombined with a clear vision of what should be constructed to replace what was being rejected; caused by the consequent fragmentation of political discussion, the lack of an overall vision of human and national development. These flaws had to be corrected in order to create a world into which China could comfortably fit, and for Lao, if these flaws could be corrected, the only available source of the intellectual energy needed to correct them was the Confucian intellectual tradition.

In contrast with the New Confucians’ optimism in recent decades, however, Lao was far from certain that any modern Chinese effort to find this creative energy within the Confucian tradition would be successful. First, there was the problem of “the original historical condition” (*yuanzhuang* 原状) of the Confucian tradition, which blurred together “closed elements” and “elements with universal significance.” This “original historical tradition” had to be “disaggregated” (*dasan* 打散) so that the “elements with universal significance could be pulled out of it” (12). These valuable elements, Lao was sure, were “the core meaning of the Confucian intellectual tradition,” “a form of learning leading to the full realization of virtue” (*chengde zhi xue* 成德之学) (12).

Second, even if this “core meaning” could be “pulled out,” Lao rejected the optimistic belief of the New Confucians that it was possible to derive from it all the central norms of modernity, that is, “directly to open up (*kaichu* 开出) the road to modern culture” (12–13). This is a most important point diverging from the optimism of the New Confucians, a no doubt sad recognition that the global “modern culture” which China must accept is a culture at least partly alien to the treasured heart of Chinese culture, that China’s world in the future cannot be a fully harmonious one where “people are of one mind because they grasp the same true principles” (*ren tong ci xin, xin tong ci li* 人同此心, 心同此理). If the West has experienced “the death of God,” this was the end of the central Chinese hope of realizing “rule by one who is a sage within, a true king without” (*neisheng waiwang* 内圣外王)—a quantum jump in Chinese cultural history.

Third, there was no obvious way to use this “core meaning” to rectify the above “flaws” of “modern culture,” because, as just noted, the divergence between this “core meaning” and “modern culture” was so basic: “These two are basically different in nature (*yizhi* 异质).” Between them “there is a chasm hard to bridge” (12).

Given these difficulties, Lao could not but vacillate. He was not ready to abandon the goal, basic to so much modern Chinese thought, of “bringing the divergent insights of China and the West into a logically unified grasp of truth” (*huitong Zhong-Xi*): “...we still seek a secure understanding [of those of the Confucian tradition’s] elements open to what is universally valid, finding a new way to have them enter world philosophy and so in a new way bringing about a union (*zuhe* 组合) [of all the universally valid theories historically available today]” (15).

Outlining the nature of this “union,” however, Lao in this brief lecture could only roughly indicate how Confucian ideas could have a “therapeutic” effect on “modern culture.” Suggesting that Confucian thought includes the idea of a “rational will,” Lao apparently saw the latter as a possible antidote to the modern “distrust of reason” (13). He added that Confucianism has a “religious” aspect, and that the “ability of [Chinese moral metaphysics] ... to deal with the problems of moral metaphysics can be used to deal with those problems other religious faiths deal with” (14). Moreover, he suggested that “we also need to enable Confucian learning to realize anew its potential with regard to social life, becoming a living philosophy” (14).

For Lao, then, Confucian thought could be used to contribute to the ethical and spiritual improvement of people in the modern world, but he offered no specific ideas about how these Confucian ethical or spiritual values differed from and could be used to improve the ethical or spiritual values in non-Confucian cultural settings. Moreover, unlike Mou and Tang, he indicated doubt about their efficacy in the modern world.

3. Agreeing with Lao’s Approach

In my opinion, there is much to agree with in Lao’s powerful analysis. Adopting that modern Chinese perspective going back to the Kang 康[有为]-Liang 梁[启超] generation a century ago, Lao saw China’s national development as inseparable from a new way of thinking (*sixiang* 思想) entailing a comparative assessment of China’s and the West’s intellectual heritage (*gujin Zhong-wai de xueshuo* 古今中外的学说). True, as just mentioned, Lao’s thought exemplifies an unavoidably emotional aspect of modern Chinese thought noted by Levenson, a desire to demonstrate that China’s wisdom is not surpassed by that of the West. Emotional or not, however, Chinese intellectuals like Lao concluded—correctly, I believe—that the structuring of the international order is not just a political or technological issue but also a philosophical one, and that the philosophical problem is how to sort out the mix of desirable and undesirable ideas found in both the Chinese and the Western philosophical worlds. Rather than viewing their perception of this confusing mix east and west as evidence of an emotional problem preventing them from just frankly recognizing Western superiority, Western intellectuals should recognize the contradictions between

Chinese and Western conceptions of the rational or correct way to think about the world as a whole and confront the still unsolved problem of how to adjudicate these contradictions.

Lao, moreover, pursued this assessment by wisely borrowing the essentially Western distinction between the contemporaneous historical context of an idea and its contemporary value. Trying to pull out from history Confucian ideas with contemporary value, Lao resembled modern Western thinkers like Paul Tillich who sought to vindicate the Christian faith by distinguishing its universally meaningful from its merely historical aspects. In effect, moreover, Lao, like the New Confucians and the Tsinghua school, adopted a major modern Chinese viewpoint going back to Yan Fu 严复 and Zhang Zhidong 张之洞, and indeed resembling Tillich's way of relating Christianity to modernity, the view, namely, that the part of the tradition having contemporary value centered on the "inner," moral-spiritual aspects of culture, not its "outer," technological-institutional aspects. How to construct the "inner" life of modern citizens is indeed a or the central question about modernization, that of the nature of the *paideia* needed to form citizens ethically and spiritually able to flourish in a modern institutional setting.

Echoing Liang Qichao 梁启超's seminal *Xinmin shuo* 新民说 (On the Renewal of Our Citizenry), moreover, Lao saw that cultural revision requires a process of both destruction and construction (*shequ* 舍取). Asking how to carry out such cultural revision by combining Confucian values with that modernity coming out of the West, Lao did not follow a path rather fashionable today, namely, listing the general ideals shared on both sides of the Pacific. Instead, he saw the need to grasp clearly the obstacles preventing further convergence. Thus he recognized that he was trying to combine two fundamentally divergent concepts of human life (*yizhi* 异质). In another regard as well, his analysis somewhat coincided with notions I tried to develop in *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, namely, that a major aspect of Western culture today is an epistemological outlook which Lao described as "mistrust of reason," I, as a certain development of "epistemological pessimism." Like all the other major modern Chinese thinkers, Lao expressed distrust of this distrust.¹²

Again correctly (in my opinion), Lao suggested that this "distrust of reason" *in its current conventional Western form* precluded the rise of a robust, overarching political philosophy making possible a collectively resolute process of cultural construction and political action and thus left society at the mercy of an unresolved "fragmentation" of opinion and a purely destructive iconoclasm. Pointing to a lack in the Western liberal polities of overall, collectively pursued purpose, Lao to some extent echoed Carl Schmitt's famous critique of them and in effect gave some support to my book's argument about the "seesaw" problem, whereby existing political theories east and west are all deficient, because they either emphasize carefulness in factual and epistemological discussion while failing to

¹² For Chinese reactions to the Great Modern Western Epistemological Revolution, see *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, pp. 50–67.

conceptualize resolute collective action in the pursuit of progress or vice versa (the former has been typical of Western liberalism, the latter, of the whole spectrum of modern Chinese political philosophy).

I also agree with Lao if he implied that, in “finding a new way” to have the “open elements” of the Confucian tradition “enter world philosophy,” it is hard to specify the part to be played in this process by all those ethical and spiritual aspects of this tradition which are highly valued today by many Chinese, including values “pertaining to individual conduct rather than political structure, such as those related to truth-telling.”¹³ First, the development of a “world philosophy” influenced by Confucian ideas does not mean the end of cultural diversity, of ethical and spiritual outlooks treasured in one part of the world but not in another. Whether or not to treasure them can become just a matter of opinion or preferred custom, not “world philosophy.” For instance, kissing children goodnight is common in the West, but many Chinese families have not adopted this custom.

Second, when ethical and spiritual outlooks are looked at philosophically—as Tang Junyi did with his hierarchical idea of “the nine realms”—one encounters the controversy-arousing problem of describing specifically how Confucian ethical and spiritual ideas differ from non-Confucian ones; of making judgments about which of all these various values should be “adopted or rejected” (*qushe*); and of then justifying all these judgments. One cannot just assume Confucian ethical or spiritual ideas override other ones. For instance, some core Confucian ethical and spiritual concepts have been criticized by Chinese as well as Western scholars discussing the need for “civility” and unutopian political expectations.¹⁴

There also is the question of Confucian ideas about human qualities not susceptible to conceptualization as “general principles,” “such as sensitivity and consideration in interacting with others, or a sense of justice and consideration in interacting with others tempered by empathy in the political context.”¹⁵ I agree with Lao if he implied that these ideas or feelings are not central to the task of reformulating “world philosophy.” To be sure, feelings or thoughts that cannot be logically or even verbally expressed are a major part of human life. They are constantly evoked as people debate normative options in that “middle ground” Richard J. Bernstein placed between knowledge and mere arbitrary opinion (see below). Scholars like Michael Polanyi tend to associate them with bodily impulses or skills acquired through practice, while Mou Zongsan associated them with a “metaphysical” or “mystical” “wisdom,” distinguishing (paradoxically enough) between “discussions making distinctions” (*fenbie shuo* 分别说) and “discussions going beyond distinctions” (*fei fenbie shuo* 非分别

¹³ Here I quote from the evaluation of my article prepared by an anonymous referee.

¹⁴ See ch. 12 in *A Cloud Across the Pacific* and my “The Western Concept of Civil Society in the Context of Chinese History,” in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, eds., *Civil Society: History and Possibilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 204–231.

¹⁵ Again a quote from referee letter cited in note 13 above.

说).¹⁶ Forming or rectifying a “world philosophy,” however, has to center on the resolution of explicitly conceptualized differences.

Tang Junyi put it well in 1954. To be sure, facing “certain cultural, intellectual, and conceptual conflicts in that mix of Chinese, Western, old, and new ideas of which we Chinese became aware over the last hundred years,” Tang approached these conflicts not only “conceptually” (*guannian shang* 观念上) but also from the standpoint of “feelings and intentions” (*qingzhi shang* 情志上)—a certain “sense of deep unease” and of what was “unbearable.” His emphasis, however, was on “transforming concepts by eliminating the contradictions and conflicts between them.”¹⁷

True enough, Tang and Mou have been criticized for being overly abstract and academic, neglecting moral cultivation and moral performance (*hanyang* 涵养, *shijian* 实践). This criticism, however, is superficial. Confucianism emphasized the conceptual side of moral cultivation, not only concrete moral performance. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, Tang and Mou by no means “walked out of history” and neglected moral praxis when they had no choice but to address the profound conceptual problems created by the impact of Western ideas on Chinese thought. Mou distinguished clearly between “philosophical reflection” or “analysis” and the “real” world of “material life, morality, and religion,” emphasizing that a philosophically analytical view of this real world of human “activity ... offers no ultimate satisfaction [of human needs]” (*guisudi* 归宿地) and so is just a “bridge” which “helps us by clearing up difficulties,” but which can be “destroyed” after it is crossed.¹⁸ Indeed, from the standpoint of this paper, Mou can be criticized not for violating the Confucian way of viewing the relation between praxis and conceptual reflection but for not challenging it.

4. Questions about Lao’s Analysis: Limited Distrust of Reason as the Basis of Convergence

Especially with regard to the epistemological concepts, however, Lao’s analysis strikes me as open to argument. I see epistemology as concerned with how and to what extent one can obtain knowledge (i.e. true and justified belief about what is objectively and really so no matter how it is observed or interpreted).¹⁹ Therefore, when Lao speaks of a Western or

¹⁶ Mou Zongsan, *Zhongguo zhexue shijiujiang* 中国哲学十九讲 (Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy; Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 2002), pp. 331–335.

¹⁷ Tang Junyi, *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian* 人文精神之重建 (The Reconstruction of the Humanistic Spirit; Hong Kong: Xinya yanjiusuo, 1955), introduction, p. 1.

¹⁸ Mou Zongsan, *Shidai yu ganshou* 时代与感受 (Reflections on Our Current Era; Taipei: E’hu chubanshe, 1995), pp. 200–204. Also see my “Daotong de shijiehua: Lun Mou Zongsan, Zheng Jiadong yu zhuiqiu pipan yishi de licheng,” pp. 105–117.

¹⁹ This paper bypasses the more recent arguments about the nature of knowledge and truth, such as those about the coherence, correspondence, performative, and pragmatic theories of truth. These arguments reveal how difficult it is precisely to explain what is meant by “knowledge,” but I just use a

modern “distrust of reason,” I see him as referring to doubt about the extent to which people in the search for knowledge can rely on a cognitive mode called “reason.” Such doubt can also be described as epistemological pessimism and indeed has been the hallmark of a historical intellectual trend that can be called the Great Modern Western Epistemological Revolution (GMWER); that has been a major characteristic of Western liberal modernity; and that all modern Chinese thinkers, including Lao, have largely rejected, often referring to it in a general way as a fallacious *bukezhi lun* 不可知论 (the theory that the objective, ultimate nature of the world cannot be known). Thus I have elsewhere suggested a contrast or clash between two discourses. Discourse #1 is the broad modern Chinese intellectual trend rejecting the GMWER’s epistemological pessimism and affirming the full ability of “reason” to seek knowledge as a logically unified (*guantong* 贯通) philosophy identifying the rules governing physical nature, human history, and moral-political praxis. This Chinese “discourse #1” diverged from the West’s “discourse #2,” which was created by the GMWER, and which also diverged from rationalistic, epistemologically optimistic Western trends like scientism and Thomistic philosophy.²⁰

But if one turns from historical fact to the goal of convergence (*huitong*), one has to find a conceptualization of “reason” which all philosophical circles east and west can regard as justified (*zhengli* 证立). In my view, how to find this conceptualization is the key question today for those seeking the convergence of philosophical circles east and west and so a way to “put China in the world.” Should then these circles affirm the optimistic epistemology of discourse #1 or the pessimistic epistemology of discourse #2? Or is there another justifiable approach which revises both discourses and leads to convergence?

Exploring this third possibility, I try to make a two-fold point. On the one hand, people can obtain knowledge or relatively enlightened understanding by not only logically analyzing sense data but also using critical reflexivity (CR) to address ontological-epistemological questions and their relation with moral-political praxis, that is, the three problem areas of philosophy as Tang Junyi conceived of them in his classic *Zhexue gailun* 哲学概论 (An Introduction to Philosophy; 1961): *cunzai* 存在 (existence), *renshi* 认识 (knowing), and *jiazhi* 价值 (values).²¹ In the quest for knowledge, then, the logical analysis of

widespread, common-sense definition of knowledge to highlight how the GMWER shrunk the scope of knowledge. On the GMWER, see note 11 above. Whether GMWER arguments about how to define knowledge partly were about obstacles impeding the quest for knowledge deserves further discussion. If knowledge is defined in a sufficiently limited way, there will be no obstacles to pursuing it.

²⁰ See *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, ch. 1 and my “New Confucian Philosophy and the Global Philosophical Problem of Culture” in Cheng Chung-yi.

²¹ In *ibid.*, p. 42 and *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, pp. 722–729, I describe the overlap between this idea of “critical reflexivity” (CR) and the thought of scholars like S. N. Eisenstadt, Noam Chomsky, John Dewey, John Rawls, Richard Rorty, Tang Junyi, and Charles Taylor. CR refers to what is commonly known as “reasoning,” but I try to strip from this term the ambiguities associated with the traditional idea of “reason.” Thus CR refers essentially to the pursuit of logic and to what Eisenstadt called “reflexivity,” the open-ended, mentalistic ability to turn any belief or other idea into an object of critical scrutiny. Moreover, I argue that this pursuit of logic and reflexivity is integral to linguistic practice at least when the latter leads to the formation of a “discourse.” I define a “discourse” as “a kind

sense data is unavoidably accompanied by the exercise of CR not only when philosophers like Tang Junyi seek to clarify ontological-epistemological questions but also when logical positivists argue that, because induction and deduction are the only sources of knowledge, Tang's effort to clarify these questions was misguided. From the standpoint of this third approach, therefore, it is the GMWER which was misguided when it led to this denial that critical reflection supplements induction and deduction as a source of knowledge or relative enlightenment, not to mention when it led to Richard Rorty's "pragmatic" conclusion that the classic idea of knowledge is a chimera, that people should regard "truth as, in [William] James's phrase, 'what it is better for us to believe.'"²²

On the other hand, I would argue, the GMWER was not misguided in emphasizing *sibian* 思辨 (conceptual thinking inseparable from logic) (Mou's *fenbie shuo*) as the key to a public philosophy guiding *paideia* and political life rather than intuition (*zhijue* 直觉) or Mou's "mysticism." It also was correct in discovering major problems impeding the pursuit of knowledge and necessitating great caution in making knowledge claims. The modern Chinese philosophical mainstream has been mistaken in largely rejecting these GMWER insights. That is, the GMWER was probably correct in showing that ontological knowledge cannot include metaphysical knowledge about how the rules of physical nature, history, and moral-political praxis are related to the ultimate "logos" (*liti* 理体) or *dao* 道 (true way) of the cosmos, and in refuting all the various attempts to deduce moral-political norms from "reason," natural law, the dialectic of history, the "state of nature," human nature, biological evolution, and so on. Most important, going back to Arthur Schopenhauer, the GMWER was profound in revealing how any theory or "intuitive" account of the cosmos and of history can have the appearance of knowledge or "wisdom" while unconsciously serving egoistic interests pursued in subtle

of linguistic practice engaged in by a group of people who, agreeing that certain ideas are indisputable and certain issues are unresolved, argue about how to address these issues." Following Taylor's interpretation of Hegel's concept of the historical embeddedness of reason, I argue that in such a discourse, the shared, indisputable ideas are "rules of successful thinking" (ROST) that have been historically-culturally-linguistically inherited, while CR is manifest especially in the open-ended arguments about unresolved issues, but CR and ROST are inseparable. It is in positing this inseparability that CR most differs from the classical idea of "reason" or *lixing* 理性, the common Chinese term *sibian* (consecutive thinking inseparable from logic), or Mou Zongsan's *fenbie shuo* (discussions making distinctions) (on the latter, see Mou's *shijiu jiang*, pp. 331–335). The GMWER's discovery of the epistemological consequences of culture dictated this inseparability, as opposed to the idea of reasoning as either totally unimbedded or totally imbedded in history. Hegelianism, rationalism, and historicism seem to be the only options, and I see Hegelianism as the only option for the intercultural or "global" philosophical seminar.

Because of deep commitments to ROST, serious revision of them is painful and usually resisted. Stephen C. Angle astutely notes that, despite "our ever present practical ability to adjust our (linguistic) theories to new (linguistic) evidence" (CR), linguistic change is impeded by "the norm-governed social practice that is language" (ROST). Angle and I, however, do not entirely agree on the extent to which revision of ROST is painful and difficult, and on the best way to describe ROST as historical phenomena. See his "Making Room for Comparative Philosophy: Davidson, Brandom, and Conceptual Distance," in Bo Mou, ed., *Davidson's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006).

²² Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 10.

partnership with a powerful ideological imagination. Revealing this danger, the GMWER harked back to the nominalistic prudence of William of Ockham (c. 1285–1349), suggesting a need to prune back any conceptual apparatus, including especially any lavishly metaphysical systems, with a kind of Ockham’s razor in order to minimize this danger of “deceiving oneself and others” (*ziqu qiren* 自欺欺人), the danger, say, of fervently promoting a moral-metaphysical vision unconsciously motivated by some desire to appear before humanity as its sole savior. Obviously, this suspicion of theorizing has reflected a Christian view of the self alien to Confucian thinking in insisting on not just the recalcitrance but the incorrigibility of a sinfully egoistic self utterly incapable of realizing sagehood or even any purity of motive.

But this Christian outlook was supplemented by the abundant empirical evidence furnished by the GMWER to show that the categories (*fenbie shuo*) anyone uses to discuss any aspect of the world (including the categories used in this sentence) are influenced by “rules of successful thinking” (ROST) stemming from that person’s local and ephemeral historical-cultural-linguistic heritage and social environment or idiolect. To be sure, it is illogical to adopt a completely relativistic view, saying both that the influence of ROST precludes all knowledge and that this influence is known to exist. Moreover, Steven Weinberg has effectively challenged the Kuhnian tendency to exaggerate the influence of ROST on the findings of modern natural science, to claim that these are no more than one historical “story” among others. ROST, however, clearly shape ideas about the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld), especially about political goals and the “evidence” used to understand historical causation in the past and the future. Thus while Jin Yuelin held that in “normal perception” (*zhengjue* 正觉), the categories (*yinian* 意念) used to pursue knowledge are “derived from what is objectively given in experience” (*de zi suoyu* 得自所与), the GMWER showed that many *yinian* also stem from local, ephemeral history (*de zi lishi* 得自历史), and that history includes not only culture but also the distortions introduced by the egoistic, ideologizing, partly unconscious impulses of individuals and interest groups (*jideliyizhe* 既得利益者), including those of the best intentioned intellectuals. From this third standpoint, “reason” refers to a “critical reflexivity” which, contrary to extreme GMWER relativism and skepticism, can be used to obtain knowledge, but which, especially in the discussion of history and political means and goals, is blurred in with the influence of ROST.

Indeed, it is precisely because ROST adulterate any logically consecutive categorization of the world that Mou Zongsan sought a way of thinking combining the making of “distinctions” (*fenbie shuo, fenjie di shuo* 分解地说) with “mysticism” or “discussions going beyond distinctions” (*fei fenbie shuo, fei fenjie di shuo* 非分解地说). But given the Schopenhauer factor, is “mysticism” the most reliable way to mitigate this adulteration or is the employment of *sibian* (consecutive thinking inseparable from logic) to describe, uncover, and critically debate the influence of ROST on the depiction of reality? Although believing in the maximum employment of *sibian*, Mou, I would argue, like all other

modern Chinese philosophers, did not sufficiently appreciate the impact of culture and language (ROST) on *all* efforts to obtain knowledge or wisdom as well as the hopeful analytical challenge offered by this impact. Like many if not all other modern Chinese philosophers, he aimed for “wisdom” as a total liberation from finitude and historicity, while my more pessimistic view aims only for a continuing struggle to increase knowledge (see below). Emphasizing the tension between ROST and CR, it is a neo-Hegelian view indebted to Charles Taylor’s way of disentangling Hegel’s insight into the historical embeddedness of reason from Hegel’s metaphysical view that history will eventually coincide fully with absolute reason. From this neo-Hegelian standpoint, absolute reason is a semantically implied ideal, not a realizable state of mind that can be embodied in either history or the sage, and intellectual debate is guided not by conventionally polite expressions of humility but by a strong sense of shared fallibility and personal moral incompleteness.

5. Caution in Examining Knowledge Claims

This epistemological-ontological, neo-Hegelian approach leads especially to two critical responses to Professor Lao’s analysis, one dealing with caution in the making of knowledge claims, the other, with the problem of knowledge about praxis. With regard to the former, I accept the GMWER view that, because ROST and CR often blur into each other in the search for knowledge about moral-political praxis and historical causation, this search has to be conducted with great caution. This question of caution might seem to be simple, but it is a methodological problem disagreement about which is one of the major obstacles preventing global philosophic convergence. In his great book *Guoshi dagang* 国史大纲 (An Outline of Our Nation’s History) (first published in 1940), Qian Mu pointed to this problem when he not only recognized the difficulty of writing history without lapsing into either *zhili* 支离 (disconnected details) or *kongtan* 空谈 (empty theorizing) but also brilliantly dealt with this problem. Nevertheless, there still is much disagreement about this problem between many Chinese scholars and those Western scholars influenced by the GMWER.

For the latter scholars, a key problem is the extent to which macroscopic categories can be used clearly to denote historical facts and political goals. This problem of clarity is one regarding which I often disagree even with Chinese scholars who have long been an integral part of Western academic life. To be sure, there are macroscopic concepts like “the Chinese language” or “modernity” which can be roughly defined and heuristically used. From the GMWER standpoint, however, macroscopic or vague concepts like “feudalism,” “Chinese culture,” or “the liberation of the individual” cannot refer clearly to a historical fact or orientation unless one first unpacks them, disaggregating their connotations and so turning them into a number of simpler ideas the relevance of which to specific empirical fact or to desirable goals can be more clearly debated.

This point applies to Professor Lao's use of "postmodernity" and "modern culture." These vague terms blur together many ideas which have to be disaggregated before one can clearly debate whether they can be used either to describe concrete historical fact or to indicate a desirable course of action. "Modern culture" arbitrarily assumes the existence of a way of life that is essentially the same in many different cultural contexts around the world today, not to mention Lao's idea of a "modern culture" which "produced a modern world." Rather than conclude from empirical events that such a homogeneous way of life has been created, one can conclude from them that what has been created in the twentieth century are various different cultural patterns, each with its own way of translating and implementing certain ideas that originated in the West, not to mention the heterogeneity of not only Western definitions of modernity but also Chinese choices about which Western definitions to "adopt and discard" (*qushu*). Hence the importance of cultural divergence.

As for "postmodernity," many scholars believe this idea at best is highly controversial. To agree with Professor Lao that people today are living in an era of "postmodernity" (5) that has "negated" capitalism (8), one would have to agree either that capitalism does not exist today as the dominant contemporary economic institution, and that it played no important, desirable causal role when societies like Taiwan in recent decades overcame the misery of economic backwardness, or that the arguments in favor of capitalism put forward by F. A. Hayek, Milton Friedman, and innumerable other economists²³ have been refuted by non-economists like Wang Hui, Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Jürgen Habermas.

Capitalism in fact remains a central economic phenomenon, and the postmodern arguments "negating" it are far less plausible than John Dunn's view that modern history east and west has revealed the paradoxical nature of capitalism: Its "rules of the game" generate "morally absurd" inequalities and other pathologies, but no one has so far discovered other "rules of the game" by means of which the misery of economic backwardness can be overcome.²⁴ Consequently, the normative economic future will almost certainly be a moral limbo in which capitalism is combined with various efforts to attenuate its pathologies. If, then, "postmodernity" refers to the "negation" of capitalism, "postmodernity" exists as neither a historical reality nor a goal that makes sense. It is merely a "frivolously" used slogan (to use Rorty's category).²⁵

Professor Lao offers another controversial generalization when he says that "the core meaning of the Confucian intellectual tradition" was "a form of learning leading to the full realization of virtue". Whether a complex intellectual tradition can have a single "core meaning" is far from clear. At the very least, I would argue that this "core meaning" of the

²³ See for example Ramon H. Myers, ed., *The Wealth of Nations in the Twentieth Century: The Policies and Institutional Determinants of Economic Development* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1996).

²⁴ On Dunn, see *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, ch. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 724.

Confucian tradition included other, logically distinct premises, because this ethical goal of transcending self-centeredness (*keji* 克己) was inseparable from historical, epistemological, political, and ontological premises, namely, that this ethical goal had in historical fact been achieved by the sage kings; that understanding their sense of morality is an epistemologically feasible task in any subsequent historical era; that political leaders in any historical period can practicably apply this sense of morality to all political issues; that applying it would effectively lead to an enormous moral transformation throughout the world; and that this sense of morality stems from a divine force, which has been variously described as “unending cosmic creativity” (*shengsheng buyi* 生生不已), “inner transcendence,” and so on.

Perhaps Professor Lao would say that this ethical goal has a “universal or open” meaning which can be distinguished from the “closed elements” with which it was entangled in its given “original historical form” (*yuanzhuang*). But does this moral vision have a “universal meaning” as an ethical goal which can “overarch” (*longzhao*) the ethical direction of modern life?

When one turns this idea of transcending self-centeredness (*chengde* 成德) into an object of CR, at least two kinds of doubts appear. First, this idea, like the standard Christian goal of “imitating Christ,” makes saintliness or the elimination of selfishness the goal of normal human life. This goal, however, has in modern times been widely questioned, whether from the standpoint of common sense and secularized ethics; Renaissance humanism; the Nietzschean ideal of the “genius”; psychology and the search for emotional authenticity emphasized in certain highly influential Viennese circles during the early twentieth century; Oscar Wilde’s famous quest for egoistic sensual and aesthetic pleasure; or that modern Chinese revolt against the traditional emphasis on altruistic self-abnegation (*chengfen zhiyu* 惩忿制欲).²⁶

Second, even if saintliness is a reasonable goal of individual development, this goal is both too sublime and too general to be of use in determining how political leaders should choose between concrete political options. Max Weber’s argument in “Politics as a Vocation” that it is too sublime strikes me as definitive. As for its being too general, one may admit that, in the case of certain extreme personal experiences, like seeing a child fall into a well, the one moral, rational response is obvious if not universal. Today, however, it is not easy to agree with Mencius that the moral path is equally obvious in the case of political options. Is there an obvious objective standard, supplied by “morality” or “reason,” with which to decide whether same-gender marriage should be instituted, whether China should quickly democratize,

²⁶ On the widespread if ambiguous modern Chinese criticism of the Confucian emphasis on self-abnegation, see Gu Hongliang 顾红亮 and Liu Xiaohong 刘晓虹, *Xiangxiang geren: Zhongguo gerenguan de zhuanxing* 想象个人：中国个人观的转型 (Imagining the Individual: The Transformation of the Chinese Concept of the Individual; Shanghai: Shanghai shiji chuban youxian gongsi, Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2006). On the Nietzschean ideal of the “genius” in the crucial Austrian contribution to modern Western sensibility, see David S. Luft, *Eros and Inwardness in Vienna: Weininger, Musil, Doderer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

whether the U.S. government should pay reparations to the descendants of African-Americans who were enslaved under U.S. law? When Mou Zongsan around 1980 explicitly and strongly endorsed the modernization of Taiwan under the Guomindang, hailing it as a “model” for all of China, and heaping scorn on the many Chinese intellectuals then traveling to the Mainland praising Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, were they rationally serving as “the conscience of society” (*shehui de liangxin* 社会的良心) successfully pursuing the “virtue” central to Confucian thought or was he?²⁷

Most basically, it is hard to see how the Mencian imperative is at all useful with regard to the question of political triage. Mencius wanted governments simply to act on the common human impulse to relieve the suffering of innocent people. Yet because the tangible resources needed to stop suffering are not enough to relieve all suffering, governments are like military doctors faced by more wounded soldiers than they can help quickly enough to save them. Such doctors carry out triage by dividing the wounded into those they will save and those whom they cannot save and have to ignore. Governments too have to decide which suffering they will try to alleviate, which suffering they have to accept. Moreover, since humanity is divided into solidarity groups such as nations, the leadership of a solidarity group will always put more priority on alleviating suffering within their group than on helping people outside it. Still more, even if all suffering in the world could be alleviated, there still would be conflicting judgments about how to allocate resources, and the Mencian imperative includes no criteria for deciding what should be done about a situation in which no one is enduring physical suffering.

Similarly, Hegel said that Kant’s ideal of a moral imperative lacks the substantive content needed to decide whether a concrete moral choice does or does not accord with it. The same goes for the utilitarian formula of normative action.²⁸

Lao’s distinction between “open” and “closed” ideas also suffers from this lack of specificity. Many will agree with him that the revision of a culture should be carried out by discarding history’s “closed elements” and adopting “open” ideas maximally approximating what is known to be true. Yet in many cases, it is hard to see how specific judgments about what to adopt, what to discard, or how fast or how violently to uproot “closed” ideas can be derived from any general standard of morality and reason. This lack of relevance to specific moral-political options can also be seen in Jürgen Habermas’s attempt to derive the norm of openness from the universal nature of social communication. In all concrete cases of political or philosophical argument, closure as well as openness can be found. Thus decisions about what to believe and what to reject (*qushè*) are inseparable, and I fail to see how Habermas’s

²⁷ On Mou Zongsan’s attitude around 1980 toward Taiwan’s Guomindang-led modernization and toward Chinese intellectuals visiting the Mainland and praising Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, see Mou Zongsan, *Shidai yu ganshou*, e.g. pp. 137, 36–40, 196, 17–18, 224, 352–356, 422, 424–425, and introduction by Wang Bangxiong 王邦雄, pp. 5, 14–15.

²⁸ Charles Taylor, *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 77. On the “emptiness” of utilitarianism see *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, pp. 399–406.

formula includes any criteria for deciding specifically how to combine openness with closure as one engages with others in “dialogue.”

If, then, there is no objective, universal, algorismic standard from which one can deduce answers to the more specific moral-political questions, answers to them can be found only as judgments made in what Richard J. Bernstein called “the middle ground between objectivism and relativism,”²⁹ where there is no knowledge, only preferences, competing descriptions and redescription of what was said and meant, all the kinds of academic and non-academic rhetoric, propaganda, and advertising shaping public opinion about “ ‘what it is better to believe’, ” and so conflicting conclusions about the reason one should believe X rather than Y. It is in this “middle ground” that there today rages the argument about whether the collapse of socialism in Russia and China during the late twentieth century demonstrated that the Western mix of capitalism and democracy is the normative mode of modernity all the world should adopt, or whether this Western mode is so deficient that the “post-socialist” or Confucian search for an alternative to it should continue.

6. The Question of Knowledge about Moral-Political Praxis

Does then a “limited distrust of reason” mean that the exercise of CR can lead to scientific knowledge but not to any knowledge with which to make specific political choices? If the GMWER was correct in rejecting the possibility of a metaphysical “wisdom” (*zhihui* 智慧) with which every specific political question can be rationally and morally answered, is there any alternative to that “fragmentation” of public opinion which Lao and others have rightly identified as a major feature of liberal politics?

One alternative is illustrated by John Rawls’s concept of “reasonableness” and that concept of “fallibilism” which philosophers like Stephen C. Angle emphasize.³⁰ Both scholars in effect agree that discussion in “the middle ground” does not need to lead to the “fragmentation” of public opinion. This is because, despite the unavailability of a moral-political program deduced from true ontological propositions (e.g. ideas about universal human nature, the cosmos, the stages of human history, or biological evolution), the middle ground includes a rich mix of various epistemic resources which can in combination facilitate consensus. Thus John Rawls refers to the ability to think in a “rational” way (this refers to instrumental rationality), the “educated common sense of citizens generally,” “principles associated with the moral virtues recognized by common sense such as truthfulness and fidelity,” scientific knowledge, “the public political culture of a democratic society,” and so on.

²⁹ Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

³⁰ On Rawls, see ch. 10 in *A Cloud Across the Pacific*. I am grateful to Professor Angle for introducing me to the idea of “fallibilism” and for valuable comments about it.

This argument is original and stimulating. Such epistemic resources indeed seem vital to the formation of civilized life. Yet can a society depending only on them check “fragmentation” enough to carry out the resolute collective actions needed to prevent major disasters? The answer is “no” if one agrees with Carl Schmitt’s essential point, namely, that democratic governments have proved unable to respond effectively to a dangerous tendency until it turns into the threat of immediate catastrophe. The classic example is the failure of the Western democracies to deal with the rise of Nazi Germany until it plunged them into the catastrophe of World War Two. Another major example is the catastrophic rise of the drug culture in the United States after the 1960s. In other words, because of this “fragmentation,” liberal democracies are little able to avoid catastrophe by acting on Churchillian propositions about dangerous long-term trends, as illustrated by their ignoring Churchill’s warning about not only Hitler in the 1930s but also the threat of Soviet Communism around 1918 and the need in 1946 to check the rising power of the U.S.S.R. before it acquired nuclear weapons. Churchillian political wisdom is antithetical to the routine dynamics of democracy.

If, then, the “fragmentation” of public discussion is a problem in democracies, there is a choice between the common tendency to accept the persistence of this problem as the necessary if horrendous price of freedom and the option of pursuing hope that this fragmentation can be lessened by rethinking the relations between freedom and knowledge. Fragmentation occurs when people find themselves without the ability to persuade others to share their convictions (*zijue qiu jue ta* 自觉求觉他). Protagoras, winning Rorty’s approval, saw this ability as purely rhetorical, but Socrates found or hoped that the processes of persuasion and agreement could be based on shared knowledge. Might not fragmentation then be lessened if one could show that the overall political direction of a society, if not its more specific policies, can be based on knowledge, not just on the flux of public opinion in “the middle ground”?

True, many will doubt that any philosophical finding in the ivory tower about the scope of knowledge can change political dynamics. Yet Reinhard Bendix’s strongly documented thesis of “intellectual mobilization” and the views of many other scholars (including F. A. Hayek and Leo Strauss) suggest that when the philosophical mainstream changes, it gradually changes the pattern of what Mou Zongsan called *jiaoyang* 教养 and what Werner Jaeger called *paideia* (the combination of socialization, education, advertising, and propaganda), and that these widespread *paideia* patterns influence public common sense and so are among the most important variables *eventually* affecting concrete political decision-making.³¹

³¹ Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 265–272. On *jiaoyang*, see Mou Zongsan, *Shidai yu ganshou*, pp. 33–34. On *paideia*, see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet. 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945 [vol. 1], 1943 [vol. 2], 1944 [vol. 3]).

There therefore is hope that political progress can be caused by new philosophical insights into the relation between ontological-epistemological questions and the norms of moral-political praxis. If dangerous totalitarian movements have been linked to the belief that these moral norms can be deduced from ontological-epistemological premises, not to mention a sacred canon, and if “fragmentation” has been the disastrous result of GMWER efforts to disconnect moral norms from these premises, it may be time to look into the possibility of a third kind of relation between these premises and moral-political guidelines.

That is, what the GMWER seems to have demonstrated is that these guidelines cannot be directly inferred from the idea of “reason” or from ontological propositions, that is, ideas about any existing objects of knowledge, such as history, biological evolution, or human nature, not to mention a cosmic logos. But can moral norms be inferred from the nature of knowledge?

To make some preliminary points, one can note the seeming inseparability of norms from epistemological ideas. Most obviously, ideas about the scope of knowledge are inseparable from the problem of how vertical, top-down political authority *should* be combined with the free, horizontal interactions of equal citizens in the three marketplaces (the intellectual, the economic, and the political). Thus F. A. Hayek famously argued that, because the scope of economic knowledge is limited, planned economies cannot be prosperous, and therefore the scope of the free economic marketplace should be large.

More basically, if a government’s power depends on not only its tools of coercion but also its legitimization in the eyes of its citizens, and if legitimized governance is government viewed by its citizens as in at least rough accord with known moral principles, then the legitimized, normative scope of vertical political authority will be correlated with what these citizens regard as the scope of knowledge. Thus the legitimized scope of the state’s vertical political authority will be large and, conversely, the legitimized scope of free horizontal interactions will be small, if the bulk of the citizens believe that an intellectual vanguard (*xianzhi xianjue* 先知先觉) can obtain what New Confucians like Tang Junyi and Marxists like Feng Qi 冯契 called “wisdom” (*zhihui*), that is, a total, unified, metaphysical understanding of the cosmos, the course of history, and all the basic needs of society. Conversely, the legitimized scope of vertical political authority will be much smaller, and the legitimized scope of free horizontal interactions will be much larger, if the bulk of the citizens are influenced by the epistemological pessimism of the GMWER and believe that there is no intellectual vanguard possessing such “wisdom.” Indeed, Karl R. Popper’s philosophy exemplifies this deduction of the normative balance between vertical and horizontal relations from the objective nature of knowledge. Although he emphasized a fully Humean disconnection between “facts” and “values,” he deduced his overriding value, the need for an “open society,” from the objective nature of the free pursuit of knowledge as the key to progress.

Moreover, if there is such an undeniable logical relationship between epistemological ideas and moral ideas defining the normative relation between political authority and freedom, these moral ideas, I would argue, are also inseparable from ontological ones. Contrary to Richard Rorty's protests, I suggest that Jin Yuelin has in an especially profound way suggested the inseparability of ontological and epistemological ideas.³² For instance, the whole epistemological argument of linguistic philosophers like Rorty and Donald Davidson about the elusiveness of knowledge depends on the truth of an ontological proposition that some existing "veil of ideas" or "language game" blocks any secure grasp of knowledge in the classic sense I have adduced above. After all, "It's vocabularies all the way down" is nothing but an ontological proposition presented as a known truth, as is the idea that the pursuit of knowledge is a "language game."

In my opinion, therefore, Tang Junyi in his great textbook (*Zhexue gailun*) was on the right track when he defied the GMWER by insisting on the inseparability of epistemological-ontological ideas and ideas about moral-political praxis (*renshi, cunzai, and jiazhi*). But just as Charles Taylor disentangled Hegel's basic insights from his overly bold metaphysical claims, it is necessary to distinguish this insight of Tang's from some of his metaphysical views.

7. The Moral-Political Implications of Empiricism and the Question of Empiricism as Knowledge

Many different efforts will be needed to explore anew the relation between moral-political norms and epistemological-ontological knowledge. Hoping to provoke discussion, I will begin by assuming that critical reflexivity (CR) (defined in endnote 21) combined with empiricism is the one correct, overriding way of obtaining knowledge (on defining "knowledge," see footnote 19).

CR thus appears not only as a primordial mental activity needed to judge whether the combination of CR and empiricism is supreme among all the possible ways of viewing the source of knowledge but also as a linguistic activity revealed by empiricism. Empiricism is here defined as the belief that the collection and logical analysis of empirical data complement CR to form the only way of obtaining knowledge (i.e. true and justified ideas about what is objectively and really so no matter how anyone may observe and interpret it).

I then argue that the GMWER, going back to Hume, badly misunderstood the meaningful content of empirical data. With the "linguistic turn," however, empiricism turned to the study of semantic relations, and these relations indicate the inseparability of ontological, epistemological, and moral-political ideas. It is this semantic inseparability that suggests how

³² Relying on Hu Jun's two magnificent books on Jin Yuelin (see notes 36 and 38 below), I have tried to outline Jin's philosophy in my article in the volume edited by Cheng Chung-yi (see note 6 above).

a democratic society can base its guiding norms on knowledge and so can pursue progress in a resolutely collective way.

But the norms integral to this semantic content cannot inspire resolute action unless this content is an object of knowledge, and it cannot be such unless empiricism can be justified as a way to obtain knowledge. Therefore, after describing moral-political norms integral to the semantic patterns revealed by empirical observation, I shall discuss the problem of justifying the belief that empirical observation combined with CR is the overriding way to obtain knowledge.

7.1. Semantic Patterns Revealed by Empiricism

Empiricism of course justifies the pursuit of science and leads to the monumental discoveries of the GMWER about the ways in which ephemeral and local historical-cultural-linguistic patterns are integral to the categories (ROST) used to depict at least some of reality. As argued above, moreover, empiricism also leads to the neo-Hegelian point about the linguistic inseparability of ROST and CR. Still more, empirical, textual study of the semantic relation in “discourses” between ROST and CR seems to reveal a variety of semantic patterns common to all the culturally different examples of this relation.³³

As already indicated, the exercise of CR in discourses is semantically inseparable from a contrast between ideas like knowledge, truth, reality, and objectivity and ideas like arbitrary opinion, nonsense, and illusion (*wangzhi* 妄执). It also connotes logic and arithmetic; the existence of a global history of doubt-filled competition between true or more enlightened ideas and false or less enlightened ideas; the belief that affirming the former and rejecting the latter (*qushe*) is an inherently good thing to do; the belief that doing this requires freedom of thought, and that this freedom also is inherently good; and the existence of a “subject or agent pursuing knowledge” (*renshi zhuti* 认识主体) and therefore utilizing this freedom. Moreover, absolutely central to this free exercise of CR are judgments based on neither induction nor deduction. (“Induction” is here used in its standard sense as inferring testable predictions from past occurrences.)

Judgments not based on induction or deduction are obviously central to metaphysical and religious writings as well as conversation in “the middle ground.” What is striking is that they are also central to the analytic or skeptical philosophies most wary of any knowledge claim not based on rigorous scientific procedure. For instance, when Willard Van Orman Quine said that in the analysis of linguistic symbols, one should focus on their semantic and syntactical aspects, avoiding any “pernicious mentalism,” and when Noam Chomsky contradicted him, finding that linguistic practice has a “mental” aspect, neither view was

³³ See note 21 for a definition of “discourse.” As I argue elsewhere, this is a kind of linguistic practice all cases of which seem to share a number of traits. See *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, pp. 67–85 and Cheng Chung-yi, pp. 42–45.

based on either induction or deduction.³⁴ Both were a matter, so to speak, of using the mind's eye to observe linguistic practice. The same goes for the many ideas about the relation between language and the rest of the world, such as Donald Davidson's "triangulation," and for judgments about whether an utterance is clear; about how to sequence utterances clearly when they form no chronological, causal, or logical hierarchy; about the extent to which context has to be described in order to grasp the meaning of an utterance; and so on.

Fully to illustrate all the points above is not possible here, but some illustration is facilitated by quoting from a book first published by Bertrand Russell in 1940, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (all italicizing but *ad infinitum* is mine): "The word 'know' is highly *ambiguous*.... if an experience is one thing and knowing it is another, the supposition that *we* always know an experience when it is happening involves an infinite multiplication of every event. *I* feel hot; this is one event. I know I feel hot; this is a second event. I know that I know that I feel hot; this is a third event. And so on *ad infinitum*, which is *absurd*. *We must* therefore say either that my present experience is indistinguishable from my knowing it while it is present, or that, as a rule, we do not know our present experiences. On the whole, *I prefer* to use the word 'know' in a sense which implies that the knowing is different from what is known, and to *accept* the consequence that, as a rule, *we* do not know our present experiences."³⁵

Judgment outside the scope of induction or deduction is illustrated by Russell's use above of "I prefer" and "absurd." Russell made a decision about what is "absurd" or, as Rorty would put it, "frivolous." Contrary to *Zhuangzi*, it is "absurd" or "frivolous" to suggest that Bertrand Russell may be not a British male philosopher but a butterfly dreaming she is such a philosopher. Pyrrhonic skepticism can also be thus refuted.

Similarly, it is absurd to suggest that the "I" in Russell's "I prefer" is just a syntactically unavoidable device, not a word denoting an existing "subject" ontologically identical with the famous historical person known east and west as Bertrand Russell. Certainly it was helpful when Kant criticized Descartes' "I think therefore I am" for confusing the general idea of existence with existence as something determined by the scientific observation of phenomena. Yet it was misleading for Russell and Jin Yuelin (as Hu Jun 胡军 in effect recognized) to try to exclude "the subject seeking knowledge" (*renshi zhuti*) from the realm of what is known to exist. Undeniably, the Russell quote above consists of linguistic symbols which were in fact manipulated by a CR necessarily presupposing the existence of an agent of exercising it, whether this agent is described as a "soul," a Kantian subject, or a series of events in a biologically observable brain. To say otherwise is "frivolous."

³⁴ W. V. Quine, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), pp. 26–27. Also see his *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), ch. 3. The Chomsky reference is to Noam Chomsky, *Language and Problems of Knowledge: The Managua Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 9.

³⁵ Bertrand Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1967), p. 46.

Rejecting frivolous ideas and critically appealing to “common sense,” one can also accept Jin Yuelin’s argument that “outer things” (*waiwu* 外物) exist, as well as the view that, to the extent that the “subject seeking knowledge” is human, it is a psyche with a sexual gender. Indeed, its having a gender erotically oriented to “outer things” possessing the same subjecthood or selfhood is another consideration making solipsism absurd. Plato’s point in “Symposium” about the ontological implications of sexuality cannot be seriously refuted. Only because Berkeleian solipsism is “frivolous” could Freud and other Viennese thinkers in the early twentieth century plausibly see the relation between gender, sexuality, and the authentic human self as central to human reality. Similarly, if it were seriously possible that nothing exists except me, there would be no plausible ontological basis for George Mead’s view that the ego is socially formed, for John Dewey’s and Richard Rorty’s emphasis on the sociality of ideas about knowledge, for Willard Van Orman Quine’s concept of language, or for Darwin’s concept of “species.” As Hu Jun has profoundly discussed, it is striking how modern thought has been unable to resolve the contradiction between its fundamental concern with the reality of relations between people (whether in terms of “revolution,” “the social,” “the sexual,” or “culture”) and epistemological reasoning “treating the self as the center,” that is, as the only secure starting point of any ontology (*ziwo zhongxin kunjing* 自我中心困境).³⁶

To be sure, many will object that this ontological predicament cannot be resolved by just appealing to the idea of absurdity or common sense. What can be argued, however, is that the understanding of what is absurd is related to what Chinese call “inferring the nature of a whole by studying much information about it” (*zongjie chulai* 总结出来). This way of exercising CR, distinct from induction and deduction, strikes me as perhaps the most basic way in which all human beings I have encountered east and west try to make sense of the *Lebenswelt*.³⁷ Still more, I would argue that, as a semantic form, any epistemological-ontological reasoning has to begin with an application of this cognitive mode to the problem of the nature of the world as a whole. Jin Yuelin called this “an accurate, overall account of the nature of what is ultimately real” (*benran chenshu* 本然陈述). Hu Jun said that such an assessment was “inferred from the nature of experience as a whole” (*you zongjie jingyan er lai de* 由总结经验而来的).³⁸ As such, it served as the most basic idea one had about how to know what is real and avoid illusion.

³⁶ See Luft, *Eros*, and Hu Jun, *Dao yu zhen* 道与真 (The True Way and Truth; Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2002), pp. 462–464.

³⁷ A good example is Yu Ying-shih 余英时’s depiction of Confucius as using this way of grasping the nature of a whole to form his philosophy. See Yu Ying-shih, *Cong jiazhi xitong kan Zhongguo wenhua de xiandai yiyi* 从价值系统看中国文化的现代意义 (Viewing the Relevance to Modernity of Chinese Culture from the Standpoint of Its Value System; Taipei: Shibao wenhua chuban shiye youxiangongsi, 1984), p. 16.

³⁸ See Hu Jun, *Dao yu zhen*, p. 53; Luft, *Eros*; and Metzger, “New Confucian Philosophy and the Global Problem of Culture,” pp. 38–40. See also Hu Jun, *Jin Yuelin* 金岳霖 (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1993).

To be sure, one can doubt that Jin's concept of *benran chenshu* can refer as he thought to an absolutely true understanding of reality. My point, though, is that a kind of ultimate ontological judgment of the sort Jin pointed to appears *semantically* not as a hypothesis but as a fully veridical standard by which to evaluate hypotheses. Moreover, it seems clear that such an overall judgment based on neither induction nor deduction has to be made before one can fashion any argument at all about the sources or scope of knowledge. Without such an ontological assessment, there seems to be no convincing way to affirm the epistemic primacy of the logical analysis of empirical data and other ways of exercising CR and thus to reject the epistemic primacy of some sacred canon; of ineffable kinds of insight, whether Confucianism's *dexing zhi zhi* 德性之知 (knowledge of one's innate, universal sense of morality), Mou Zongsan's "mysticism," "tacit knowledge" (Michael Polanyi), poetic insight (Richard Rorty), or that blend of art and erotic experience in which Viennese intellectuals during the last century like Heimito von Doderer sought the authentic, unbourgeois self; or of the linked Nietzschean idea of identification with some supremely important will to create. (My attempt in section 4 above to evaluate the GMWER illustrates this kind of overall ontological assessment.)

In other words, Jin seems to be saying that nothing but such an overall epistemological-ontological assessment supported by neither inductive nor deductive evidence stands between what Max Weber called the modern commitment to rationalization and the above massive array of nonrationalistic outlooks which today in our age of alleged secularization still command the allegiance of the vast majority of this planet's population. Similarly, when logical positivists state that if a question cannot be answered inductively or deductively, it is a "wrong question" for which there are only "meaningless" answers, their conclusion is another example of the kind of overall assessment Jin was referring to, just as is any refutation of their conclusion.

Admittedly, the fact that such overall assessments are unavoidable and always presented as veridical leaves open the question of how to prove that such an assessment is actually veridical. At this point, however, I argue only that, as an unavoidably linguistic process, the exercise of CR by all philosophical schools I am familiar with has never been limited to induction and deduction. It seems unavoidably to include such overall assessments presented as veridical.

Richard Rorty has provocatively suggested it is possible to make such an epistemological-ontological judgment in a completely "ironic" way, that is, saying or assuming that a certain concept accurately denotes something which absolutely exists while covertly believing it does not necessarily do so and thus avoiding any absolute ontological belief—a sort of "I had my fingers crossed all along." This theory of his, however, allows for mental conduct apart from semantic and syntactical content, a Quinian taboo he seemingly accepts. True, one might argue John L. Austin's "pragmatic" point about "doing things with

words” could be used to explain how a semantically unironic argument could call for a sense of irony. Even so, how could one argue that people should regard all characterizations of reality as ironical without saying in a serious way that they should do so *because of* the existence something? If languages or “language games” do not absolutely and objectively exist and serve as a veil hiding the nature of any other objective reality, how could one support any recommendation to regard the nature of reality as elusive and to talk about it ironically? Thus I agree with Jin that any epistemological discussions about the scope of knowledge, including Rorty’s, includes an absolutistic, completely serious judgments about what is ultimately real, whether it is language, “the given,” “reason,” “God,” or the physical events of science. Thus it is far from clear that when such an ontological judgment is the reason given for adopting a skeptical, fallibilistic, or ironical attitude toward a wide range of knowledge claims, this judgment itself can be regarded skeptically, fallibilistically, or ironically. If it is not correct, what is the reason it should be so regarded? In other words, any epistemological characterization of ideas as either open to doubt or absolutely veridical has meaning only as logically implied by ontological truth. If fallibility were limitless, it could not be logically conceptualized, and so turning it into the ultimate epistemic norm could not be rhetorically effective. (I leave aside here the problem of whether limitless fallibility can be coherently posited by using the thesis of a hierarchy of languages.)

7.2. A Metaphysical Realm Revealed by Semantic Analysis

Having touched on a variety of semantic patterns integral to the exercise of CR, especially dependence on judgments not based on deduction or induction, I shall now outline another major semantic aspect of all philosophical discussion east and west so far as I have observed it. This idea is the unquestioned belief that there are unobservable and therefore metaphysical objects (such as some characteristic of all of humanity) descriptive judgments about which are based on neither induction nor deduction, which are the same for any individual observer, which this individual can therefore speak about using “we” to represent all of humanity (note Russell’s “we” in the quote above), and about which true or enlightened statements can be made by this individual. This metaphysical realm, close to what Feng Youlan 冯友兰 called *zhenji* 真际 (the abstract realm of what is universally true), is integral to the semantic exercise of CR as evidenced by countless texts east and west. Again, it is obviously central to metaphysical or religious writing, but it is equally central to the thought of an analytic philosopher like Bertrand Russell, who depends on it without (so far as I have seen) mentioning it, not to mention raising the question of its ontological status. The same goes for historicism like Rorty’s.

The idea of this metaphysical realm is indeed similar to Plato’s theory of independently existing ideas, to New Realism, and to Kant’s way of positing certain a priori

aspects of experience. Here, however, I do not inquire into the classical problem of whether universalistic categories grew psychologically out of the association of sense data, or of how these categories are or are not related to any independently existing aspect of the cosmos. The GMWER has taught that this question may be unanswerable (offering another, widely respected judgment based on neither induction nor deduction). Therefore I try here only to ground this metaphysical realm in semantic content.

This content obviously includes the universalistic aspects of words (*gongxiang* 共相) (all words, I believe, except proper names) and the realm of deduction (logic and mathematics). It also includes the idea that the world is an inherently categorizable process including notably the categorizability of philosophical topics, of social action, and of historical causative variables. For example, Tang Junyi's philosophy textbook uses a basic categorization of philosophical topics revolving around "existence," "knowing," and "values" (*cunzai, renshi, jiazhi*). (It seems to me that philosophers have spent more time pondering the seeming historicity of categories than the seeming objectivity of the world's categorizability.)

This metaphysical realm, however, also has a less obvious aspect. I am here trying to distinguish between the idea of, say, the logical laws of identity, contradiction, and the excluded middle and the idea that, whether one agrees or disagrees that there are such laws, there is widespread if not unanimous agreement that whether or not there are *is a question which is the same whoever is commenting on it*, and about which opinions can be less enlightened or more enlightened. Thus Quine still had the latter metaphysical belief when he challenged the idea of such laws of logic by questioning Kant's way of dealing with the problem of logically necessary inference or "analyticity."

Russell too had this metaphysical belief when he said "The word 'know' is highly ambiguous." When he thus characterized this word, he was setting forth a proposition about what is the case whenever anyone anywhere any time accurately characterizes the meaning of this word. If I had convinced Russell that "know" is actually unambiguous, he would have agreed he had been mistaken, believing that he and I had discussed the same question, he, incorrectly, I, correctly.

Similarly, when in the above passage Russell logically discussed the relation between the experience of a subject ("I") and this subject's knowledge of this experience as it occurred, he took for granted that, whether or not his view was correct, he had addressed a problem that would be the same whenever anyone else anywhere or any time either agreed or disagreed with his analysis of it. This latter "it" is the issue. What is metaphysical is the antecedent of this "it," namely, a certain problem, which necessarily exists unless Russell cannot say about the person who disagreed with his analysis: "She misunderstands it." Because this "it" as a semantic phenomenon is perceived as existing eternally and identically, "I" can suggest what "we" (all of humanity) should say about it. Thus Russell could write about what "We must therefore say" about a certain aspect of experience.

Clearly, then, as a semantic process, any discussion of the problem of knowledge includes this belief in a metaphysical realm of truths or at least problems that remain identical whatever the specific empirical circumstances under which comments about them are made. This metaphysical realm, however, is presupposed not only by arguments about certain issues or the use of certain pronouns but also by all those seemingly unavoidable ideas defining the universal human condition, whether viewed as human nature, thinking, linguistic practice, history, or whatever. Almost every comment Quine ever published is an observation about this metaphysical realm, although it is hard to think of any philosopher more opposed than he to metaphysical theorizing. A good example is “The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even pure mathematics and logic, is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges.”³⁹ Similarly, the above neo-Hegelian formula of a tension between ROST and CR has been presented by me as applying to all human thinking or linguistic practice even though I, like Quine, have personally observed only a tiny sliver of this whole mentalistic-linguistic process. Somehow, I know that the sliver I have observed is typical of a whole I have not observed. Anyone contradicting my neo-Hegelian view will similarly be confident that she can generalize about this human process as a whole. Indeed she will still be generalizing about it even if she claims that this process is so various that no accurate generalizations about it are possible. How can she possibly know that this whole process is as various as that sliver of it she has observed?

At least as a semantic process, then, all discussions I have seen about ontological-epistemological questions entail belief in a metaphysical realm which is the same for anyone anytime and anywhere, and the nature of which can be discovered by any thinking subject by just observing his or her sliver of the total human experience. To contradict this view by saying that any depiction of human experience is merely a product of local, ephemeral historical-cultural-linguistic conditions is once again to offer a view about an unobservable, metaphysical object, namely, how all human life is anywhere and anytime. When Richard Rorty in July 2004 announced “the end of philosophy” in Shanghai, he did not mean that it had ended only in Shanghai, not in Hong Kong or New York. What he announced was an insight into the universal nature of human life.⁴⁰

7.3. Substantive, Metaphysically-Grounded Moral-Political Norms

Moreover, having already noted the inseparability of ontological-epistemological ideas and ideas about moral-political praxis, I can readily point out that in semantic fact normative ideas also presuppose this metaphysical realm. As Mou Zongsan said, “...the

³⁹ Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ See *Wenhui dushu zhoubao* 文汇读书周报, July 27, 2004, p. 13.

principles of life explained by Confucius applied not just to the people of Shandong but to all of humanity.”⁴¹ Christian teachings or conventional references today to “human rights” also are phrased as applying to all of humanity. Illogically combined by modern liberalism with the Humean view that “ought” cannot be deduced from “is,” the idea that every human being exists as an object of the highest value also exemplifies this metaphysical realm. The above normative ideas integral to the semantic interaction between ROST and CR also refer to it, namely, the idea that the pursuit of enlightenment is inherently good; that the freedom to pursue it by rejecting unenlightened ideas also is inherently good; and that all the political-social arrangements logically needed to realize this freedom are inherently good.

Semantic analysis thus contradicts Hume by revealing a metaphysical realm in which ontological-epistemological principles and the norms of moral-political praxis are inseparable, and the free quest for enlightened ideas is necessarily good. Moreover, the concept of this free quest cannot be criticized the way Hegel criticized Kant’s categorical imperative, as empty of any concretely specific meaning. Emphasizing the limited scope of knowledge and so the large scope of free horizontal interaction in the three marketplaces of the “middle ground,” this semantic approach logically requires institutional arrangements facilitating this freedom, and so it largely coincides with J. S. Mill’s liberalism (see section 6 above).

Still more specifically, it differentiates between Mill’s liberalism and the liberalism dominant today, because the latter correlates freedom as an absolute norm with equality as an absolute norm,⁴² while the semantic version of liberalism, and Mill’s too, correlate freedom as an absolute with the goodness of increasing enlightenment as an absolute, leaving equality as an ancillary or derivative norm respected only to the extent that it accords with or facilitates increasing enlightenment. So far as I can see, unlike the norms of freedom and enlightenment, the norm of equality is not implied by semantic analysis.

Unlike this contemporary correlation of freedom with the absolutization of equality, Mill’s definition of freedom puts “thick” limits on the exercise of freedom. These go beyond his famous idea that “power” can be “rightfully exercised over” anyone “against that person’s will” only to “prevent harm to others.” For Mill, the exercise of freedom was also limited by the need to respect the norms of “civilization.” Repeatedly used in his “On Liberty,” this word is even found in his key formulation of the above famous norm, which spoke only of limits on the “power” which “can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community.”⁴³ “Civilization,” in turn, was correlated by Mill to his broad, pre-GMWER concept of “reason.” Thus he vaguely but importantly suggested that freedom and democracy are incompatible with a simply egalitarian marketplace of ideas in which anyone is free to argue even that the

⁴¹ Mou Zongsan, *Shidai yu ganshou*, pp. 329–330.

⁴² On modern liberalism’s absolutization of freedom and equality, see for example David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 271; and John Dunn, *Setting the People Free: The Story of Democracy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006), for example pp. 171, 168.

⁴³ See p. 956 in J. S. Mill, “On Liberty,” in Edwin A. Burt, ed., *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill* (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, Inc., 1939).

supreme norm of society need not be the correlation of freedom with the absolute value of increasing enlightenment. His implication was that there would have to be limits on freedom and equality depending on the definition of enlightenment, and that, given the state's inherent tendency toward tyranny, the prime responsibility for defining enlightenment would have to be given to another, possibly less imperfect institution, namely *paideia* and all the people arguing about the latter.

Even more, there is a substantive distinction between Mill's liberalism and the semantic approach above. True, the latter agrees with Mill that the supreme principle of the free society is neither divine authority nor the wisdom of the sovereign state but the correlation of freedom with the pursuit of enlightenment, and that therefore the prime institutional vehicle of this correlation is incompatible with the egalitarian correlation of freedom with equality. It also agrees with his hope that *paideia* can function properly if the philosophical correlation animating it turns on the link between freedom and enlightenment rather than that between freedom and equality. It also agrees with Mill's hope that, with this proper kind of *paideia*, a society can be open to intellectual debate while avoiding the divisiveness of an anti-intellectual, commerce-driven egalitarianism and so would be able to unite in the fight against its "enemies" (to use Karl R. Popper's term).

Mill, however, derived his liberalism from a pre-GMWER concept of "reason," while the above semantic version of liberalism is grounded in a post-GMWER account of the empirically observed, semantic tension between ROST and CR. This difference has major implications. With his pre-GMWER outlook, his ethnocentrism, and his innocence regarding the then still emerging insights regarding the impact of historical-cultural-linguistic phenomena on the formulation of norms and the understanding of reality, Mill took for granted not only the correlation of freedom with "reason" but also the identification of "reason" with the essential norms of the European cultural mainstream. *Paideia* for Mill, therefore, essentially combined the pursuit of modern science with transmission of the many "uncontestable" "truths" produced since the Greeks by European "civilization."⁴⁴ Consequently, the GMWER required a reconceptualization of *paideia* when it turned European culture into just another set of "comprehensive doctrines" or ROST the critical examination of which was required by the pursuit of freedom.

This reconceptualization is still under way. I argue that, because the very meaning of freedom requires overcoming the hegemony of unenlightened beliefs, pursuing freedom means uncovering and critically examining as many ROST as possible in order to compare them and to decide through free debate which seem the most enlightened. As I have argued elsewhere, this means going beyond "the linguistic turn" to focus not on the relation of language in general to the rest of the world but on differences between languages or discourses. With his pre-GMWER outlook, Mill failed to confront the problem created by the

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 982.

way that local, ephemeral historical-cultural-linguistic conditions (ROST) impede the pursuit of freedom and enlightenment.

This problem is still little understood. As indicated above, the semantic analysis of many texts east and west seems to reveal a necessary goal, whether that necessity is existential, linguistically unavoidable, or merely integral to prominent ROST found in modern Western and Chinese thought. This is the goal of being a person pursuing freedom and autonomy by depending on the free exercise of his or her critical reflexivity to decide which ideas are more enlightened than others. For instance, take two culturally different thinkers, the famous Westernizer, Chen Duxiu, writing around 1915 and soon to endorse Marxism, and the English liberal Bertrand Russell, one of the founders of analytic philosophy, writing around 1911. Very much like Mill, they both emphasized this goal. Wrote Chen: “The liberation of the individual refers to casting off the shackles of slavery so as to realize fully the autonomy and freedom of one’s person.... Clearly enough, a person who regards himself as free or autonomous does not blindly, subserviently follow another person’s views and principles, he depends only on his own understanding and abilities to decide all questions regarding the quality of his character and actions, his rights, and his beliefs.”⁴⁵ Said Russell, celebrating “the free intellect”: “philosophy” is a struggle to “be great and free,” to avoid being a person who “goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the co-operation or consent of his deliberate reason.”⁴⁶

What the evolving GMWER added to this philosophical challenge perceived by Mill, Russell, and Chen was a new, empirically more precise and subtle understanding of those “habitual beliefs” liberation from uncritical acceptance of which Russell and Chen both sought. To view these beliefs as ROST is to grasp that they are not fully manifest. That is, they are less easily noticed than Mill, Chen, and Russell thought. Because they lurk within the innumerable connotations of a vocabulary imbibed since childhood and so are habitually regarded as the instruments rather than the objects of critical discussion, the textual analysis needed to turn them into such objects is a difficult challenge, which philosophy has to meet if it is to pursue its Socratic, uncontroversial goal of freedom from critically unscrutinized beliefs.

In this way, then, the *paideia* of a free society requires a very new kind of philosophical exercise (*gongfu* 工夫): unpacking the historical, semantic content of the categories one uses to analyze the world, not just assuming that these categories are the universally “rational” ones with which to analyze it; thus turning the analysis of historical texts, as Leo Strauss suggested, into the first step methodologically required by the pursuit of any philosophically critical understanding; in other words, instead of just seeking directly to

⁴⁵ Cited in Gu Hongliang and Liu Xiaohong, pp. 84–85.

⁴⁶ Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 157–160.

apprehend the categories basic to the objective constitution of the world (such as Tang Junyi's "existence," "knowing," and "praxis"), making any effort to know the world contingent on a critical examination of the differences between one's own ROST and contrary views throughout intellectual history; but, unlike Strauss, demanding a multicultural, comparative intellectual history, instead of assuming, as he and the New Confucians did, that one ancient segment of intellectual history included a somehow perfect or "natural" understanding of the norms all humanity should follow (*daotong* 道统); and so turning the philosophic focus of attention on the differences between linguistically different constructions of the world (discourses) rather than on the familiar theme of linguistic philosophy today, namely, the nature of language in general and its relationship in general to the pursuit of knowledge.

7.4. Refinding the Path toward Knowledge

There are, therefore, basic, substantive differences not only between Mill's liberalism and conventional liberalism today (notably Rawls's) but also between Mill's concept of the relation between freedom and knowledge and that of the semantic approach above. As mentioned above, however, if this semantic argument about the norms of moral-political praxis is to be an idea inspiring resolutely collective action, it must be based on a persuasive argument that the combination of CR with the logical analysis of empirical data is the overriding way to seek knowledge. Only then can the liberal norms above appear as objects of knowledge, and only then can they be used to form the *paideia* of a free society able to act in a collectively resolute way to pursue progress and hold back its enemies.

The GWMER has left the impression that there can be no conclusive answer to the question of what is the one correct way to seek knowledge, but this impression is open to controversy. The problem here is whether, given the nature of thought and language, one can correctly say that the correct way to view one's picture of the world is to see it as based on assumptions, not on truth. Jin Yuelin (like all other modern Chinese philosophers, so far as I know), holds that an accurate understanding of the nature of reality and knowledge is needed and possible, what he called *benran chenshu* (see section 7.1 above). To be sure, given the nature of CR, any proposition can be doubted. Even if it seems indisputable, it may really be only a linguistically unavoidable idea or an idea that merely seems indisputable to one's own we-group as one segment of an ever-changing historical process. One can even doubt that the authority of logic should be respected.

Jin, however, is saying that the right to doubt is not unlimited. First, it is absurd to doubt that history and languages exist; it is absurd to doubt that these two have major effects on the formation of ideas; and it is absurd to try to defy the Socratic faith in the search for logical explanation (see section 7.1 above). Indisputable ideas such as these three are at the

very least generically different from fallible efforts in “the middle ground” to support or object to one or another hypothesis.

Moreover, if one argues that even ideas like these three are dubitable, one is still left with an indubitable idea, an absolutely irrefutable sense of uncertainty which the GMWER discovered, and which now, as especially Isaiah Berlin liked to emphasize, is the very hallmark of the enlightened person. What is left then is a set of indubitable or virtually indubitable ideas vastly different from hypotheses in the middle ground.

One then can ask whether this indubitable, enlightened sense of doubt has any moral-political implications. If it does (see sections 6 and 7.3 above), people knowing it does can redefine history as Karl R. Popper somewhat unknowingly perceived it: a clear-cut moral, indeed teleological struggle between more enlightened political forces and less enlightened. The empirical data about linguistic practice indicate the inseparability of the quest for enlightenment and the goodness of freedom, while it can be known with near certainty that the logical collection of empirical data combined with CR is the overriding way to seek knowledge.

Unfortunately using “open society” to denote the forces of enlightenment, Popper fostered a positivistic misunderstanding central to the modern liberal imagination east and west, the idea, namely, that, apart from strictly scientific inquiry, there are no indisputable principles dictating how openness to new ideas should be combined with resolute rejection of some of them. Absolutizing the value of openness contradicts the empirical, semantic nature of the exercise of critical reflexivity as free choices about what to endorse, what to reject (*qushe*).

Instead of absolutizing openness, the semantic approach above absolutizes the correlation of freedom with the quest for knowledge and then combines this correlation with an irremovable sense of doubt and uncertainty. Such empiricism in turn deepens the consciousness of freedom, turning the setting or context of critical reflexivity from a fixed Platonic structure of knowable realities into a partly indeterminate, Jamesean universe open to the free, creative judgment of an autonomous human will and imagination realized both individually and socially. Especially with regard to analysis of the *Lebenswelt*, the GMWER thus saw beyond the classic concept of reason by replacing the very idea of any set agenda with continuing, free reconsideration of the initial questions with which such analysis should begin. Perhaps Russell had something like this in mind when he said that for “the free intellect... the value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty.”⁴⁷

Celebrated by the theory of fallibilism, this absolutistic idea of uncertainty, then, differs from any absolutization of openness because it is integral to the ideal of a free, enlightened intellect poised to resist the exercise of power in the name of unenlightened belief. Eloquently opposed to the latter, Popper erred in his conceptualization of the philosophical

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 156.

stance needed to oppose it but well understood that the nature of philosophy has to be inferred from the struggle against it. Perhaps one can say that in a post-GMWER world, philosophy turns from a contemplation of ideas with no objective moral content into a moral mission to dispel unenlightened ideas, and so it moves closer to the Confucian priority on *shijian* 实践 (moral-political praxis).

8. Conclusion: Convergence as a Painful Philosophical Exercise in a Multicultural World

As I see it, Professor Lao is correct in recognizing that putting “China in the world” is not only a technological, economic process of globalization but also one of forming a philosophically-grounded international community, a convergence of people unified by commitment to certain justifiable beliefs and resolved to protect themselves from attack by the peoples not sharing these beliefs.

Thus the philosophy allowing this convergence cannot but include some degree of consensus about the proper way to discuss political questions and resolve conflicts of interest. These questions include major practical ones, such as: What should be the goals of political action? What are the causal processes revealed by history as the means with which to pursue these goals? How do these causal processes vary depending on cultural conditions and stages of development? What is the appropriate mix of optimism and pessimistic realism with which to pursue political goals? As political leaders pursue them, how should they carry out the inevitably tragic process of political triage? How should wealth be distributed, and how should foreign policy be designed? And—especially important—what should be the specific answers to any of these questions when assessing the concrete political circumstances of a particular society?

To address such practical political questions, however, epistemological questions are unavoidable: To what extent can the causal processes of the historical past and future be known? What is the ultimate justification for the definition of political goals? What is the epistemic nature of what John Dunn calls “political understanding”? To what extent can political understanding be based on science or on some more general concept of knowledge?⁴⁸ Thus political discussion unavoidably turns into political philosophy, and, conversely, philosophy itself, as both the Confucian tradition and the school of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle suggested, unavoidably culminates in political philosophy—the problem not only of normative political structure but also of the ideas needed to improve political behavior through education, the central question of *paideia*.

⁴⁸ The problem of the agenda of political philosophy is discussed in *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, chs. 8 and 10, especially pp. 614–622.

Today, however, political philosophy is pursued in a multicultural world, something unimagined during the “axial age.” Theoretically, this could have led to a “multiphilosophical” world, each culture parochially developing its own philosophies, uninterested in philosophies being developed elsewhere. Indeed, many scholars have concluded that this “multiphilosophical” situation is unavoidable, talking of a multiplicity of different “faith traditions” for none of which there is logically discursive justification (*zhengli 证立*). Thus, many Chinese philosophers today see themselves as pursuing the development of “Chinese philosophy,” not as pursuing “philosophy” to determine how Chinese culture should be revised. In the West, however, although some historians speak of studying “Western philosophy,” philosophers do not see themselves as pursuing the further development of “Western philosophy”; they picture themselves as studying philosophy in general.

More precisely, as the modern era forced philosophers east and west seriously to assess culturally exotic philosophies, the Chinese way of balancing inherited values with commitment to universal truth has tended to differ from the Western. For instance, a linguistic philosopher like Richard Rorty theorized that his own philosophy was essentially a product of his own idiolect and local, ephemeral historical-cultural-linguistic environment but depicted his situation as illustrating the universal validity of historicism.⁴⁹ By contrast, Tang’s universalism was evident in his self-definition as most primarily “a man,” not a “Chinese man”;⁵⁰ in his desire “logically to unite all valid Chinese and Western ideas” (*huitong Dong-Xi*); and in his effort to demonstrate “the value of the spirit of Chinese culture” (*Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi 中国文化之精神价值*) by showing how this spirit accorded with a proper analysis of the universal nature of human “experience” (*jingyan 经验*).⁵¹ But when he wrote his monumental series *Zhongguo zhexue yuanlun 中国哲学原论* (Essays on the Ultimate Principles of Chinese Philosophy), he expressed an absolute commitment to the Chinese tradition he had grown up with, not a desire to turn China’s *daotong* (ancient truths transmitted, albeit imperfectly, generation to generation down to the present) into just another object of critical reflexivity.

There thus are many different ways—both conscious and unconscious—of balancing commitment to culturally inherited values and the pursuit of universal truth when assessing exotic philosophies. If, however, pursuit of such a balance is unavoidable east and west, can one expect the people pursuing it to assess these exotic philosophies in what today is repeatedly referred to as an “open” way? When the exotic philosophy cogently challenges any of the most basic premises of the native intellectual tradition, can one reasonably recommend

⁴⁹ On the “tribalism” toward which Rorty’s “end of philosophy” heads, see Susan Haack’s incisive comments in Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., ed., *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), pp. 137–139.

⁵⁰ On Tang’s self-definition, see his *Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian*, p. 2.

⁵¹ See my *Escape from Predicament*, ch. 2.

that the native philosopher affirm the exotic idea and discard the contrary native one (*qushe*)? Or can one reasonably expect that the natives east and west will select out only those exotic ideas which explicitly or implicitly mesh with indigenous premises and either attack, filter out, or distort exotic ideas which do not? If the latter is the case, can philosophy as an intercultural conversation seek a global consensus based on the “open,” cogent criticism and revision of local philosophies? Or can “global philosophy” only mimic political bargaining by depending on vague ideas to accommodate diverse cultural interests and avoid painful choices of cultural revision? If so, is “global philosophy” an oxymoron and “openness” a chimera?

What is clear is that, east and west, painful choices cannot be avoided if cultural revision is to be guided by any serious effort to pursue philosophical reasoning. One illustration is John Rawls’s “political liberalism.” He either accepts a painful clash between a political philosophy explicitly designed for only a tiny minority of our planet’s population and different political philosophies, or he seeks a global political consensus built on a principle of “reasonableness” according to which it is “delusional” to believe that any ultimate religious or metaphysical beliefs can be evaluated as either true or false. Thus world order can arise only as people agree on the need not only to pursue peace, prosperity, and democracy but also to bracket their “comprehensive doctrines” as ideas that are not necessarily true. Such bracketing of sacred ideas is something many millions of people on this planet (the vast majority in my opinion) would regard as ridiculous and hateable, assuming they could even conceptualize it. The exercise of mental faculties widely shared by human beings has not historically led to the conclusion that such bracketing is obviously appropriate. What led to it was a Popperian epistemology that arose out of a long, highly distinctive cultural process.⁵² Yet cruder versions of this no-nonsense pragmatism are basic to mainstream U.S. political science and simply assert that all rational people want to put the institutionalization of democracy and capitalism above all other public goals, including religious ones. Rawls insisted this pragmatic approach to world peace is independent of any “comprehensive doctrine,” but it amounts to the belief that the primacy of this institutionalization is the one “comprehensive doctrine” that is not “delusional” and so is worth fighting for.

Clearly, Professor Lao would not accept this kind of “philosophical unification.” But I can think of no philosophical unification which does not similarly involve a painful, controversial process of “adopting and rejecting” (*qushe*). While Hegel said that “history is no place for happiness,” the same can be said about the multicultural search for “philosophical unification.” The unifying, neo-Hegelian formula of “limited distrust of reason” discussed above is no exception. Proposing that the overriding source of knowledge is CR combined with the logical analysis of empirical data, it deduces universal moral-political principles from this overall judgment about the nature of reality and knowledge (*benran chenshu*). Thus it

⁵² See Metzger, “New Confucian Philosophy and the Global Problem of Culture,” pp. 63–64, and *A Cloud Across the Pacific*, pp. 622–624, 631.

uses an empirical procedure—semantic analysis—to reveal a metaphysical realm in which ontological, epistemological, moral, and political categories are logically inseparable, and the freedom to pursue enlightenment is the supreme norm. Conversely, the interdependence of CR and the logical analysis of empirical data as the only way to know what is true and real implies rejection of not only the religious fundamentalism which most of the world’s population still fervently follows but also the still widespread belief that CR can lead to metaphysical grasp of a cosmic logos (*liti*) from which stem the universal rules of physical nature, history, and moral-political praxis. Including a fresh analysis of the semantic content of discourses, this kind of empiricism is also at odds with the highly influential Humean attempt to disconnect ontological-epistemological questions from the norms of moral-political praxis.

Most important, it indicates the limits of doubt and fallibility, distinguishing between fallibilistic argumentation in “the middle ground” and the epistemological, ontological and ethical-political premises justifying the need for free exploration of doubts in “the middle ground.” Thus underlining the limits of fallibility, it effectively refutes that major GMWER tendency to identify freedom with the reduction of all knowledge claims to “stories.” (It also revives the possibility of vindicating that ascetic virtue tradition Max Weber saw as central to the rise of the West.) One therefore cannot deny that this semantic approach is an attempt to wrest the definition of modern liberalism out from under the control of the American or Western iconoclastic mainstream today. There is no reason to dispute the postmodernists’ claim that all ideas about the universal nature of human life—all philosophies—are part of a political struggle for power. This point was obvious as soon as Karl Popper spoke of “the open society and its enemies.” But I do reject their claim that any philosophical theory is just another “story” or “narrative.” What this paper tries to offer is a theory based on knowledge and designed to help the forces of liberalism resolutely counter their enemies.

Most basically, the multicultural search for “philosophical unification” cannot be free of painful controversy because the GMWER was such a momentous event in global cultural history, creating a conflict, indeed a political conflict, between two vastly different, utterly irreconcilable worldviews: The new Cartesian doubt about knowledge claims, and ancient beliefs, still possessed east and west by the vast majority of this planet’s population, in the ready availability of absolute knowledge about all the most important questions. Indeed this epistemological contrast is at the heart of the dangerous cultural and political divergences Huntington emphasized. At the same time, there is a passionate controversy in the West, a heavily political “culture war,” about how to combine this new sense of doubt with the concept of knowledge.

The semantic approach adumbrated here, then, on the one hand is part of this Western “war” and, on the other, clashes east and west with an ethnocentric sense that one’s inherited intellectual or religious tradition includes core premises the absolute truth of which is so

obvious that there is no need to uncover them, textually disaggregate them, turn them into objects of CR, and then debate whether they are “closed” or “open.” This identification of inherited cultural premises with universal truth is central to the New Confucians’ idea of a Chinese *daotong*, but it is just as basic to the GMWER and other aspects of Western thought. Yet if individual and collective freedom means freedom from the hegemony of “closed” ideas, it cannot mean exempting any culturally inherited content from such critical scrutiny.

Even more basically, this concept of freedom arising out of the GMWER’s sense of doubt collides with a cultural tendency, especially central to the Chinese intellectual tradition past and present, to put primacy not on CR but on trust in the globally historical accumulation of wisdom. After Chinese could no longer restrict such trust to the Confucian classics (or to “the Three Teachings”—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism), they put it in the writings of “the past and the present, China and the rest of the world.” Thus Liu Guisheng 刘桂生, citing Yu Yingshi 余英时, distinguished between the Chinese tradition of “merging critical reflection with study of the intellectual heritage” (*si yu yu xue* 思寓于学) and a Western tradition of “using critical reflection to exert control over the intellectual heritage” (*si jia yu xue* 思驾驭学). Coming out of the latter tradition, the GMWER emphasizes the primacy of CR over ROST and is incompatible with the former tradition. The huge change here is from looking at history as a teacher, a well from which to draw water, to turning all of history into an object of analytical appraisal.

This change is so hard to understand because it requires taking into account the GMWER discovery of how culture complicates not only the interactions of historical actors but also the discourse of the historian or philosopher. Postmodernist circles today often claim that understanding this discourse is simply a matter of “deconstructing” it to reveal how it has been driven by a desire to exert power over others. The ideas making up discourses, however, vary enormously. Even if they all have expressed some monolithic human desire for power, the ways in which they have varied also were crucial and indeed seem to have had great historical consequences. Moreover, there can be no truth about how the desire for power shapes discourses unless discourses can articulate the truth, not only express a desire to exert power. To understand a discourse, therefore, means grasping the meaning of each of its key utterances and their relations with the problem of truth and knowledge.

The GMWER’s discovery of the epistemological consequences of culture and discourse is at least as important as Darwin’s insights. Yet the “epistemological turn” endlessly debated doubts about the pursuit of knowledge but neglected the relation of these doubts to the pursuit of freedom as well as the possibility of strengthening the pursuit of freedom by uncovering cultural premises and turning them into objects of critical reflexivity. In other words, philosophers east and west failed to explain how to adjust the pursuit of freedom and knowledge so as to take into account this discovery of the epistemological consequences of culture. Their main responses have been either to ignore this discovery, to

denounce it à la Leo Strauss, to downplay the quest for knowledge and absolutize that for freedom à la Richard Rorty, or to reduce the problem of discourse to a desire to dominate others. Ignoring this discovery has been the main response to it on the part of modern Chinese philosophy—whether the Tsinghua school, Chinese Marxism, Hu Shi, or New Confucianism—but has also been extremely common in Western intellectual circles.

As one effort to find another option, the above discussion suggests basing political philosophy on a “limited distrust of reason,” that is, on a distinction between (a) a “middle ground” where the premises of discourses (ROST) can be uncovered, compared, and debated critically and cautiously without arriving at any apodictic conclusion and (b) certain overriding ontological-epistemological-moral-political premises the epistemic status of which is ambiguous only in that they could be either veridical, linguistically unavoidable, or merely indisputable in the eyes of one’s we-group. The GMWER has thus not only discovered a vast “middle ground” but also replaced apodictic ideas with a kind of qualified indisputability as the outcome of the quest for knowledge about moral-political praxis. Political philosophy, then, cannot be based on apodictic ideas, but it can still clearly, resolutely distinguish the more from the less enlightened ideas. Instead of either a complete “trust in reason” facilitating authoritarianism or a complete “distrust of reason” turning society into a free marketplace of equally unveridical “stories” or fallibilistic theories, this “limited distrust of reason” implies the bright hope of a freedom bounded by overriding moral-political principles (as well as factual knowledge).

If this makes sense, “philosophical unification” depends on agreeing to begin with the above distinction and then to debate the issues in the middle ground, such as the practical and the epistemological questions listed at the beginning of this Conclusion. Answers to such questions will differ nation by nation, intellectual circle by intellectual circle, depending on local, personal, cultural, developmental, and situational circumstances. Yet those groups able to find some agreement on this overarching definition of political rationality will have a basis for resolute cooperation when they have to protect themselves against unenlightened forces and for mutual respect when they have to argue over conflicts of interest.

Admittedly, like Rawls’s attempt to devise a concept of “reasonableness” as a norm that can be shared by peoples with divergent “faith traditions” or “comprehensive doctrines,” my formula of a “limited distrust of reason” is based on the GMWER conclusion that political authority can no longer be derived from any of the whole variety of metaphysical and religious doctrines traditionally inherited east and west. All these doctrines have to suffer an epistemic demotion from the status of universal and eternal truth. Rawls, however, used a Popperian epistemology to define these traditional ROST as “delusional,” while I use a neo-Hegelian epistemology viewing *any* intellectual perspective as shaped by the tension between CR and an ROST tradition. Thus I try to turn any inherited set of ROST into an object of critical reflection in order to evade the dangerous assumption that the ROST my we-group

inherited from a privileged, purely rational-moral platform on which we can stand to look down on a sea of delusionary doctrines. Instead of reifying the distinction between less and more enlightened ideas by equating the latter with belief in Popperian positivism and U.S.-style democracy, I see this distinction as inherent to any semantic process east or west that includes some degree of theory about how the human world is and how it ought to be. Instead of seeking a global unification of philosophical premises (*huitong*) based on, say, the *Daodejing* 道德经's vision of the *dao* 道 or what Tsinghua thinkers called "the West's logical way of thinking," this semantic approach seeks to turn any culturally formed idea about how to think logically (including the GMWER and modern Chinese philosophy) into an object of textual analysis, of comparison, and of critical reflexivity. Moreover, I take seriously any proposition about how to improve political life, not only the call for democratization. More specifically, while Rawls saw its improvement as depending on the democratic reform of the formal, constitutional structure, I see it as depending at least as much on the reform of *paideia*.

But would Professor Lao find the latter perspective on modern Chinese philosophy more acceptable than Rawls's? As Lao suggests, "putting China in the world" (1) is indeed a process of global philosophical reappraisal and convergence, but this philosophical revision awaits painful reflection in not only the Chinese but also the Western cultural arena. Moreover, this revision will alter the philosophical constitution of that world in which each of the various segments of humanity can hope to find its proper place. This constitution will not be based on that utilitarian, Friedmanian concept of felicity currently animating globalization, or on the worship of Allah. But neither will it be based on that "wisdom" which modern Chinese philosophy has consistently demanded and seen as the historically emerging principle of a global political organization free of conflict and moral-intellectual dissonance (*shenmo hunza* 神魔混杂). Instead of such wisdom, the world in which China can find its proper place will offer only a newly clarified, more enlightened concept of knowledge with which to address the misunderstandings and painful dramas of domestic and international political life and so to protect humankind from the enemies of enlightenment—a world avoiding "decay and chaos" (*juluan* 据乱) but unable to achieve "universal peace" (*taiping* 太平) and fated forever to waver in the limbo between "decay and chaos" and the era of "rising peace" (*shengping* 升平), to use Kang Youwei's terms.⁵³

In deciding how to address that agenda of political philosophy outlined above, nothing seems more important than deciding whether wavering in this limbo or "universal peace" is the normal, practicable goal of political life. Professor Lao clearly has shifted away from the New Confucians' goal of "universal peace" (Tang spoke of a "supreme harmony" [*taihe* 太和]). He thus has strongly criticized Tang and Mou for insufficiently understanding "modernity" and for having overly "optimistic" expectations about "modernization." His

⁵³ I follow Chang Hao 张灏's translation of *juluan* in his *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 51–52.

point is that although “the modern world” is “basically different” from “the core meaning of the Confucian intellectual tradition,” and although “we well adopt toward modern culture a severely critical attitude, what we cannot deny is that the actual existence of the modern world puts unavoidable limits on any morally inspired activity.”⁵⁴ Professor Lao, however, still juxtaposes these limits with the Confucian vision of morality instead of welcoming history’s moral limbo as the promising medium of piecemeal, political progress. In other words, seeing these “limits” as stemming from the nature of “the modern world” instead of from the universal nature of political life, Lao rejects what Chang Hao called “awareness of the permanent moral darkness of human life” (*you’an yishi* 幽暗意识). Astutely criticizing Tang’s and Mou’s excessive optimism, has Professor Lao sufficiently identified and pondered the problem causing the basic rift between Chinese and Western political philosophy?

⁵⁴ Lao Sze-kwang, “Guanyu ‘Zhongguo zhexue’ de jidian yijian” 关于中国哲学的几点意见 (Some Views about “Chinese Philosophy”), *Zhongguo zhexue yu wenhua* 1 (May 2007): 5, 9.