

The Fusion of Modern Confucianism
and Buddhism:
Mou Zongsan's Journey from Double
to Fundamental Ontology
牟宗三哲學的儒佛會通
——從兩層存有論到基本存有論[§]

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關鍵詞：牟宗三、兩層存有論、基本存有論、現代儒學、佛教、天臺宗、華嚴宗

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Abstract

Mou Zongsan (1909-1995) belongs to the most important Chinese philosophers of the second half of the 20th century. In essence he was one of the main proponents of the Modern Confucian intellectual movement, but was simultaneously also heavily influenced by Buddhist thought. The present article describes his paradigm of double ontology, which is divided into the noumenal and phenomenal, or the attached and detached ontology. He points out that this bipolar or twofold ontology is considered to constitute the structure of moral metaphysics, which is a core supposition of Confucian thought. When Mou insists on a twofold structure for ontology, he always holds to his metaphysical standpoint, which deals with entities no matter whether they are phenomenal or noumenal. Based on Tomomi Asakura's critique, the author analyses Mou's concept of double ontology, shedding light upon the fact that Mou considered only the ontic difference between entities and their two regions, phenomena and noumena, without ever developing the genuine ontological difference between entities and their own being itself. Only in the latest phase of his philosophical development did he start considering this inconsistency, and proceeding towards a model of fundamental ontology.

摘要

牟宗三（1909-1995）是二十世紀下半葉最重要的中國哲學家之一。雖然牟先生本質上是新儒學思潮的大家，實亦深受佛學思想影響。本文論證牟宗三哲學的本體與現象的兩層存有論範式，亦即執的存有論（attached ontology）與無執的存有論（detached ontology）。牟宗三的二元或兩層存有論，是為了建立道德形上學結構，乃儒家思想之核心假設。當牟宗三執持兩層構造之存有論時，大抵皆立足於其形上學之觀點，即不論是現象還是本質都處理實體。本文從朝倉友海（Tomomi Asakura）的評論出發，剖析兩層存有論之概念，闡明牟宗三原本僅考慮了存有與其現象界及本體界實體上的異同，未曾發展出實體與其存在自身之真正的存有性區別。在他哲學思想發展的晚期，牟宗三注意到此一矛盾，才開始構思基本存有論。

1. Introduction

The present article is dealing with a synthesis between different philosophical systems, namely between Western (especially Kantian), Confucian and Buddhist thought. The synthesis will be explored through the examination of Mou Zongsan's work. He was an innovative theoretician who belonged to the philosophical current of the so-called Modern Confucians (Xin ruxue 新儒學).¹

This stream of thought is defined as the search for a synthesis between Western and traditional East Asian thought, in order to elaborate a system of ideas and values capable of resolving the social and political problems of the modern, globalized world. The philosophers belonging to this stream of thought have namely attempted to reconcile “Western” and “traditional Chinese” values, in order to create a theoretical model of modernization that would not be confused or equated with “Westernization.” In this study, I mainly analyze the most important works written by the leading theoreticians of the so called 2nd generation of new Modern Confucians, who were most active in the second half of the 20th century. Beside Mou Zongsan, the most influential philosophers belonging to this generation were Xu Fuguan 徐復觀, Tang Junyi 唐君毅, and Fang Dongmei 方東美.

1 Literary: New Confucianism. In international sinology, this line of thought is translated with various names, ranging from *Neo-Confucianism* or *Contemporary* or *Modern Neo-Confucianism*, to *New Confucianism* and *Modern* or *Contemporary Confucianism*. The first series, which includes the term Neo-Confucianism, is impractical because it is often confused with Neo-Confucianism, a term which in Western sinology denotes the reformed Confucian philosophies of the Song and Ming periods (li xue 理學 or xingli xue 性理學). I therefore generally prefer the term *Modern Confucianism*, given that we are dealing with philosophical discourses that belong to Chinese modernity. A similar confusion can be found in Chinese discourses, which generally denote this line of thought with one of the following expressions: *Xin ruxue*, *Xiandai xin ruxue*, *Xiandai ruxue*, *Dangdai xin ruxue*, etc. In the case of Chinese, I find the expression *Xiandai xin ruxue* to be the most appropriate, the reason being that in China, as opposed to European sinological discourses, the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming dynasties has never been associated with the concept of new Confucianism (Xin ruxue 新儒學) and therefore the character which denotes ‘new’ in this phrase is not problematic.

2. Confucianism as a Teaching That Includes Daoist and Buddhist Elements

We should bear in mind that the term Confucianism (Ru xue 儒學) often denotes early Chinese thought in general. Tu Weiming, a prominent member of the 3rd generation of Modern Confucianism, has described this in the following way:

The scholarly tradition envisioned by Confucius can be traced to the sage-kings of antiquity. Although the earliest dynasty confirmed by archaeology is the Shang dynasty (18th-12th century BCE), the historical period that Confucius claimed as relevant was much earlier. Confucius may have initiated a cultural process known in the West as Confucianism, but he and those who followed him considered themselves part of a tradition, later identified by Chinese historians as the *rujia* 儒家, ‘scholarly tradition,’ that had its origins two millennia previously, when the legendary sages Yao and Shun created a civilized world through moral persuasion.²

In addition to Tu, many other scholars have noted the wider connotational scope of the term *ru xue*. Roger Ames, for example, has shown how this notion refers to a general classical “scholarly tradition.”³

This, of course, does not mean that Daoist and Buddhist texts were included in the Confucian canon, but only confirms how inextricably intertwined these three major systems of philosophy were. In most forms of Confucian state orthodoxy, e.g. the *Shiji* 史記 and *Hanshu* 漢書, the term *Ru* 儒 basically

2 Tu Weiming, “Confucianism,” in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/132104/Confucianism/25455/The-historical-context#ref1008344> (13.03.2014), p. 1.

3 See Roger T. Ames, “Classical Daoism in an Age of Globalization,” in *Classics and College Education in an Age of Globalization*. (Taipei: Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, National Taiwan University, 2014), p. 5.

signifies an expert in the Five Classics. In her book on Confucianism and women, Li-hsiang Lisa Rosenlee also writes:

The concept of *Ru* 儒 [...] denotes the inexact Chinese counterpart of the term Confucianism used by Jesuits in the 18th century [...] The ambiguity of its semantic origins in ancient, pre-Confucian times obscures the connection between *Ru* as an intellectual discipline and Confucius, as its most prominent spokesperson. Unlike the term Confucianism - its secularized and simplified representation in the West - the complex term *Ru* can only be approximated as the teaching of the sages and the worthies wherein the ethical teaching of Confucius – the Supreme sage and the First teacher - forms a part, but an important part nevertheless.⁴

Even though the Neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming Dynasties, who created the theoretical framework that underpins Modern Confucianism, formally distanced themselves from Daoism, Buddhism, and similar, more mystical, less rational traditions, even going so far as to view the proponents of these systems as their philosophical “enemies.” At the same time, however, one of the greatest theoretical shifts in Neo-Confucian philosophy was due precisely to the integration of many important Daoist and Buddhist concepts and methods into the framework of classical Confucianism. Take, for example, the concepts of the subject and object of recognition (*neng* 能 – *suo* 所), originating in Buddhist epistemology, which were often applied even by the most rationalistic philosophies within the School of Structure⁵ (*li* 理學). Even Zhu Xi 朱熹,

4 Li-hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 4.

5 While interpreting the term *li* 理 to mean structure may seem highly unusual, there are several good reasons for doing so. Since they are much too complex to be analysed in the limited scope of this article, I would refer here to my book *Traditional Chinese Philosophy and the Paradigm of Structure - Li* 理 (Rošker 2012) and the article “The Concept of Structure as a Basic Epistemological Paradigm of Traditional Chinese Thought” (Rošker 2010), in which I elaborate

the leading figure of this school, incorporated several Daoist ideas and procedures into his own philosophy (e.g. the idea of the ultimate pole or *taiji* 太極, the concept of non-action or *wuwei* 無為, etc), whereas the theories of the more idealistic current (“The School of Mind,” *Xin xue* 心學) were practically based upon Buddhist and Daoist onto-epistemologies.

It was the assimilation of those very ideas that orthodox classical Confucian doctrine was deemed dangerous, improper (*fei zheng* 非正), and even “heretical,” which to a great extent defined the reform of classical Confucian thought, which, already at that time, had ossified and became far too formalized. These Buddhist and Daoist impulses saved Confucianism from collapse in the period from the 10th to the 14th centuries, and succeeded in transforming the classical state-building doctrine into a system of thought that deserved once again to be called “philosophy.”

It is difficult to say to what extent this process was a conscious one, but the contemporaneous integration and “discharging” of Buddhist and Daoist philosophy certainly constituted a challenge for Neo-Confucian philosophers.

By the 10th century, the formalized classical Confucian doctrine was an empty husk, and was studied and mastered only in order to pass the official state examinations, which for the successful candidates (and their clans) gave access to political power. But because this doctrine was incapable of satisfying the intellectual needs of the educated classes, these classes turned to the study of Daoist and Buddhist philosophies, a tendency that threatened both Confucianism as such, and the entire ideological system on which the traditional state institutions were based. In this sense, the Neo-Confucian reform was absolutely

on this question in detail. Based on my analyses of this concept, I believe that the term structure is the proper translation for the term *li* 理. Hence, I also translate the name of Zhu Xi’s school *li xue* 理學 as “School of Structure” and not as “School of principle” which was hitherto the most common translation of this thought current.

necessary for the preservation of Confucianism, in terms of its function as the main social, ethical, and philosophical system of thought in China.

Modern Confucians rarely relied on Daoism, and understandably so, for the Modern Confucian stream of thought emerged not only in order to preserve cultural identity, but also with the goal of modernizing and “saving” the institutional framework of Chinese society. The anarchic classics of Daoism are eminently unsuited for such goals. That said, several Modern Confucian philosophers have devoted considerable effort to the study and integration of Buddhist thought into their own theories (beside Mou Zongsan, who is the main figure for the present essay, we should mention here especially his teacher Xiong Shili 熊十力 and the philosopher Liang Shuming 梁漱溟).

In their attempts to synthesize Euro-American and Chinese philosophies and modernize the Chinese philosophical tradition, many other Modern Confucian thinkers also focused on various traditional discourses that do not belong to the framework of Confucianism in a narrow sense. As a final point, we must also take into account the differences between the original Chinese notions and their semantic connotations that originate in the translations of these notions into Indo-European languages. The expression “Ru xue 儒學” is translated as “Confucianism” (also in the term “Modern Confucianism”), and thus automatically connotes Confucius (Kong Fuzi 孔夫子) and the various historical phases of the Confucian teachings. But “Ru xue 儒學” actually signifies “the teachings of the scholars,” which means that this expression does not exclude a priori any of the major influences on the history of Chinese thought. In fact, what Confucian and Daoist philosophy, as well as Sinicized Buddhism, all share is this idea of traditional Chinese philosophy as the “teachings of the scholars.”⁶

6 In considering specific features of traditional Chinese philosophy that are common to all schools of ancient and classical Chinese thought, of primary importance are the concept of transcendent immanence (or immanent transcendence), binary structured holism, which functions by means of binary categories (for example yin-yang 陰陽, you-wu 有無, ti-yong 體用, ming-shi 名實, etc), as well as the principle of complementarity, which describes the

3. Mou Zongsan and the Development of “Double Ontology”

The present study focuses on the theoretical work of Mou Zongsan (1909-1995), who ranks among the most important Chinese philosophers of the second half of the 20th century. He was born in Shandong province and graduated from Peking University. In 1949 he moved to Taiwan and later to Hong Kong, and he remained outside of mainland China for the rest of his life. His thought was heavily influenced by Immanuel Kant, whose three *Critiques* he translated into Chinese,⁷ and above all by Tiantai Buddhist philosophy.

An immensely creative theorist, he was the best known second-generation Modern Confucian and belongs to the small number of contemporary Chinese philosophers who managed to develop their own philosophical systems and theories respectively. He followed his teacher Xiong Shili, reevaluating the Chinese philosophical tradition through the perspective of Modern European, especially Kantian, philosophy, inter alia elaborating upon and simultaneously upgrading traditional Buddhist theoretical approaches.

In spite of Mou’s admiration for this important European philosophy, in his view, Kant was “entangled” with the idea of God; and this idea constituted a superfluous and disturbing element in his theoretical system. Kant should have eliminated God, as in all coherent moral philosophies (e.g. Buddhism). According to Kant, given that the world was created by God, it could not change in accordance with the moral development of man. Kant was thus unable to explain the idea of *summum bonum*.

method of interactions between both implied antipodes.

⁷ Lee Ming-huei, the most well-known Taiwanese expert in Kantian studies, exposed (Lee 2001, 68) that Mou could not be considered an expert in Kant’s philosophy, for he did not know how to read German, thus his translations into Chinese were based on the English translations of this philosopher. However, even if his translations were secondary and thus surely less reliable, we have to admit that Mou’s comments, with which he equipped them, represent valuable additions to Kant’s philosophy and he opened quite a few new, philosophically innovative problems and issues.

In the course of his endeavors to upgrade Kant's metaphysical system and to develop a system of moral metaphysics, Mou Zongsan has built the system of his double (or two-tiered) ontology. For Mou, moral metaphysics' refers to the existence of things with moral substance that are reflected by moral consciousness. Thus, for him, "this clear consciousness is a moral substance, and, at the same time an ontological substance." (知體明覺是道德的實體，同時亦即是存有論的實體)⁸

Mou based his idea of "double ontology" on Kant's distinction between phenomena and "things in themselves." However, he disagreed with Kant regarding his understanding of intellectual intuition as the only means of gaining insight into or of comprehending the noumenal sphere. While Kant has reserved this divine consciousness exclusively for God, Mou rejected this view and was convinced that human beings also possess the possibility of such infinite comprehension. Hence, he developed a two-tiered ontology, which is divided into the noumenal and phenomenal, or the attached and detached ontology. Within the frame of these two ontologies, he defines detachment and attachment as follows:

If we start from the assumption that 'man is finite as well as infinite,' we must apply ontology on two levels. The first is the ontology of the noumenal sphere, or the 'detached ontology.' The second is the ontology of the sphere of appearances, or the 'attached ontology.'

(我們以「人雖有限而可無限」，需要兩層存有論，本體界的存有論，此亦曰「無執的存有論」，以及現象界的存有論，此亦曰「執的存有論」。)⁹

He developed this famous doctrine of "two-level ontology," patterned off of Kantian and Huayan Buddhist metaphysics in his book *Phenomena and the*

8 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Xianxiang yu wu zishen* 現象與物自身 (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1975), p. 40.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Things in Themselves (*Xianxiang yu wu zishen* 現象與物自身, 1975). In creating this two tier ontology, he was namely proceeding from the Huayan Buddhist concept of the “Two-Gates-in-One-Mind (一心開二門).” However, this model implies some problems, which were profoundly examined by the contemporary Japanese scholar Tomomi Asakura.

4. Asakura’s Critique

Double ontology is thus divided into the noumenal and phenomenal, or the attached and detached ontology. He points out that this bipolar or twofold ontology is namely considered to constitute the structure of moral metaphysics. When Mou insists on a twofold structure for ontology, he always holds to his metaphysical standpoint, which deals with entities no matter whether they are phenomenal or noumenal. Therefore, in his article "On Buddhistic Ontology: A Comparative Study of Mou Zongsan and Kyoto School Philosophy," Tomomi Asakura points out, that Mou only considers the ontic difference between entities and their two regions, phenomena and noumena. Thus, he never develops the ontological difference between entities and their own being itself.¹⁰ Only shortly before his death, in the latest phase of his philosophical development, Mou started to consider this inconsistency and to proceed towards a model of fundamental ontology.

In Mou’s latest important work, *On Summum Bonum* (*Yuanshan lun* 圓善論, 1985), the idea of Buddhist ontology, derived from the Tiantai School, brought new meaning to this term.¹¹ In the twofold ontology scheme, it simply

10 Tomomi Asakura, “On Buddhistic Ontology: A Comparative Study of Mou Zongsan and Kyoto School Philosophy,” *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 61, No. 4 (2011), p. 652.

11 This is also the main reason why the present article is focusing on Mou Zongsan’s work. Although several other scholars also attempted to draw a synthesis between Confucianism and Buddhism, and although many Modern Confucian scholars were at least influenced by some aspects of Buddhist thought, Mou was the only one who has in this context thoroughly explored fundamental ontology.

means a study of entities and of the region of entities. Since phenomenal ontology must be fully grounded in the noumenal version, the ultimate ground must be morality: it is essentially a moral vision of the world. In contrast with this view, Tiantai Buddhist ontology has nothing to do with morality. It is something amoral. And only on this amoral ground, or on the lack of any ground, can we see the possibility of posing a question of being. This is the meaning of fundamental ontology.¹²

If the twofold ontology is metaphysical, Buddhist ontology is non metaphysical. Only at this point does the word ontology need to be differentiated from metaphysics.

Hence, the double ontology scheme (Huayan 華嚴) and Buddhist ontology (Tiantai 天臺) should not be confused.

The idea of Buddhist ontology can be seen to constitute a fundamental critique of his previous New Confucian standpoint; at least, it did indeed allow him to overcome Kantian philosophy by recasting the antinomy of practical reason.¹³

Before that, the concept of intellectual intuition was Mou's most significant contribution to the upgrading of the Kantian philosophy. It was by no means a negation or a profound critique of the Kantian system. In his work *Summum Bonum*, however, he directly attacked the Kantian solution to the antinomy of practical reason. This work does not only imply new, extended interpretations of the Kantian system, but also the invention of a totally different method for solving the Kantian antinomy of practical reason, which is discovered between happiness and virtue. Hence, Asakura points out¹⁴ that only if this alternative

12 Tomomi Asakura, "On Buddhistic Ontology: A Comparative Study of Mou Zongsan and Kyoto School Philosophy," p. 654.

13 Ibid., p. 656.

14 Ibid., p. 657.

solution is successful and acceptable can we say that Mou succeeded in presenting the supremacy of his (or Chinese) philosophy over Kantianism.

Again, Mou, as a non-Christian East Asian philosopher, attempts to solve the Kantian antinomy of practical reason without postulating the existence of God. Here he discovers the profound ontological meaning of the Tiantai doctrine of perfect teaching (yuan jiao 圓教). It appears bizarre that he invokes the Buddhist idea of perfect teaching at this point, but Mou had no choice but to resort to Buddhism, because Confucianism does not work effectively here, as the latter tends to consider the virtue-happiness relationship as something analytic, even though their ultimate positions might be different.¹⁵

In his *Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy* (*Zhongguo zhexue shijiu jiang* 中國哲學十九講, 1983), Mou writes:

The first stage of Confucian moral practice sees the virtue-happiness relationship similarly to Stoicism, taking an analytical attitude. [...] In the later period, when Neo Confucianism developed to its highest point, at this stage it was no longer deadlocked. However, Confucianism does not explain this problem sufficiently or put enough emphasis on it. It was when Buddhism exhibited its idea of perfect teaching that the virtue-happiness relationship became suddenly unquestionable.

(儒家實踐的第一關對於德福的看法，與斯多亞學派一樣，都採取分析的態度[……]。後來理學家發展至最高峰，也沒有停滯於此境界。只不過儒家對這方面的問題並不大講，也不十分正視。至佛教提出圓教，德福的觀念頓時清楚起來。) ¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 658.

¹⁶ Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Zhongguo zhexue shijiu jiang* 中國哲學十九講 (*Nineteen Lectures on Chinese Philosophy*) (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1983), p. 329.

5. Don't Worry, Be Happy

Mou's fundamental understanding of the antinomy of practical reason resides in the interpretation of "happiness." Kant himself seems aware of this problem as well. When Kant describes our joy in moral practice,¹⁷ he writes about "self-satisfaction" (Selbstzufriedenheit) as a more adequate term (sometimes he also denotes this kind of joy as intellectual satisfaction), he is closer to the possibility of going further than his own previous understanding of happiness. From this, it becomes quite clear that the concept of happiness is problematic even for Kant himself. In this context, Mou's reinterpretation, which will be explained below, can certainly be justified.

Mou's reinterpretation of "happiness," one which no one else had conceived of before, is refreshing and innovative. His understanding of Buddhist ontology has namely led him to the conviction that happiness itself is simply being. He wrote: "The being of *dharma* is nothing but happiness (法的存在就是福)."¹⁸

In other words: happiness is simply inseparable from the act of being, because it can only be ascribed to something that exists. It is thus inseparable from existence and is, simultaneously, attributable to it; therefore, the concept of being can be substituted through the concept of happiness. We can therefore conclude that happiness is identical to the affirmation of being. Here, we can, once again, sense Mou's identification with the life oriented, pragmatic and positive aspects of traditional Chinese culture.¹⁹ This affirmation does not refer

17 Kant, Immanuel, *Kritik der Praktischen Vernunft*. Kritische Aufhebung der Antinomie, S. 247, Volume VII (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 247.

18 Mou Zongsan, *Zhongguo zhexue shijiu jiang*, p. 363.

19 In contrast to original Buddhism, indigenous Chinese philosophy does not negate human life and human desire, but understands the world in a way that enables the transcendence of desire, thereby freeing human beings from their obsessive pursuit. Hence, in addition to Mou, many other Modern Confucian philosophers also problematized this negative Buddhist attitude towards life and the world. For instance Fang Dongmei's critique of the Buddhist concept of Nirvana is grounded on the problem of alienation as a consequence of the splitting of knowledge from the dolorous confines separating modern individuals from their human dignity i.e. their divine nature), thereby isolating them from the ontological sphere of creative

to a complete, divine state (like Nirvana), but to something which is incomplete, relative and includes various problems and even suffering - but for Mou and most other Chinese Confucian philosophers, it is nevertheless valuable:

The existence of my individual life is a completed fact, but it still implies possibilities of improvement. Therefore, it is not a kind of fixed or determined existence. This existence is, according to the Buddhists, a non-defined existence of everything that exists. Everything that exists is in this completed fact of existence, but, at the same time, this existence is un-defined (i.e. it is not of a fixed, determined nature).

(我之個體生命之存在是既成的，雖是既成的，但可改善。因此，茲並無定性的存在，此如佛家說無定性眾生，推之，凡天地萬物都是既成的存在，但亦都非定性的存在。) ²⁰

Thus, if happiness is the act of being itself, then the Kantian antinomy can easily be transformed into a question of the relationship between virtue and being. However, this affirmation does not make it less difficult to affirm the being of this world now, as it is. We cannot namely ignore the fact that it is not only positive, but also full of evil.

When we hear the expression “virtue and existence coincide,” this seems to indicate Confucian moral metaphysics. However, Mou’s shift does not imply anything comparable to it, because, what is actually really asked here is how we can affirm the world that necessarily includes most evil and most terrible aspects one can imagine. If Tiantai is the true, perfect teaching, it is because the awakening or awareness it pursues is an all-encompassing affirmation of existence, which characterizes this form of Buddhism.²¹ Mou is namely

creativity.

20 Mou Zongsan 牟宗三, *Yuan shan lun* 圓善論 (*On Summum Bonum*) (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1985), p. 306.

21 Tomomi Asakura, “On Buddhistic Ontology: A Comparative Study of Mou Zongsan and Kyoto

convinced that we become Buddha in the immediacy (ji 即) of Hell, Hunger, or Animality.²²

Huayan Buddhism nullifies the problem of evil in this sense by neglecting the being of all inferior entities such as the abovementioned Hell, Hunger, and Animality. When we awaken and become Buddha, we have to deny the negative outlook on this world. In this way, the Huayan mode of thought cannot comprehend reality absolutely because it only sees the ultimate reality.²³

Hence, Mou has solved the problem of the Kantian antinomy in a genuinely Buddhist way. According to him, happiness is complete existence, in which we are all that we should be in order to be complete human beings. In this sense, humans can affirm existence through Buddhist virtue (i.e. Buddhist practice) when they become aware of their immediacy with the world in all its aspects and by becoming aware of the being of everything that exists and with which we are one.²⁴ In this way, every human being can attain the affirmation of being without any reservation or exception.

6. Conclusion

But what is the meaning of ontology here? As we know, ontology is a philosophical discipline that encompasses besides the study of “what is” and the study of the general features of what is also the study of what is involved in settling questions about what there is in general, especially for the philosophically tricky cases.²⁵ Things might namely be quite different in their

School Philosophy,” p. 661.

22 Mou Zongsan, *Yuanshan lun*, p. 279.

23 Tomomi Asakura, “On Buddhistic Ontology,” p. 661.

24 Ibid.

25 Thomas Hofweber, “Logic and Ontology,” in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/logic-ontology/>, p. 3.

essences, but from an ontological standpoint, i.e. if we focus on their being, they should be the same.²⁶

Things are immediately the same, at least paradoxically so, as long as we can see the ontological difference between entities and their “being” and concentrate on the latter. An all-encompassing affirmation is realized in the awareness of this univocal horizon of being, and it will be attained through the virtue of Buddhist practice. This solution to the problem of antinomy, this realization or presentation of the highest good, is a truly ontological enterprise; thus, it is called Buddhist ontology.²⁷ Only through an absolute affirmation, i.e. only if we are able to affirm the whole being in a practical way, can we see the possibility of real ontology. At this point, we cannot speak any longer about any kind of moral metaphysics even though this ontology still might be denoted as a kind of practical ontology. Mou also conceived of it as the final conclusion of his ontological quest; however, what he could not (or did not want to) see, was the fact that his solution could no longer be regarded as Confucian moral metaphysics, since it was an a-moral ontology that was, in essence, not only Buddhist inspired, but genuinely Buddhistic.

However, Mou does not clearly recognize that his approach is no longer in the category of moral philosophy because he wants to incorporate it as far as possible into a Confucian framework. He seems fairly optimistic

26 Regarding Buddhist practices, however, we must still consider that while accepting the fundamental ontological oneness or unity of being, one still senses and comprehends suffering and feels compassion and the need to respond to it in a certain way. We cannot forget that all the preparatory steps to entering on the final stages of the Buddhist quest are ethical in nature. In this context, is the very totality of being that makes compassion and response possible, since the practitioner takes seriously that all are one and that suffering of other people is at the same time my own.

27 Tomomi Asakura, “On Buddhistic Ontology: A Comparative Study of Mou Zongsan and Kyoto School Philosophy,” p. 662.

about the realization and the presentation of the highest good, but he never forgets to emphasize his ultimate moral orientation.²⁸

When Mou re-examines the Kantian antinomy of practical reason, the implications of this idea become very clear. This antinomy is namely completely resolved by Mou's absolute affirmation of being. In Mou's theoretical system, this affirmation (which can be achieved through Buddhist practice) represents the highest good. Since this idea came to life only in the last phase of Mou's philosophical work, he could not develop it further and was not able to see that with this new idea he questioned (or even negated) some of his own previous presumptions that were tightly connected with morality. Mou's unchanged faith in Confucianism does not devalue the importance of this idea of Buddhist ontology.

Because through this absolute affirmation of being, in this "authentically ontological view,"²⁹ Mou's original scheme of the double ontology ("one-mind-opens-two-gates"), which was still based upon moral metaphysics, becomes thoroughly unsustainable.³⁰ In this context, and from this profound (though unconscious) shift in Mou Zongsan's thought we cannot overlook the great contribution of Buddhism to contemporary global philosophy, which can be found precisely in this non metaphysical and a-moral (or above-moral) radicalization of the question of being. This radicalization takes us away from any kind of metaphysical understanding of the being of entities, but also offers us, on the other hand, a better possibility of becoming aware of this being – namely through the Buddhist practice.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 571.

29 *Ibid.*

30 This difference between metaphysics and ontology is historically expressed by the way Tiantai perfect teaching criticizes Huayan Buddhism.

However, if we proceed from the presumption that philosophy should be an absolute and unending critique,³¹ we could, of course, also raise the question whether an all-encompassing, absolute affirmation does not imply a simple legitimation and lethargic confirmation of all that already exists, which is doubtless a dangerous vision of the world and our position in it. Tomomi Asakura's reply to this question is logically consistent, for he points out that if perfect teaching or Buddhist ontology preserves and contains all the kinds of entities and thoughts, it already comprehends an imperfect component of its own, which is the critical type.³² However, we must still ask ourselves whether this ultimate facticity is truly able to express the fundamental importance of human autonomy and responsibility, and hence, whether it is really not in contradiction to the endeavor of changing and re-creating reality.

Hence, notwithstanding the fact that Mou Zongsan has solved the problem of *Summum Bonum* in a genuinely Buddhist way, the question of the relation between being and autonomy still remains open.♦

31 Ibid., p. 672.

32 Ibid., p. 674.

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