

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation by Tu Wei-Ming

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Comparative philosophy aims at community of differences, not similarity of content, which Izutsu has done, thereby missing both Taoism and comparative philosophy.

KUANG-MING WU, *University of Wisconsin—Oshkosh*.

WEI-MING, TU. *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. xi + 203 pp. \$34.50 (cloth); \$12.95 (paper).

This collection of Professor Tu Wei-ming's essays declares the faith of a modern "Idealist" Neo-Confucian who has inherited Wing-tsit Chan's mantle as Confucianism's ambassador to American academe. Tu casts the idealist Tao in words ("self," "subjectivity," "spirit," "creativity,") with rhetorical appeal to an alien individualistic culture.

Confucian self-cultivation aims for a nonindividualistic human perfection. The self we cultivate is the Great Self—the total set of human relationships. Tu expresses his challenging vision with engaging passion: "Humanity is the respectful son or daughter of the cosmic process. . . . Human life is part of a continuous flow of the blood and breath that constitutes the cosmic process" (p. 43). The appealing modern twist in Tu's Confucianism is that in "learning to be human" (working out our specific dyadic human relationships) we creatively transform the cosmos.

Tu's missionary zeal detracts from his presentation of philosophical issues. Tu's Neo-Confucianism uncritically buys the Mencius's doctrine which was, charitably, "on the defensive" in the classical period. Tu's idolization of Mencius is not objectionable, but his occasional posing as a spokesman for Taoism and Buddhism—the philosophical opponents of Confucianism—ranks this particular Taoist. Rather than answer the objections of Mencius's philosophical colleagues, Tu focuses on interpreting "Chinese thought" as a whole to Western professors of religion (especially Robert Bellah). Tu does raise Chuang Tzu's question: if human nature is intrinsically good, why bother with self-cultivation? (p. 94, 106)—and gives Mencius's standard response—natural intrinsic goodness (*liang-chih*—knowledge of pro and con [*shih-fei*]) lies latent like a *seed* in the heart-mind—a disposition that grows into sageliness. But Mencius emphasized how "natural" the growth was—almost inevitable except for the interference of rulers. The Neo-Confucians had become the rulers of the Sung and Ming. That more sages were not sprouting everywhere was an embarrassment. They shifted the responsibility and emphasized that long and strenuous personal effort was required to realize the latent pattern written in the heart-mind (p. 127).

Tu treats this Neo-Confucian embellishment of Mencius's nonanswer as the end of the argument, but Chuang Tzu insists that the fact that we have such a heart-mind does not entail that we ought to develop or follow it; that the fool's mind is a realization of its latent state as surely as is the sage's; and that this cultivation story covers up the fact that our heart-mind is being fed *shih-fei*'s all the time. Before it issues pro-con responses, it already has absorbed some Tao or other—a Confucian (traditionalist) Tao, a Mohist (utilitarian) Tao, an egoist Tao, or a nativist (Mencius) Tao. To be chirping out pros and cons without having been fed them would be like going to New York today and arriving there yesterday!

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Tu does not answer this Taoist challenge. Instead his “creative” Confucianism seems to repudiate the heart of Mencius that drew the Taoist criticism. “In a deeper sense, however, a distinction between ontological assertion and existential realization must be made. Self realization is an existential idea, specifying a way of *bringing into existence* the ontological assertion that human nature is good” (p. 126; italics mine). Tu calls this a “virtuous” cycle, but why, if that was Mencius’s view, did he pretend to disagree with Kao Tzu that human nature can *become* good or bad? And still Chuang Tzu’s question will not go away. Why limit self-cultivation to the conventional Confucian dyadic relationships—in particular, the father-son relation? “Since I can never realize myself as an isolated or even isolable individual, I must recognize as a point of departure my personal locus with reference to my father *among other dyadic relationships*” (p. 127; italics mine). Certainly learning to be human involves working through my dyadic relation to my computer, the moon, Vermont leaves, terrorism, and anything else to which I have a relation in the cosmos. Tu resolutely defends all Confucian role hierarchies—from his paradigmatic father-son relationship to his apology for Confucianism’s position on women (pp. 140–41). “Our bodies for instance are not our own possessions pure and simple; they are sacred gifts from our parents and thus laden with deep ethico-religious significance” (p. 118).

In his response to Western attitudes, Tu’s defensiveness is disappointing. Rather than attack the traditional distinction between spirit and matter, Tu offers (and later theoretically withdraws) a claim that Confucius was a dualist too (pp. 37, 90). The Confucian point of view presents a bold challenge to Western attitudes. It deserves bold, not defensive, advocacy.

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SMART, NINIAN, and PURNANANDA, SWAMI. *Prophet of a New Hindu Age: The Life and Times of Acharya Pranavananda.* London and Winchester, Mass.: Allen & Unwin, 1985. xi + 171 pp. \$15.00 (cloth); \$9.00 (paper).

The Bengali Hindu saint and religious activist, Acharya Pranavananda (1896–1941), is perhaps not as well known in the West as some of his contemporaries (Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Ramana Maharshi), but his life story, as recounted here by his disciple Swami Purnananda and retold by historian of religions Ninian Smart, is every bit as compelling.

Already as a child, Binode (as the Acharya was then called) showed an inclination toward the practice of meditation and austerities (*tapas*), spending long hours and fasting in a converted outhouse in the courtyard of his family’s home. At the same time, he laid great stress on physical culture and manliness. Self-trained (i.e., guruleless), he eventually became a *sannyasin* and a teacher in his own right. He founded a community of monks, the Bharat Sevashram Sanga, whose members, under his unflagging guidance, were dedicated to leading the lives of brahmacharin and to the selfless practice of social service, especially famine relief and health care. Energetic, eating little, sleeping hardly at all, the *acharya* constantly advocated hard work, applying the principles of *tapas* in “a positive, practical manner to contemporary problems” (p. 164). At the same time, he was dedicated to nationalist causes, to organizing Hindus in support of his vision of India as a righteously ruled religious