

# Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions

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## Table of Contents

*Theme: Religion, Philosophy, and Culture*

*Theme Editor: Rajesh C. Shukla*

Introduction Rajesh C. Shukla	1
Philosophy of Religion, Meta-Religion, and the Expressive Dimension of Meta-Religious Discourse Gordon Davis	15
Critical Thinking versus Ideology: Challenging Education, Culture, and Religion Ramón Martínez de Pisón	39
Religion, Philosophy, and Culture: A Christian Theological Perspective Anthony Chinedu Osuji	55
Thomas Aquinas, Amartya Sen, and a Critical Economic Discourse Timothy Harvie	73
Love as Political Concept: A Short Genealogy Elucidating the Background of Anders Breivik's Manifesto Marc De Kesel	87
Thinking Intervention: From Westphalian Non-Intervention to Military Humanitarian Intervention Richard Feist	105
Ethics, Politics, and Public Life: An Aristotelian Account Rajesh C. Shukla	123
Fonder le vivre-ensemble à travers l'éducation: L'apport du cours d'éthique et de culture religieuse Martin Samson	139

ii *Philosophy, Culture, and Traditions*

Humanisme et pluralité: une pratique du jugement pour  
les débats publics 155  
Sophie Cloutier

Référence chrétienne, culture et historicité modernes 171  
Louis Perron

**Non-thematic papers**

When Confucian Orthodoxy encountered the Papacy:  
A Contrast in Political Thought between Confucianism and  
Christianity in the late Ming Dynasty 185  
Yun Huang

Tu Wei-Ming and Charles Taylor on Embodied Moral Reasoning 199  
Andrew Tsz Wan Hung

# TU WEI-MING AND CHARLES TAYLOR ON EMBODIED MORAL REASONING<sup>1</sup>

Andrew Tsz Wan Hung

## INTRODUCTION

While the philosophies of Tu Wei-Ming (杜維明), a contemporary Confucian Chinese scholar, and Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher of the Catholic faith, come from very different traditions, they have similar criticisms of modern Western society. Both of them are discontent with the domination of instrumental reason and disembodied rationality. They also agree on the embodied understanding of the self and morality. While very little has been written concerning Tu's or Taylor's theory of embodiment,<sup>2</sup> the comparison between their theories of embodied moral reasoning has never been examined. This paper will first illustrate their criticisms of secular modernity. Second, it will examine and compare the theory of embodied reason by Taylor and embodied knowing by Tu. Finally, it will show that, while there are some similarities between their theories, the differences between them can be mutually enriching.

## DISCONTENT WITH SECULAR MODERNITY

### **Tu's criticism of the marketization of everything**

Tu Wei-Ming, in a lecture given in Zhejiang University at 2008,<sup>3</sup> argued that the Chinese community faces the challenge of globalization, a trend of modernization and homogenization by Western culture. After the May Fourth Movement,<sup>4</sup> Tu argued, many Chinese have blindly idolized Western culture because of its economic and technological development. It is true that certain elements of Western culture are also valuable for the Chinese. For instance, freedom, rationality, human rights, the rule of law – these were Western values that have now become universal values. Nevertheless, justice, sympathy, responsibility and courtesy, as emphasized by Confucians and Asians, should also be universal values.

In dialogue with Western culture, Chinese people should come to have a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage and be aware of certain problems inherited from Western culture. One of the crucial problems is the marketization of the economy, politics, academic life, and education, due to the rise of capitalism. The marketization of everything has led to a vulgarization of civilization, which in turn has made intellectual activities shallow and trivial. Academic life has lost direction. Family values have diminished. What is worse is the marketization of religions, in which many religious temples have become profit-oriented. Religious rituals have

become profitable activities. The spiritual aura of religion has increasingly faded out.

Many moderns see the Enlightenment as a move from the realm of religion to that of natural science. Such an idea rejects religion and spiritual matters, and has given rise to an anthropocentrism. Human beings think of themselves as the masters of all things. They attempt not only to understand nature, but to use and conquer nature, seeing nature as a tool, as a human resource. The operation of modern capitalist society is dominated by instrumental reason, which is disembodied, unsympathetic, and even cruel. For Tu, people today, nourished by the Enlightenment, may have knowledge, but lack wisdom. Thus, it is important for the Chinese to retrieve their cultural heritage, in particular to restore Mencius's idea of the sense of commiseration (惻隱之心, *ceyin zhixin*).

### **Taylor's theory of excarnation of religious practices, morality and the self**

Charles Taylor also generally agrees that the primacy of instrumental reason is one of important sources of "malaises of modernity."<sup>5</sup> It forces societies, as well as individuals, to focus on instrumental reason – something that we should never do in serious moral deliberation. The primacy of instrumental reason partly arises from the idea of the disengaged human subject, proposed by Descartes. Descartes supposes that we are essentially disengaged reason; we are pure mind, distinct from our bodies. Our ordinary embodied way of seeing ourselves generates confusion. Furthermore, in *A Secular Age*,<sup>6</sup> Taylor raises another problem of modernity: that is, the trend of "excarnation" (SA, p. 288). Taylor argues that the religious reform movement, which began in the Axial age, leads to the trend of the disenchantment of the world. The shift from enchantment to disenchantment effects a transformation of religious practice, morality, and the self. This transformation is what Taylor calls "excarnation."

Excarnation means a shift from an embodied form of life to a form of idea. In other words, the excarnation of religious practices refers to the transformation from "embodied, 'enfleshed' forms of religious life, to those which are more 'in the head'" (SA, p. 533). In older societies, rituals integrated people, through desire and its fulfillment, with nature and the cosmos (SA, p. 613). However, excarnation is a change from a more embodied religious life, in which the presence of the sacred is experienced and enacted in ritual, into one that is more in the mind, where the connection with God enters an endorsement of our religiously defined political identity, or sees God as a moral source supporting our ethical life (SA, p. 553).

Taylor sees excarnation as having three dimensions. First, the ethical dimension tends to deny bodily desire, seeing it as a lust that alienates us. The second is the disenchanted dimension which denies the deep resonance of these desires with the spiritual world. The third is the

disengaged stance towards self and body.

The trend of excarnation of religious practices has also influenced the development of ethical theory. “Enlightened” ethics today, whether in the Humean or Kantian stream, is very theory-oriented. We start with our head, and rely on a disengaged understanding of experience and ethics. We have excluded the possibility that “part of being good is opening ourselves to certain feelings; either the horror at infanticide, or agape as a gut feeling” (SA, p. 555).

This movement has also brought about the objectification of the self in the modern world. Such objectification can be seen in the current medicalization of the body, which takes an objectifying standpoint and finally devalues our living body. We are trained to see ourselves in an objectifying way. This has not only degraded our lived experience, but also changes our phenomenology of our lived experience, in which certain instinctive feelings are suppressed while biochemical, medical facets of life have been prioritized. Unfortunately, the tracks of the objectification have been covered and we do not see that we are being led to see and feel ourselves in different ways (SA, pp. 740-1).

For Taylor, the network of Christian agape can only be established in an embodiment in which agape is released from instinct. However, the corruption by excarnation takes us ever farther away from the network of agape. We can no longer understand this gut feeling as we go along with these alienating self-images. We can comprehend Christian doctrine of Resurrection only if we have overcome excarnation and take embodiment seriously.

## **TAYLOR’S EMBODIED SELF**

### **The transcendental argument for the engaged and embodied self**

The move of excarnation violates Taylor’s understanding of a human being as an embodied agent, as revealed in his earlier writing. In his earlier work, following Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, Taylor used a transcendental argument to support the idea of embodied agency. The transcendental argument also challenges modern representational epistemology and the disengaged stance of the self and, therefore, the move to excarnation as well.

The transcendental argument was brought into philosophical prominence by the work of Immanuel Kant. Kant thought that in order to distinguish between experiencing an objective order of things (the noise I hear in the neighboring woods) and experiencing a merely inner subjective order (the buzzing in my head), our sensation must have a “dimension of ‘aboutness’.” This necessary condition will later be called ‘intentionality,’ in the Brentano-Husserl tradition (PA, p. 72). Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty follow this pioneering Kantian form of transcendental argument, further exploring the conditions of intentionality to undermine a belief in the disengaged subject.

Based on his reflections on the conditions of intentionality, Heidegger argues that we are “first and mostly” (*zunächst und zumeisti*) agents in the world. Thus, we are indispensably engaged as agents coping with things. We could never really “form disinterested representations any other way” (PA, p. 11). For Merleau-Ponty, “our primary access to the world is through perception, and this is essentially that of an embodied agent who is engaged with the world” (PA, p. 25). I am always perceiving the world from where I am, through my senses.<sup>7</sup> Another feature of embodied agency is teleological in nature. In the standard notions of mechanistic materialism, our body is just a machine which can be manipulated and objectified by the operations of consciousness. However, for Taylor, as the subject is inevitably in the world, if we want to describe the state of a person, the characterization has to involve certain features of the world which have meaning for us. In other words, one cannot be indifferent to those features of the world. The features have meaning for us because we are teleological beings. We have purposes, goals, and aspirations, and these features touch us.<sup>8</sup>

Taylor claims that the exploration of intentionality undermines the disengaged perspective and the entire epistemological position, because our representation of things is always grounded in the way we deal with those things. In other words, in our understanding, we are always engaged in dealing with those things. Basically, the problem of disengaged consciousness is that it leaves out a concern for the body and the other, and the role of these in constituting the self. As Taylor states, it is possible to draw a line between “my *picture* of an object” and the object. However, it is impossible to draw the line between “my *dealing* with an object” and the object (PA, p. 12). For instance, it may make sense to ask us to focus on imagining a football, even in its absence; but it would be absurd to ask us to play football without a football. The actions involved in the game can’t be done without the object. The action of our understanding is just the same. Understanding and perceiving are different from imagining. Our understanding of the world is an action which is grounded in our dealing with it, rather than ultimately based on representation.

### **Criticisms of the behaviourist approach and the positivist approach in human science**

Concurrent with the rise of natural science and modern epistemology, behaviourist and positivist theories were the norms of the social scientific approach during the 1970 and 80s.<sup>9</sup> These approaches tended to adopt the criteria of abstraction and neutrality in studying human beings, and a morality that sidelined the purpose and intentionality of the embodied agent. They attempted to define the paradigm of social science according to the model of natural science. Taylor criticizes such approaches as sterile; they cannot come to understand important dimensions of human life (PHS, p. 21). This is because the criteria of social science theories can never be based on

the degree they enable us to predict, as natural sciences do. In his article “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man” (PHS, pp. 15-57), Taylor elaborates three fundamental reasons why he disagrees with social science adopting the paradigm of natural science:

1. Human life and society are open systems. It is impossible to shield the domain of human events from external interference (PHS, p. 55).
2. Most human behaviours, values and motivations cannot be quantified and measured as natural sciences do; they can only be understood by interpretation.
3. Most fundamentally, according to Taylor, man is a self-defining (or self-interpreting) animal. Changes in his self-definition also change what man is, such that he has to be understood in different terms.

The first reason for Taylor’s disagreement is obvious. Social scientists can never put human beings or society into a laboratory for investigation as natural scientists do. It is impossible for social scientists to single out several factors as variables for investigation and delineate all other factors by setting them as constants. But the second and the third reasons are related to his theory of self-interpreting embodied agency, which has to be further elaborated.

### **Embodied reasoning**

For Taylor, with the idea of embodied agency, one’s emotions, desires and actions also carry purposes and meanings for that person. Thus, to articulate the underlying meaning of our emotions and actions is an important part of self-understanding. Taylor’s concept of reason, I would argue, is a kind of embodied reasoning.

In “Self-Interpreting Animals”, Taylor maintains that many of our actions, motivations and emotions involve experiencing our situation as having a certain “import” or significance, which is of value to desires or purposes of a human subject (HAL, p. 48). Thus, most of what is important is subject-referring. The implication of the concept of subject-referring, import-attributing emotions is obvious: instead of conceiving emotion as an irrational obstacle to true knowledge, Taylor sees our bodily emotions and actions as the medium through which we can understand the self and others. So, to understand the self, we cannot be detached from the body; we have to engage with it. Since our subject-referring imports are irreducible, we have to grasp them through articulations in language. Through articulation, we can sometimes go deeper into our emotions and actions, and articulate more clearly what is hidden in our desires, and deepen our understanding of emotion. Such deeper understanding of emotion and actions through articulation may be, in turn, constitutive to our emotion and actions, and sometimes may call for further articulation.

For instance, as our emotion is “a response to the situation’s

bearing the relevant import' (HAL, p. 49), one cannot have a feeling – for instance, a feeling of remorse – unless one has a certain understanding of right or wrong. However, we sometimes feel remorse even without being able to fully articulate why what we did was wrong. In these cases, we may seek to articulate further. In further articulations, if we come to see that our sense of wrongdoing is unfounded, then the remorse may dissipate altogether. These kinds of understanding are what the mechanistic, reductive approach cannot attain. So our emotion and actions, and articulation by language, are mutually constitutive. We are impelled from time to time to interpret ourselves, and we are always embedded in our own interpretations. So Taylor says, we are “self-interpreting animals”, because we are partly constituted by our continuous self-interpretation. Further, as our self-interpretation is largely determined by the form of the human body and is always mediated through our bodily emotions, desires and actions, Taylor’s interpretative approach is a kind of embodied reasoning. It engages bodily actions and emotions, to find out their underlying significance and their relationship to personal identity, rather than to treat our body as an object – something which neglects our lived experience.

Furthermore, language exists and is maintained only in a community. We are brought up through conversations with those who are significant for us, and we understand ourselves through dialogue and communication with others. We learn our languages of moral and spiritual discernment from them. The meanings of the words are therefore inter-subjective. When we discuss something, the object is not simply for me and only that which happens for you; instead we make it an object for us together. Therefore, embodied reasoning is inevitably communitarian in nature. There is no investigation of the self which can be taken without reference to the surrounding culture.

For Taylor, grasping inter-subjective meaning is crucial for better understanding human behaviour in society, because many social practices inevitably require common understanding. For instance, negotiation and bargaining is the usual practice in Western democratic politics. Both are based on a contractual notion that is connected with distinct autonomous individuals and the voluntary nature of their relations. But in the traditional Japanese village, the villagers’ relations to one another were largely based on a strong form of consensus; hence, they had no idea about negotiation and bargaining. Relations would be damaged and villagers would be upset, if the connected parties were separated. The Western notion of bargaining has no place there. This shows that the vocabulary of a given social dimension is usually based on the form of social practice. The vocabulary would not make sense in situations where certain ranges of practices did not exist. These ranges of practices simply could not exist without the prevalence of certain relevant vocabularies. This shows, then, a mutual dependence between the language and social practice. The meanings of these terms are, then, inter-subjective meanings (PHS, pp. 33-4).

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor further points out that our bodily emotions and desires are the medium which bear the aura of transcendence (SA, p. 288). The meaning involved in our desire is, to a certain extent, spiritual. Somewhere, deep down in our heart, we will feel drawn to recognize and relate to our spiritual reality. That is why even people who are very successful in ordinary human flourishing can still feel unease. Unfortunately, due to the trend of the medicalization of the body, such unease can only be understood as pathological. The aspirations of transcendence are held back (SA, pp. 620-1). For Taylor, this is a kind of mutilation. Thus, for Taylor, we are required to rediscover the sense of nature and bodily feeling that can be pathways in our contact with fullness.

### **The Subtler Language**

To respond to the trend of disengagement and excarnation by which we have lost contact with the natural world and the spiritual domain, Taylor refers to a number of spiritual conversions or "epiphanic" experiences in Catholic artists and poets, including Vaclav Havel, Charles Peguy, and Gerard Manley Hopkins (SA, pp. 728-72). For Taylor, art and poetry is a key element to recovering an aesthetic dimension in contemporary life (SA, p. 755). The language of poetry makes better sense of possible meanings about spiritual matters. Through using language and symbols, spiritual matters enter our world. Poets establish meaning by creating symbols and, so, poetry is potentially world-making.

Understanding poetics in its performative sense opens up a new domain of possibilities. For instance, spiritual matters enter our world through the Bible and other related literature by means of the term "spirit." Spiritual reality is fixed in narrative and doctrine. However, the new poetics brings us a reflexive turn which directs our attention towards the manifestation of the events narrated in the Bible. This reflexive turn brings an awareness of the conditions for making the spiritual manifest. So the new poetic language can help to find a way back to the God of Abraham. We can see this in Hopkins and Eliot. For instance, Hopkins' poetry is a fusion of two spiritual sources: articulating experience of God and making sense of the action of God. These two elements transform in such a synthesis, which gives a deeper meaning to the experience of transcendence and a new kind of experiential reality to the work of God (SA, p. 757).

These transformations, by transcendent experience, in some sense contest the limits of generally accepted language. They appeal to a new "subtler language" which can point us beyond ordinary immanent realities. The arts can turn the reality of hidden depths into an epiphany of the divine. Through artistic expression, the convert's insights go beyond the boundaries of the prevalent understandings of immanent order, reaching a larger, more encompassing order of God by inventing a new language or literary style (SA, p. 732).

## TU'S EMBODIED KNOWING

### Moral knowledge vs. empirical knowledge

In his article, "On 'Embodied Knowing' – the Implications of Moral Knowledge in the Confucian Tradition," Tu Wei-Ming argues that moral reasoning in the Confucian tradition is a kind of "embodied knowing" (體知, *tizhi*).<sup>10</sup> Tu also rejects the use of the scientific method in the investigation of humanity. Following Zhang Zai (張載), a Neo-Confucian philosopher, Tu emphasizes the distinction between moral knowledge (德性之知, *dexing zhizhi*) and empirical knowledge (聞見之知, *wenjian zhizhi*). While empirical knowledge derives ideas or information from observation through our sense organs, it is not necessarily embodied in one's body. Moreover, moral knowledge is not derived from empirical observation. While it cannot be totally separated from empirical knowledge, moral knowledge is a kind of bodily experience; it must be based on reflection on one's bodily practice and experience.<sup>11</sup>

Moral knowledge is a kind of bodily experiential knowledge (體驗, *tiyan*). Tu uses a Chinese idiom as a metaphor: "only the person who drinks knows whether water is hot or cold."<sup>12</sup> It is similar to the English idiom, "only the wearer knows where the shoes hurt." Ontologically speaking, the expression of the moral subject is necessarily true and honest. Such a claim is *a priori* rather than *a posteriori*. However, from the practical perspective, if we do not maintain the practice of self-cultivation, the moral knowledge of the subject would finally be depleted.<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, embodied knowing is a kind of transformative act.<sup>14</sup> Such bodily experiential knowledge can lead to self-transformation. It aims at the identification of knowledge and action. Thus, apart from intellectual understanding, embodied knowing also stresses the transformative effect of knowledge, that is, the renovation of one's disposition.<sup>15</sup> Such knowing must be beneficial to the body and leads to a practical implication of embodiment, that is, how to embody our moral knowledge. It is a kind of self-consciousness which is necessary for moral practice.<sup>16</sup> For Confucius, the highest human achievement by moral self-cultivation is to become what Tu calls, "*ren-ren*" (仁人), that is a man who embodies *ren* (仁); and such embodiment must have a concrete manifestation in the observance of rites (禮, *li*).<sup>17</sup>

### Knowing self, others, and Heaven

Embodied knowing is a kind of self-knowing by the moral subject. Such knowledge is derived naturally, through the subject's self-understanding, rather than by objectifying others. The Confucian discipline of self-cultivation (為己之學, *weij izhixue*) is not through a kind of disengaged introspection; rather it is realized through social practice in a complicated

social network. Confucius's understanding of human dignity is not atomistic; rather one's personality is established in the network of mutual support and encouragement. For a man of perfect virtue, he, "wishing to be established himself, seeks also to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, he seeks also to enlarge others" (*Analects*, 6:30).<sup>18</sup>

Knowing others also inevitably operates in social networks. Such knowing is a dynamic process. For instance, when we attempt to know, to understand a person, and to be friend with him/her, we have to go beyond detached empirical observation. We have to know the other's dispositions and character through dialogue and interaction with him or her. Embodied knowing is a kind of empathic sensual perception; it rejects the objectification of others, be they things or humans. Embodied knowing can accommodate and integrate everything in the world, and let all these things become something that is non-objectified in our mind.<sup>19</sup>

Tu stresses that Confucian human science (儒家知人之學, *rujia zhiren zhixue*) is an inter-disciplinary study. It attempts to integrate the study of culture, psychology, religion, and hermeneutics. It overcomes the framework of the subject/object dichotomy and value neutrality. We acquire insights about human nature from reading books, understanding the heritage of our traditions, spiritual communication with others, value regeneration, and the study of moral self-transformation.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, embodied knowing cannot be separated from the framework of unity and harmony between man and Heaven (天人合一, *tienren heyi*). According to Zhang Zai, everything is included in Heaven; there is nothing which can be detached from the scope of Heaven. Zhang Zai's idea of "great heart" (大心, *taxin*) is based on one's endeavor to know heaven and nature. The way of Heaven and the way of Humanity is continuous and united. It is, what Tu calls, "The Continuity of Being".<sup>21</sup> Everyone can be connected to Heaven by one's nature.

According to *The Doctrine of the Mean*, by Zisi (子思), the grandson of Confucius, "What Heaven has conferred is called THE NATURE". For Tu, such an understanding of Heaven and nature necessarily leads to the demand by the person of sincerity to:

development to his nature. Able to give its full development to his own nature, he can do the same to the nature of other men. Able to give its full development to the nature of other men, he can give their full development to the natures of animals and things. Able to give their full development to the natures of creatures and things, he can assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transforming and nourishing powers of Heaven and Earth, he may with Heaven and Earth form a ternion.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, to know the way of Heaven is not to disengage and observe, rather it is to reflect, based on bodily experience by the self.

### Four levels of human subjectivity

Tu's idea of embodied knowing is based on his theory of subjectivity. Tu's understanding of subjectivity includes body (身, *shen*), mind (心, *xin*), soul (靈, *ling*) and spirit (神, *shen*) – four different levels.<sup>23</sup> According to Tu, the foundation of Confucius's moral concern, shown in *Analects*, is an embodied person, a human being who is lively, vivacious, sensitive, emotional, with flesh and bone, and who can feel pain; rather than simply a disengaged, disembodied soul.<sup>24</sup> In short, it is an embodied person with sensitivity and emotion. Embodied knowing is an experiential knowledge based on the integration of these four different levels.

#### *i. Body*

For Confucians, self-cultivation (修己, *xiuji*) literally means “nourishing the body” (修身, *xiushen*). Our body includes five sense organs, providing us five sensual experiences: vision, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Confucian teaching emphasizes nourishing our bodily senses through the Six Arts (六藝, *liuyi*); they are rites, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics. To nourish one's body is not simply to exercise and maintain one's health; rather, it is to aestheticize human life through the practice of rituals (禮, *li*) and music (樂, *yue*). These practices, Confucians emphasize, help to cultivate one's disposition, to facilitate one's thinking and controlling of emotion.<sup>25</sup> Such discipline must aim at achieving one's embodiment of virtues (以身體之, *yishen tizhi*).<sup>26</sup>

Embodied knowing means to have bodily experience or to think in terms of a particular situation. Through the term “embodied knowing”, we can see that cognitive activity is based on integration of body and mind.<sup>27</sup> As Confucius considers *ren* (仁) as a restoration of ritual (禮, *li*) through self-cultivation, he orders his students to see, listen, speak and act in accordance with rituals (*Analects*, 12:1). The process of learning to be human is to pursue a civilized mode of conduct by the ritualization of the body, to learn to express the self through bodily action. It is the result of a discipline of what the Song-Ming Confucians call, “*tizhiyushen*” (體之於身), that is “to embody it [the experience of each of the six senses] in the body”.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, Tu emphasizes, the body is not a kind of private property. “We do not own our bodies; we become our bodies and through that process of becoming we learn to fully realize ourselves as concrete living human beings.”<sup>29</sup>

#### *ii. Mind*

Mind is a rational faculty. It attempts to integrate our different sensual experiences.<sup>30</sup> According to the Song-Ming Confucians, Mencius's Confucian anthropology is the study of heart/mind (心, *xin*). As Tu states, “Mencius stresses the spiritual resources inherent in human nature as both

the theoretical ground and the practical process of self-realization. He focuses his attention on the embodiment of the heart-mind as the spacious dwelling and the broad highway of profound persons (君子, *junzi*).<sup>31</sup>

For Mencius, there is something in every human mind that is a given reality and endowed by Heaven as the defining feature of being human. It is not learned or acquired, and can never be subject to external control.<sup>32</sup> It is “the power of the will for self-realization, a power never totally lost, although it is conceivable that it can be forever latent.”<sup>33</sup> This power is what Mencius calls, “vast, flowing *qi*” (浩然之氣, *haoranzhiqi*) (*Mencius*, 2A: 2)<sup>34</sup> or vast, flowing vital force or vital energy. This vital force is great and strong. “If one nourishes it with uprightness and does not injure it, it will fill the space between Heaven and earth” (*Mencius*, 2A: 2). As Mencius said, “He who has exhausted all his mental constitution (heart/mind) knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven. To preserve one’s mental constitution, and nourish one’s nature, is the way to serve Heaven” (*Mencius*, 7A: 1). This *qi* is “the companion of rightness and the Way, in the absence of which, it starves. It is born from an accumulation of rightness rather than appropriated through an isolated display. If one’s actions cause the mind to be disquieted, it starves” (*Mencius*, 2A: 2).<sup>35</sup> Thus, in the process of realizing humanity and rightness in the world through self-cultivation, profound persons focus on tapping their own internal energy to achieve the goal.

For Mencius, everyone has the potential of acquiring the four virtues: benevolence (仁, *ren*), propriety (義, *yi*), observance of rites (禮, *li*) and wisdom (智, *zhi*). These virtues are not acquired by socialization. Moreover, our mind is not a *tabula rasa* that has no innate moral knowledge. Rather, these virtues result from our cultivation of four germinations (四端, *sidian*, four kinds of universal predispositions) in human nature. They are the sense of commiseration (惻隱之心, *ceyin zhixin*), the sense of shame (羞惡之心, *xiuwu zhixin*), a reverential attitude toward others (辭讓之心, *cirang zhixin*), and the sense of rightness and wrongness (是非之心, *shifei zhixin*). So humans, as living persons, have emotions; they can feel pain and are able to make judgments.<sup>36</sup> These senses are both a necessary and a sufficient condition for self-realization. Among them, the sense of commiseration (a combination of sympathy and empathy) is the most essential feature of humanity. By doing our utmost with our mind, we can extend our sympathy and empathy not only towards other persons, but beyond; our influence “flows abroad, above and beneath, like that of Heaven and Earth.” (*Mencius*, 7A: 13). As the sense of commiseration is unlimited, in principle, it can embody countless things, including an ever-expanding network of human relationships, and even Heaven and earth, in our sympathy and empathy. As Tu states,

This faith in the human potential for understanding Heaven through self-knowledge and the human capacity for self-knowledge through

the cultivation of the heart-mind is predicated on the sensitivity of the body both as a spacious dwelling and as a broad highway for our ultimate personal realization.<sup>37</sup>

### *iii. Soul and Spirit*

Soul is the extension of mind. It is expressed in terms of wisdom, a kind of awareness in the existential situation. Spirit is the state of transcendence. It is the ultimate goal of self-cultivation. According to Tu, the soul is concrete, definite, with fixed shape and direction; while the spirit is indefinite and hardly traceable. It is just like the relation between body and mind, in which body is concrete and mind is abstract.<sup>38</sup> In *Mencius*,

A man who commands our liking is what is called a good man. He whose goodness is part of himself is what is called real man. He whose goodness has been filled up is what is called a beautiful man. He whose completed goodness is brightly displayed is what is called a great man. When this great man exercises a transforming influence, he is what is called a sage. When the sage is beyond our knowledge, he is what is called a spirit-man. (*Mencius*, 7B: 7)

For Tu, this verse shows the stages of development of self-transcendence. The stage from goodness to realness belongs to the ascending level from body to mind. Ascending from beauty to greatness occurs at the movement from the mind to the soul. Sage-spirit is the product of the ascending status from the soul to the spirit. So, in Confucian self-elevation, one cannot detach oneself from the body. Rather, one must use the body, so that one can learn about mind, and then be aware of soul, and finally rise to the level of spirit. This is a process of creative self-transformation.

For Tu, embodied knowing is not only exercised in meditation, but also in our ordinary life. Through ritual practice, we expand our humanity by establishing a reciprocal communication with the outside world, so that we can experience a kind of union with the cosmos; as Mencius asserts, “all things are there in me” (*Mencius*, 7A: 4). By exercising embodied knowing through social practice, the embodiment of virtue and of the ritual-musical cultivated harmonious world (禮樂教化的大同世界, *liyue jiaohua de tatong shijie*) can then be established.<sup>39</sup>

## COMPARISON AND EVALUATION

If we compare Taylor’s and Tu’s philosophy of the body, we can see some similarities between them. They both criticize the domination of instrumental reason and the disembodied rationality of the Enlightenment. Their view of the body has both instrumental and constitutive senses. On the one hand, the human body, as an instrument of moral knowledge, helps human beings to achieve self-understanding, so that human nature is explored; the goals of human beings, the importance of the relationship

with the community, and the sense of transcendence are also illuminated. On the other hand, our body is also constitutive to our self-understanding. Morality and values, derived by embodied reasoning, are inevitably bodily knowledge. Such knowledge is constitutive to our self-understanding as embodied beings. We can never disengage ourselves from our body, or replace our body by machines, without distorting our self-understanding. To acknowledge our embodied nature is to recognize that we are embedded in a particular historical, social, and cultural community. To understand the self and others, our moral reflection must be based on our active participation in the community, rather than a kind of disengaged mediation. Moreover, apart from natural science and analytical philosophy, the arts, literature, music, religion, and social rituals are also important sources for our investigation of humanity. Furthermore, both men stress that our embodied perception and reasoning involves the sense of transcendence.

Although the moral epistemology of both stresses the significance of embodiment, Tu's account of bodily moral epistemology seems to have certain gaps. Tu bases his reflection mainly on Confucian tradition and, at times, his theory seems to verge on the mystical and the instinctive. His argument for the *a priori* nature of moral knowledge seems to beg the question. His distinction of soul and spirit remains obscure. His analogy of the distinction of soul and spirit with the distinction of body and mind seems to be misleading, because body/mind distinction is a difference between material and immaterial, whereas both soul and spirit are immaterial. Tu has also not provided an account of why we are embodied rather than disembodied. His distinction of moral knowledge and empirical knowledge is mainly analytical, based on an explanation and reflection on Zhang Zai's theory, rather than being argumentative in nature. Basically, he has not offered an account of why morality cannot be attained by empirical knowledge.

Nevertheless, in respect of a philosophical foundation, I would argue that Taylor's theory can supplement Tu's embodied knowing in the area of moral epistemology. Taylor's transcendental argument of embodiment and his exploration of intentionality can provide an ontological foundation for human embodiment. His criticism of the behaviourist and positivist approaches, and his argument of embodied interpretative reasoning also offers a persuasive philosophical argument for Tu's distinction between moral and empirical knowledge. Nevertheless, Taylor's theory of embodiment focuses too much on moral epistemology, and its practical implications seem to be neglected.

In the areas of marketization and the primacy of instrumental reason, Taylor's idea of excarnation provides a fresh perspective on the deficiency of contemporary disembodied culture. Ironically, while Taylor criticizes this feature of secular society as a kind of excarnation, his theory of embodiment itself remains too cerebral. Taylor is right to say that our emotions and desires involve value judgments that have to be articulated through the language of a particular community. His argument that arts and

poetry are a subtler language that has an epiphanic nature is illuminative. However, all of these explorations focus on conceptual knowledge rather than on practice. Admittedly, to claim that Taylor has totally neglected the social implication of embodiment would be unfair, because his communitarian political theory is mainly based on his theory of the embodied self. However, his political theory is mainly concerned with criticism of atomism, liberal neutrality, the significance of cultural community, and the common good. It does not provide many practical guidelines on individual conduct and self-cultivation.

With respect to individual practice, Tu's emphasis on the relation of embodied knowing and self-cultivation provides an important complement to Taylor's theory. Tu stresses the transformative effects of knowledge and the renovation of one's disposition, which finally leads to the realization of *ren*, with a concrete manifestation of ritual observance and embodiment of virtues. For Tu, the body, as an instrument, not only helps us to know about morality, but also lets human beings, as Heaven's co-creators, be involved in the great transformation by communicating with all modalities of being, so that we can realize the ultimate human goal, and sustain and enrich nature in ordinary life. Such a view of knowledge not only stresses the identification of knowing and acting, but also the transformation of being. For Tu, I would argue, moral knowledge is not simply intellectual or experiential, but also leads to existential embodiment. Such knowledge includes both conceptual and experiential understanding, but goes beyond both. It is a capability to realize what one conceptually and experientially understands through his or her bodily actions. This is the ultimate stage of embodied knowing. Furthermore, such practice has social and cosmological implications.

Through self-cultivation, Confucianism emphasizes that we should establish and enlarge others, and even the whole cosmos. By participating in ritual and intellectual and spiritual life, the body adapts and embraces the world, which generates the possibility of the union with the whole cosmos. Although Taylor also stresses the transformative nature of religion, its relation to embodiment remains unexplored. In contrast, Tu's emphasis on the integration of knowing, doing, and being, and the enlargement from the self to the universe, seem to reflect a more holistic view of the body. At least the Confucian's emphasis on ritual practice provides a more fully embodied understanding of the moral self.

Finally, both Tu and Taylor agree that our body can act as a conduit by which we can communicate with and be connected to the aura of transcendence, although their underlying metaphysical assumptions are very different. Taylor's philosophy is deeply influenced by his Catholic faith in which God and human beings are very different in nature. Our knowledge of God is mainly derived from God's revelation. Human beings are finite. Therefore, at best, we can conceive of an infinite God in an analogical way. However, according to Tu's thesis of the continuity of being, we are integral parts of Heaven, Earth, and a myriad of things. Human beings are intimately

connected with nature on the one hand and Heaven on the other. In short, human beings form a trinitarian relation with Heaven and Earth.<sup>40</sup> As human nature is imparted by Heaven, it is impossible to conceive humans as alienated from Heaven in any essential way. As Tu states, “the relationship between Heaven and man is not that of creator and creature but one mutual fidelity; and the only way for man to know Heaven is to penetrate deeply into his own ground of being.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, briefly speaking, the Confucian religious view is a kind of pantheism, or what Tu calls “anthropocosmic”<sup>42</sup>, meaning that “there is implicit mutuality, constant communication, and dynamic interaction between the anthropological world and the cosmic order.”<sup>43</sup> For Confucians, any inquiry into religion must begin with a reflection on the problem of human being, rather than one acquired by transcendent revelation. Obviously, their religious views are important components to Tu’s and Taylor’s theories of embodied reasoning. Unfortunately, the current study is unable to further explore the relationship between embodiment and religion.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has compared and shown some similarities and differences between Tu Wei-Ming’s and Charles Taylor’s view of embodied reasoning. While Taylor provides a clear ontological foundation of embodied moral epistemology, Tu elaborates on how we can enlarge and cultivate ourselves by bodily practice. I have demonstrated that these two theories, although based on very different traditional backgrounds, can be mutually enriching. Furthermore, their respective theories of embodiment are also related to their religious views. In order to have a more in-depth comprehension of Tu’s and Taylor’s theory of embodiment, the investigation of their underlying metaphysical and religious views, and their relation to embodiment, deserves further study.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference, “Spiritual Foundations and Chinese Culture: A Philosophical Approach”, organized by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy and the Fu Jen Institute of Scholastic Philosophy, Taiwan, December 13-14, 2013. The work on this article was supported by a grant from the College of Professional and Continuing Education, an affiliate of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

<sup>2</sup> John Tambornino, *The Corporeal Turn: Passion, Necessity, Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), pp. 41-72; Zhang Bing (張兵), “Embodied Knowing’ from the Perspective of the Study of Body” (身體觀研究視野下的“體知”述議) (Chinese Article), *Philosophical Trends* (《哲學動態》), Issue 11 (2010), pp. 27-29; Gu, Hong-Liang (顧紅亮), “An Reinterpretation of Moral Knowledge: On Tu Wei-Ming’s Theory of Embodied

Knowing” (對德性之知的再闡釋 ——論杜維明的體知概念) (Chinese Article), *Confucius Studies* (《孔子研究》), Issue 5 (2005), pp. 105-111; Ning, Xin-Chang (寧新昌), “On Culture of Confucian Embodied Knowing: Review on Tu Wei-Ming Confucianism” ( “體知” 儒學考量文化——杜維明儒學思想評述)(Chinese Article), *Newsletter of History of Chinese Thought* (《中國思想史研究通訊》), Issue 8 (2006), <http://www.confucius2000.com/admin/list.asp?id=2318>, accessed on 15 October, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Tu, Wei-Ming (杜維明), *Embodied Knowing: Conversation on the Modern Value of Confucianism* (《體知儒學：儒家當代價值的九次對話》) (Hangzhou: Zhejiang da xue chu ban she [浙江大學出版社], 2012), pp. 1-88.

<sup>4</sup> The term "May Fourth Movement", in a narrow sense, refers to the student protest in Beijing on 4 May 1919 following the Versailles Peace Settlement decision that Japan should take over former German concessions in Shandong. In a broader sense, it often refers to the period during 1915-1921, more often called the New Culture Movement. In the following months hundreds of similar student demonstrations were held across the country. A wave of intellectual debate and the re-evaluation of traditional Chinese culture in light of Western thought were triggered by these demonstrations. Scholars of the New Culture Movement, such as Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀), Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), Lu Xun (魯迅) and Hu Shih (胡適), believed that traditional Confucianism was responsible for the political weakness of the nation. Chinese nationalists called for a rejection of traditional values and the creation of a 'new culture', based on Western ideals of science and democracy, to strengthen Chinese culture itself.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); *Philosophical Arguments*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). Reference to these works, cited as SA, HAL, PHS, SS and PA respectively, will appear parenthetically in the main text.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Taylor, “Embodied Agency”, in *Merleau-Ponty: Critical Essays*, ed. Henry Pietersma (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, “Embodied Agency”, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Smith, “Positivism and Beyond”, *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve Smith et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Tu, Wei-Ming (杜維明), “On ‘Embodied Knowing’ — the Implications of Moral Knowledge in the Confucian Tradition” (論儒家的「體知」— 德性之知的涵意) (Chinese Article), in *Essays from the seminar on*

*Confucian ethics* (《儒家倫理研討會論文集》), ed. Liu Shu-hsien (Singapore: Institute of East Asia Philosophy, 1987), pp. 98-111; See also Tu, Wei-Ming (杜維明), *Tu Wei-Ming Collections, Book V*, eds. Guo Qiyong, Zheng Wenlong bian (《杜維明文集》卷五, 郭齊勇、鄭文龍主編), (China: Wuhan chu ban she [武漢出版社], 2002), pp. 329-76.

<sup>11</sup> Tu, "On Embodied Knowing", p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> Tu, "On Embodied Knowing", p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> Tu, "On Embodied Knowing", p. 101.

<sup>14</sup> Tu, *Tu Wei-Ming Collections, Book V*, p. 371.

<sup>15</sup> Tu, Wei-ming, "Confucian humanist learning in the four related perspectives of body, mind, soul and spirit" (從身、心、靈、神四層次看儒家的人學) (Chinese Article), in *Tu Wei-Ming Collections, Book V*, eds., Guo Qiyong, Zheng Wenlong bian (《杜維明文集》卷五, 郭齊勇、鄭文龍主編), (China: Wuhan chu ban she [武漢出版社], 2002), pp. 331-2. Hereafter "Four Perspectives".

<sup>16</sup> Tu, "On Embodied Knowing", p. 101, 109.

<sup>17</sup> Tu, Wei-Ming, "The Creative Tension between *Jên* and *Lî*", *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 18, No. 1/2 (Jan. - Apr., 1968), pp. 31, 34.

<sup>18</sup> Tu, "On Embodied Knowing", p. 106.

<sup>19</sup> Tu, "On Embodied Knowing", p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Tu, "On Embodied Knowing", pp. 106-7.

<sup>21</sup> Tu, Wei-ming, "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature", in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, ed., J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 67-78.

<sup>22</sup> *The Doctrine of the Mean*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> Tu, "Four Perspectives", p. 329.

<sup>24</sup> Tu, "Four Perspectives", p. 330.

<sup>25</sup> Tu, "Four Perspectives", p. 331.

<sup>26</sup> Tu, "Four Perspectives", p. 331.

<sup>27</sup> Tu, "On Embodied Knowing", p. 99.

<sup>28</sup> Tu, Wei-Ming, "Chinese Philosophy: a Synoptic View", in *A Companion to World Philosophies*, eds. Eliot Deutsch and Ron Bontekoe (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), *Blackwell Reference Online*. 09 October 2013 <[http://0-www.blackwellreference.com.lib.cpce-polyu.edu.hk/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9780631213277\\_chunk\\_g97806312132773](http://0-www.blackwellreference.com.lib.cpce-polyu.edu.hk/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9780631213277_chunk_g97806312132773)>

<sup>29</sup> Tu, Wei-ming, "Body, Body Politic and The Way", *Reischauer Lecturer*, Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University, April, 1996, <http://archive.is/3KHMx> accessed on 27 Oct 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Tu, Wei-ming, "From Embodied Knowing to Human Dignity (Outline)" (從“體知”看人的尊嚴[提綱]) (Chinese Article), in *Tu Wei-Ming Collections, Book V*, eds., Guo Qiyong, Zheng Wenlong bian (《杜維明文集》卷五, 郭齊勇、鄭文龍主編), (China: Wuhan chu ban she [武漢出版社], 2002), p. 362.

<sup>31</sup> Tu, "Chinese Philosophy: a Synoptic View"

<sup>32</sup> Tu, Wei-Ming, "On the Mencian Perception of Moral Self-Development", *The Monist*, Vol. 61, no. 1 (1978), p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Tu, "On the Mencian Perception of Moral Self-Development", p. 76; In this article, Tu did not explicate what this is in the human mind. However, according to another of his articles, "Four perspectives", we know that Tu is talking about *Qi*. *Qi* is a kind of vital force or vital energy. See Tu, "Four perspectives", p. 334; see also Tu, "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature", p. 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Mencius*, Irene Bloom trans.; edited and with an introduction by Philip J. Ivanhoe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 30.

<sup>35</sup> *Mencius*, Irene Bloom trans., p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Tu, Wei-ming, "Four Perspectives", p. 333.

<sup>37</sup> Tu, "Chinese Philosophy: a Synoptic View".

<sup>38</sup> Tu, "Four Perspectives", pp. 335-6.

<sup>39</sup> Tu, *Tu Wei-Ming Collections, Book V*, p. 352.

<sup>40</sup> Tu, Wei-Ming, "Soul: Chinese Concepts," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 13, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), p. 447.

<sup>41</sup> Tu, Wei-Ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Tu, *Centrality and Commonality*, p. 102.

<sup>43</sup> Tu, "Chinese Philosophy: a Synoptic View".