Intuition in Kant and Confucius

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I. Introduction

The various methods of epistemology have been derived from the common human forms of coming to know and making judgments. In the West these usual forms, since the Enlightenment, include: 1) reason, 2) experience, 3) science, and 4) history. Almost never included in philosophy books (except for a few Kantians) as methods of knowing are methods such as: 5) personal intuition or insight (veridical knowledge), and 6) spiritual direct knowledge (personal revelation), and spiritual experience (mystical experience; voices, dreams, visions).

Recently Avery Dulles (2000) has proposed that spiritual sources of knowledge are available to all of us in some ways, and indirectly to all of us from the direct experience of some of us. This fits with the philosophical work of Dallas Willard (1999), and Christopher Dawson (1994), and the theological contributions of Richard Foster (1978) on means of discerning the word or will of God in our daily lives, and more recent approaches to spiritual formation by Blackaby (1998), Curtis & Eldredge (1997), Lawrenz (2000) and Clinton (2006).

At the same time, a technical discussion is going on in philosophy as to the status of intuition. Audi (2003, 2004), using W. D. Ross and Falkenstein (2004) reconstructing Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic, proposes updated theories on the value of intuition. Audi integrates Rossian intuitionism with Kantian ethics. He anchors intuitionism in a pluralistic theory of value, leading to an account of the relation between the right and the good. In his discussion on Moore, Audi links Sidgwick's utilitarian, psychological intuition to Moore's propositional intuition (p. 11). Either way a person's intuition is linked to a specific content. This is parallel to Plantinga's warranted belief (1993) and the older definition of truth as justified, true, belief. Levinas (1995) developed his own explanation of intuition. Wilson

(1999) and Pust (2000) are developing intuition as a modification of pragmatism, especially Putnam's internal realism (1981). DePaul and Ramsey (1998) did an entire edited volume on rethinking intuition. An older version (Dennehy, 1986) searched intuition for a basis for certitude in a Kantian/Thomistic combination. Other work related realism to a modified phenomenology (Clinton, 1984A).

In China there is a resurgence of writing about Confucius and the influence from the social philosophy of this system which continues to be felt in modern Chinese society (Chan, 2006; Cheng, 2006). Confucianism is presented today as a moral philosophy which had strong social action as a result of its personal ethics. The literary source of this philosophy is the *Analytics* (Confucius, 1998), where Confucius says the "natural path of life has its own duty and therefore its own harmony" (p. xxvi). The natural way of things, which is accessible to all of us, shows us how things should be (p. 61). In this way Confucianism results in a position much like a duty/rights argument based on common human intuition of the real. Since Confucius refused to discuss any explicit metaphysic or ontology, intuition is the default basis for generating our personal and moral ethics. A relatively new journal is dedicated to making the Chinese contributions accessible in English: *Chinese Journal of Philosophy*.

In this paper I will relate these three strands: western philsophy, western theology, Chinese philosophy.

II. The philosophical process

We in the West teach that a realist should begin on philosophic grounds with ontology (a systematic description of what is), present a world view (basic conceptual grid organized by values) as a whole, then discuss and defend the parts with warrants. Thus, the inter-related conceptual system is itself the logical starting point within a realist orientation (Clinton, 1984A).

This approach is reminiscent of, but a significant development beyond, Carnell's starting point with hypotheses of a rationalist system (1948). Both approaches are very different than Van Til's presuppositional approach. A realist does not start with his system as a given but as a proposal for investigation.

A new realist approach forces each thinker to a realization that one's person, via his values, is

revealed in his writing, if any constructive work is to be done (cf. Cooke, 1986). As a realist position this approach presents the truth of an external world, other persons, and the self and that these beings/spirits influence us; in Heidegger's terms (1962), they (the world and other persons), present themselves to us. Our physical, mental and intuitional abilities (Lonergan, 1972, 1977) reconstructs the nature of the being presented to us and the meaning of that being, using memory as well. Our understanding of the nature of being and the meaning of life set our personal foundations (Plantinga, 2000). Concrete and practical knowledge is constructed from internal and external evidence, partially in isolation, partly in community (Putnam, 1981; Fiorenza, 1987).

In a similar teaching on philosophic process, Confucius taught that the method of reality coming to be in the world is by means of *tzu-jan*, translated as the "of-itself." Hinson says a more descriptive translation would be, "occurrence appearing of itself" (Confucius, The Analytics, *Introduction*, 1998). Confucius goes beyond Heidegger to describe a similar process for the phenomena of all of life. "The ten thousand things [Confucian shorthand for all reality] unfolding spontaneously, each according to its own nature" (Hinson, p. xxvii). Muller (2003) reviews the early contributions to this recent discussion.

Confucius likewise teaches that the totality of things forms a system, united by an inner harmony and brought into perception of daily life by personal and social ritual (Confucius, 1998). Ritual combines the ideas of doing ones' duty, a reverence for life and understanding and participating in the system of being which presents this life to us (Confucius, p. 6).

III. Personal intuition

Carnell (1957) and others (Goldman, 1986) have pointed to the legitimacy of personal subjective experience within a philosophic theory. Martin (1986) gave an excellent summary of their work. But MacGregor (1973), Rahner (1978) and Pannenberg (1985) demonstrate that such a subjectivity is a necessity in any statement of philosophy. Polyani had taught that position early (1958), well before Foucalt and Derida. Wilson (1999) applies this theory to the general field of cognition.

As theistic realists we can see fundamental directions being set from three sources: historical experience, personal human experience (Smith, 1970), and revelation. Of course, with three sources of

information, we are open to the possibility of conflict between them. However, as believers in consistency we do not anticipate any real conflict of truth between the fields, other than by way of human interpretations. Tracy (1981) well illustrated the use of analogy in modern times to enable us to see unitive reality. Moreland and Craig (2003) present a complete approach to a up-to-date version of philosophical thinking. None of these speak directly about intuition.

This raises the issue of the status of talk about God and the possibility of revelation. Following Kant (transcendental unity of apperception) and Heidegger (understanding of being as an in-itself which presents itself to perceivers), if reality presents itself to us in a meaningful way, it is certainly possible to introduce the idea that if there is a God, then God is capable of revealing himself to us in a similar meaningful way through means which are relative to our experience, reason, and personal intuition or by other means of his own supernatural choice, such as visions, miracles, voices, etc.. These would not have epistemic status beyond the persons thus affected.

Some philosophers have also contended that all people have an orientation toward relating to God which is worked out in their lives in their value commitments and religious practices (MacGregor, 1973, Rahner, 1978). The fact of this subjective reflective experience and personal and social objective experience is common to all humans, although the specific content and response is different for each person. This is what theologians have called common grace. The analysis of this spiritual experience usually focuses on the biblical data, objective historical religious experience, or personal subjective experience. There are, then, three interrelated aspects to the spiritual area of a person's life: Each person has a spirit; each person can receive spiritual impressions from other spirits; each person can be indwelt by another spirit (Clinton, 1994).

Audi (2004) goes further than either Broad or Ross. Audi presents three possible implicaitons of self-evident intuitions. First, intuition requires self-evidence as a condition for knowledge, or second, we must have justified belief of singular as well as general propositions, or third, we can take self-evident propositions as knowable on conceptual grounds (p. 69). A special case of such a particular situation based on conceptual grounds would be an application of a *prima facie* duty.

Confucius did not present a basis for making his judgments about the unitive nature of reality and did not comment on the religious positions of his day. But he did teach that there are specific duties which all persons can know is their duty as part of the Way and that we all have a duty to follow these specific obligations. This sounds much like Ross' *prima facie* duties (1930). Using Audi's reconstruction of Ross would provide an interesting foundation for discussion of public rights and duties. Ganssle (2000) has an intersting article on moral necessity in light of these modern western discussions.

More recently Youg Huang (2005) commented on one of the leading exponents of Confucianism:

Mou (1990) regards the central idea of Kant's ethics as autonomy or self-legislation of moral agent, which is a revolt against the Christian idea of heteronomy—God as the law giver. Mou sees this idea of autonomy as congenial to Confucian ethics, which is autonomous and not heteronomous. Still, Mou does imply that Confucian ethics is an ethics of rule that focuses on moral laws, albeit ones legislated by the moral agents themselves.

Huang disagrees with this conclusion. He says it is better to take Confucian thought as a virtue ethic (2005, p. 11), like the older Greek ethic or a Christian ethic. He refers to Cua:

the strongest advocate of Confucian ethics as virtue ethics is Antonio Cua. Cua claims that throughout its long history, Confucianism has stressed character formation or personal cultivation of vitrues, *de*. Thus, it seems appropriate to characterize Confucian ethics as an ethics of virtues," as it has a "focus on the centrality of virtues" (Cua 2003, p. 73).

If Confucianism is a virtue ethic then it follows the patter of duty based on intuition as a practical means of finding and living one's duty in life. This fits with Audi's third form of intuitive knowledge based on conceptual grounds.

IV. Conclusion

Western realism, using a variety of methods, including intuition, reaches many of the same conclusions about the nature of reality and proper descriptions of rights and duties as did Confucius in ancient China. Chinese writers today, especially the ones evidenced in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, use Kant as a touchstone with the West because of his approach to morals and ethics apart from reason or experience. I think they will find that Kant's groundwork for any future metaphysics also fits with many of the symbolic approaches and ritual (duty based) practices of Chinese philosophy. This ties Confucian ethics to the post-Kantian tradition found in Broad, Ross, and Audi.

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