

# **The Nine Spheres of Tang Junyi**

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The philosopher Tang Junyi (1909-1978) is one of the most outstanding personalities in the movement of the New Confucians. One of the most favored disciples of Xiong Shili, he died in 1978 after an intense life of teaching and research, leaving behind numerous works which are still held in high esteem among the cultured Chinese.

## **I. Life**

Tang Junyi was born on January 17, 1909, in the district of Yibin, Sichuan province. At 10 he entered the First Normal Elementary School in Chengdu. At 12 he moved to the Unified Middle School of Chungking. After middle school he studied first in the Sino-Russian University in Beijing, then in Beijing University. Finally, he enrolled, to complete his education and to quench his thirst for learning, at Nanjing Central University. Among his various teachers, we find Fang Dongmei, Tang Xiyu and Xiong Shili. Tang was one of those students who followed Xiong's course presentation of the 'New Consciousness-only Doctrine' elaborated by Xiong.

Tang graduated in 1932 from the department of philosophy of Central University in Nanjing, and right away returned to Chengdu to teach in the middle school there. But in 1933 he was back at Central University in the role of assistant professor. In 1937 he became lecturer in Huaxi University, and in 1940 he was again in Central University as a lecturer. In 1944 he became ordinary professor and at the same time was head of the department of philosophy in Central University. As side jobs, he was still teaching philosophy in Huaxi University and also in Jinlin University, and was also dean of studies in Chiangnan University.

In the spring of 1949 he moved to teach to Huaqiao University (Overseas Chinese University) in Guangzhou. But China was already in full chaos because of the civil war and Tang had no way to do his teaching. He then moved to Hong Kong, where he founded—together with Chianmu and other persons bound together by love for Chinese culture and for freedom of research—the New Asia College.<sup>1</sup> He was college professor and head of the philosophy department as well as dean of studies. It was during those years that Tang organized the famous “Seminars for Study and Culture,” inviting lecturers from all over the world and from different doctrinal backgrounds. His college became in those years the liaison center for the Chinese intellectuals outside of mainland China.

In 1957 he made a trip to the United States of America, a trip of exploration of the methods of teaching and research used in the USA. In 1958, the magazine *Democratic Tribune*, in its first issue of the year, published the “Declaration to the World on Chinese Culture,” which became a kind of Magna Charta of the New Confucian movement. Tang was one of the main contributors; he had been also the author of the first draft of it.

In 1959 he was again in the United States for the third congress of ‘Philosophy East and West,’ held in the Hawaii islands. Afterwards he traveled quite often between Taiwan, Japan, Korea, the USA, and Europe for the purpose of giving lectures or taking part in congresses.

In 1963 the Hong Kong Chinese University was established, and the New Asia College became just one college of that university. Tang kept his teaching job and was also head of the College of Liberal Arts of the University. The policies of the directors of the University were often at odds with his ideals. In 1967 beside the New Asia College there came to exist a New Asia Research Institute<sup>2</sup> meant for graduate studies. Tang was the head of this graduate school. In 1977 he retired. At odds more than ever with the policies of the University directors, he took completely out of the University his Research Institute and made it an independent institution, which he headed until his death in 1978.

He died on February 2, 1978 in Kowloon of lung cancer, due to his long time habit of smoking. He attributed his chain-smoking habit to his early life in Hong Kong. His living quarters then were steamy hot and quite noisy during the day, so that he could sink himself in his studying and writing only at nights, and he grew the habit of keeping awake by smoking. He was buried with a solemn rite on March 14, 1978 in a cemetery in the outskirts of Taipei, Taiwan.<sup>3</sup>

He was a man extremely committed to writing and teaching, but was also very approachable. He replied personally to any letter from colleagues or students, even in later years, when he suffered from eye-troubles and one eye had gone almost blind. Quite versatile in writing, as he grabbed a pen, he could pour out long chapters or entire books in one breath. His books, however, have not been widely read, because his style is sometimes abstruse and often made hard by exceedingly long periods. Whenever in his writing he took up a problem, he dealt with it with very subtle, almost hair-splitting labor of analysis and the results were often original and creative.

Actually, when reading his books, one can feel behind them the warm heart of a patriotic hero, trying all his best in order to save Chinese culture, and the messianic soul of a religious leader, exerting all his energies in order to save the human race from their evils.

Throughout his many writings he tackled a great variety of issues. Among his books we find also a tract on love by the title *The Good News of Love*.<sup>4</sup> Written in the style of Plato's dialogues, this book exhorts young people to make of love a means for personal spiritual elevation. True love is the one that helps a person to grow. On the contrary, if people fall in love and emotionally sink into each other and forget that in the world at large there are billions of other human beings who may suffer and cry for help, then love is evil, is a sin.

## II. Main Works

Tang has left us over 30 voluminous books and 318 research articles. A few of these articles were written — or translated for him — in English. His first research paper was written at the age of 15 and published on the school journal of the Unified Middle School of Chungking. Its title: *Xuntze's Theory of Nature*.<sup>5</sup>

Hereby we give briefly the basic content of the most meaningful works of Tang. It will be possible, however, through this short presentation to gain an insight of the world of thought in which Tang used to live during his lifetime. Many of his ideas are shared by the other New Confucians; so that an understanding of his thought can help us to better understand the thought patterns of the New Confucians.

### *The building of the moral self*<sup>6</sup>

This book was written at 35 years of age in 1944. It shows Tang's thought arriving at its maturity. After the research labors of his youth,

and after the earliest intuitions concerning the self and the spirit, in this book Tang shows that he has finally grasped the theme that will dominate all his life: the moral self, inherited from the Confucian tradition, but deepened by his assiduous reflection. Tang develops this theme in three parts:

(1) The intuition of self-determination. Man, any human being, understands that he is the master of his own life. Moral behavior is not deterministically decided by physical appetites. On the contrary, the appetites are at the living subject's beck and call.

The very source of individual ethical behavior cannot be the sphere of the appetites — which are dominated by the self—but it should be rather the moral self that rules the appetites. The scope of life is to build one's moral self based on one's freedom of ethical choices.

(2) From a position of doubt about the existence of the outside world, thanks to the intuition of the moral self, one arrives to determine the non-illusory nature of the outside world. One also arrives to understand that the essence of the mind which is at the origin of the moral self is eternal and indestructible. The body temporarily limits the mind, but the mind is in itself a limitless substance.

(3) As seen from the outside, a human being is an existing material body limited by time and space. Seen from the inside, it is a spiritual existence transcending time and space. It moves therefore outside of any space or time limitation; it moves in the four space directions as well as through time—past, present, and future—without being conditioned by any physical reality. Consequently, all kinds of human activities—even the most pedestrian ones, like eating and drinking—have in themselves a spiritual significance that transcends the material sphere and is the expression of a spiritual value (it might be this: human nature is basically or 'essentially' good, although temporarily obscured in the case of an evil deed, and awoken again in the case of a good deed).

### *The Experience of Human Life*<sup>7</sup>

This book, written in 1944, is connected in its content with the preceding one, and with the one that will follow. Actually, Tang originally planned to publish the three books together in one volume.

In this work, he examines the activity of the human spirit in the course of its existence in time. He finds three spheres of activity, namely

1) The affirmation of life, which includes wisdom concerning human life, the silent activity of the personal inner self, the ascertainment of one's personality, the perception of values, and so on.

2) The development of the spirit: inseparability of mind and natural world, development of the spirit inside the natural world; self-determination and self-transcendence of the spirit, development of the soul in the spiritual world.

3) The itinerary of growth of the self: the development of the self through the whole course of vicissitudes of a human life, that means the whole process of search for the truth, where the true ideals of a human being are found.

Behind all three these processes of development and of growth, there is always present the manifestation of the moral self.

### ***Subject, Object and Human Life*<sup>8</sup>**

In this work, published in 1954, Tang goes on with his ascertainment of the nature of the moral self; then he examines the relationship between the moral self and the universe, and between moral self and human existence. The book consists of two separate parts:

1) The first part explains how it is to be concluded—from a logical examination—that the living world is superior to the inert material world, and that the spiritual world is superior to the living world and is the true center of the whole cosmos.

2) Based on the above premise, Tang then moves on to define the meaning of the human existence, the ideal of humanism, and the significance of the humanistic world. He comes out to prove that the human spirit is the manifestation of a search for realization of the values of 'goodness-truth-beauty.'

The scope of Tang's book is to solve the problem of the alienation in man: this may happen whenever there is a turning upside down of the values, for instance, when materialism prevails—historically this is what has been happening in China—or when some people, going too abstract, get too far away from the concrete reality of human existence.

### ***The Conscience of Culture and Ethical Reason*<sup>9</sup>**

On the base of the premises of the two preceding works Tang proceeds to build his philosophical system of 'ethical idealism.'

Among the strong points of his system, we find:

1) *The family*. For Aristotle, the foundation of the institution of the family is the social nature of man. Tang does not agree. For him the true foundation of the institution of the family is to be found in the moral self: namely, it is the ethical imperative of love-respect toward the parents and of brotherly love which brings about the cohesion of the family. This ethical imperative is a direct manifestation of the moral self.

2) *Economic activity*. It enjoys an autonomy for itself, a right to develop, but always sustained by the ethical conscience. The economic activity of humans is not merely the manifestation of their instinct for survival. Therefore all kinds of economic activities must be 'reasonable,' which means based on an ethical base.

3) *Politics*. Thirst for power plays an important role in political activity; but it should not be seen as the foundation of political life. The foundation should be the knowledge of objective values and the utilization-adhesion to them.

4) *Philosophical speculation and scientific research*. The research for pure knowledge by itself leaves out of consideration the practice of the moral conscience. But when, based on abstract theories, man builds up the empirical sciences, the exact sciences, history, applied science, logic, and philosophy, then it is knowledge employed by the moral reason, and it must reveal the ethical values. Besides, even pure and abstract research needs the impartial stand of the scholar: this is already in itself a manifestation of moral responsibility.

5) *Literature and artistic activity*. They all are a search for beauty. They are different from the search for truth; therefore they have their own autonomy. But a human being feels also the urgency to realize moral values through the beautiful. The artistic experience is above selfishness: as such, it is at the same time a manifestation of the true and of the good.

6) *Religion*. Religion is an overcoming of the temporal self and an experience of the transcendent self. God is the objectivation of this transcendent self. The objective transcendent self manifests itself also as the Existing Absolute which transcends the personal concrete self. This activity too of research for the transcendent has as its foundation the moral reason.

7) *Moral behavior*. Tang distinguishes between intuitional and non-intuitional ethical mentality. The non-intuitional is at the base of

the single cultures. The intuitional includes the totality of the cultural phenomena.

8) *Sport, military, legal, educational activity*. These are all autonomous and independent activities, inside a given culture. However, they are all grounded on the moral reason.

Conclusion: the whole human activity, the whole culture is based on the moral self. The various activities are but different manifestations of the moral self. Therefore, in order to preserve the humanistic ideal in the world, systems of thought driving against it—like naturalism, materialism, utilitarianism—should all be rejected.

### ***The Spiritual Value of Chinese Culture*<sup>10</sup>**

This book was written by Tang in 1953 and was the first book he wrote after Maozedong came to power in China and Tang himself took refuge in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong he had no books and he wrote this work basing himself on memory. The book shows it: the topics are dealt with through short hints, without going deep and without quotations.

The book is made up of reflections on Chinese culture in the aftermath of the victory of communism in China and of the second World War, with its consequent situation of cold war.

In this work Tang touches on various problems concerning Chinese culture. Practically he tries to describe the development and the peculiar characteristics of Chinese culture, and to explain why in his view Chinese culture can harmonize with Western culture. We find mostly short allusions and indications, for the reason that we already explained earlier.

### ***The Reconstruction of the Humanistic Spirit*<sup>11</sup>**

This book came out in 1955. The author here sets himself facing China and the West and all world cultures and tries a reflection on their common origin from the moral self, in order to open a way for the future development of the culture of mankind. The book is made up of articles written during the first five years in Hong Kong and already published on magazines such as "Democratic Tribune"<sup>12</sup> or "Human Life."<sup>13</sup> In the end he states that the future culture of mankind will cherish four ideals: peace, stability (longlasting in time), democracy, and freedom. While democracy and freedom are two products of the West, peace and

stability are two typical Chinese products which China can contribute to the world.

### ***The Development of the Chinese Humanistic Spirit*<sup>14</sup>**

Written in 1958, this work repeats the ideas of the preceding books, but enriching and deepening them. Mostly he deals here with the problem of how China can absorb western cultural contributions (mainly democracy, science and religion) so as to arrive to build an ideal humanistic culture. Actually, for him there are similarities and differences between Western and Chinese humanism, and China has something to contribute indeed to the West in this area.

The last section of the book is dedicated to an analysis of the religious phenomenon ('What is religion?') and to a discussion on how to solve the conflicts existing between the various religions in China. He also deals with how to harmonize traditional Chinese humanistic spirit with religious spirit, so as to connect the humanistic spirit with the transcendent reality.

### ***The Origin and Development of the Basic Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*<sup>15</sup>**

This work is not simply one volume, but a set of six voluminous books published between 1966 and 1975. They are the following:

- 1966, *Introduction* (1 volume);
- 1968, *Origin and Development of the Concept of Nature* (1 vol.);
- 1973, *Origin and Development of the Concept of Dao* (3 vols.);
- 1975, *Origin and Development of the Concept of Doctrine* (1 vol.).

This work undoubtedly came out to be a monumental study of the content of the history of Chinese thought. It is historical research, but done in a very personal way. As Tang himself used to say, it was done 'from moral self to moral self,' meaning that he wanted to study the history of Chinese philosophy through a meeting of hearts with the ancients. Because of this, his conclusions often are at variance from those of the ancient historians as well as from those of other modern authors.

Whoever has got some familiarity with Chinese philosophy is quite aware of the terminological obstacle: each ancient author speaks and



reasons using always the same words but giving them different meanings. Tang too was aware of this difficulty, which nowadays is a serious obstacle to a true understanding of the ancient doctrines. His major accomplishment in this voluminous study has been to clarify matters with outstanding results.

His first volume (Introduction) is a diachronic analysis of the main philosophical concepts appearing through the history of China. We have *li*, *xin*, *ming yu bian*, *yan-yu-mo* and *bian-yu-mo*, *jr-jr-ge-wu*, *dao*, *tai ji*, *ming*.<sup>16</sup> As an example of the novelty of many of his observations, we may quote his opinion concerning one of the above, namely 'Yan-yu-mo' (or 'Bian-yu-mo') which means 'speaking or keeping silent.' Tang notices that in traditional Chinese thought—different as in the West—a good deal of importance has been given, beside what is expressed in human words ('yan' or 'bian'), to what is being not said ('mo'). This is the sphere of the implied, of the 'self-understood.'

Western philosophy, at least the recent developments of it, concentrates on language and ignores the 'unspoken.' In the modern era, Kant concentrated himself on criticism of knowledge, that is on the definition of the internal limits of knowledge. According to Tang, in the future there will rise a philosophy which will study the external limits of language, that is the sphere of the 'unspoken,' to which the ancient Chinese sages had already arrived.

Tang spends three volumes on the meaning of the word 'Dao' because he is well aware that *Dao* is undoubtedly the most basic, the most rich and wide in content and branches out to many other ideas, and is also the most studied and searched for throughout the whole history of Chinese thought. After an exhausting and very deep examination, Tang comes to a general conclusion: that the *Dao* in the historical development of Chinese philosophy is an all-inclusive word. In other words, *Dao* is 'the whole activity of Human Nature.' In the Neoconfucian view of reality, *Nature* is 'ceaseless generation'; and *Dao* is 'ceaseless activity.' *Dao* and *Nature* are one and the same reality. *Dao* is manifestation of Human Nature. Even the past is *Dao*; but it is something already frozen (passive, not active) and objective, external to the subject/Human Nature. However, through the comprehension of these objective manifestations of the *Dao*, the human mind activates and opens up. While the true *Dao* is the one intimate to man and that works as foundation and basis for a person's activity. *Dao* then is not a reality outside Nature, outside the Mind: it is the manifestation of Nature, of the Mind. This manifestation includes the past, present, and

future manifestations of the single person as well as of all his peers, and of all the human beings who have appeared on the earth.

The above three volumes deal with history of thought on the Dao from ancient times down to the Tang dynasty. The historical analysis of the concept of *Dao* from the Sung dynasty up to our day is performed by Tang in the sixth volume of this set *The Origin and Development of the Concept of 'Doctrine.'* Practically in this volume he goes through the whole history of the Neoconfucian philosophical movement. On this movement he had written extensively in previous articles and textbooks for teaching. In this volume he gathers those writings, improving them here and there, and adding something new. On the whole, there comes out a rich and complete picture of the doctrinal development of Neoconfucianism. Tang's conclusion on the subject is that the Neoconfucian thinkers of the Sung dynasty (the founders of the movement) were striving to give a new life to ancient (pre-Ch'in) Confucianism, and they based themselves on different bases: each author based himself on one of the ancient Classics, or on some different point of view from the Classics. Despite the great variety found in that thought movement (variety of basis, of formulation, of theses), all those thinkers were moving inside the great river of Chinese culture, and the all belong to the sphere of Confucianism. They have based themselves on traditional ideas from Chinese antiquity and on the fundamental thought patterns of Confucianism and tried to expound and to go deeper on the meaning of Mind, Nature, Heaven, Human Being. They have exerted themselves to grasp and study in depth human life, the human *Dao*, humanistic education and the significance of the unity of Heaven and Man. Therefore they rightly are to be considered the true and authentic continuation of the ancient Confucian (pre-Ch'in and Han) philosophical thought; though, at the same time, they have been profoundly creative, due to the fact that they had to face new times with new thought patterns. Their thought continued to develop in later times, during the Ming, and then the Qing dynasty, and still in our days is quite influential. Even nowadays, whenever people talk about traditional Chinese culture, they usually see its authentic spirit and core in Neoconfucianism. The culture of the past is then connected with the present. And the overall development of it is substantially different, in its main nucleus, from the development of Buddhist thought.

### III. Final Synthesis of the Thought of Tang Junyi

Tang Junyi is well known and esteemed among the cultured Chinese. What they appreciate most in him is the laborious analysis

of the basic concepts in traditional Chinese philosophy. The Chinese generally are proud of their ancient philosophers; but due to the terminological obstacle they can get to the meaning of the ancients with much difficulty. Thus their appreciation for people like Tang who have helped them overcome the difficulty.

Reading through the books and articles of Tang, it is easy to perceive that he is following his own line of thought, based on the idea of the moral self, a line, after all, very orthodox in the context of the Neoconfucian tradition. At the same time, one can perceive that Tang is continually striving to harmonize the Chinese with the Western tradition of thought.

So far, very few people have taken to examine the synthesis of thought that Tang presented in his latest book, entitled *The Existence of Life and the World of the Spirit*.<sup>17</sup> This is a work of great philosophical engagement, and in the future it will be widely studied and emphasized as it deserves. One of Tang's disciples, who has fathomed it thoroughly, dares to say that it is a work of universal value, on the same level as the masterpieces of world philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

As stated in the preface, Tang had in mind to write such a book since at least thirty years. Always busy with practical chores and with problems to be dealt with urgently, he postponed this plan until the time he could with leisure put down in detail in writing his own *Weltanschauung*. He finally started it with full thrust in 1967 and in four months he had finished a first draft. In 1968, in six months, he completed a new draft. Then he kept adding and correcting up to 1976, when, feeling his energy shrinking, he decided to rush and prepare it for publication. He proofread it on September 8, 1976, on the eve of the day fixed for an operation for lung cancer. After the operation he survived for a few months. The book came out in September 1977, five months after his death.

Here in this book Tang wants to gather together all the ideas he developed during his lifetime, but he gives them a new and quite meaningful unity. He had started out with the idea of the moral self. Then he had studied in depth and without prejudices Chinese and Indian philosophy. Now he is summing up everything. His conclusion is that the speculative activity of men is not exclusively activated by ethical problems. There are other interests, therefore other selves, beside the moral self. For Tang, however, it is axiomatic that each branch of knowledge should be guided by moral reason, in order to

construct true values of human life. Tang therefore from beginning to end has not changed his thought. He only enriched it, deepened it and brought it to maturity, arriving at a quite interesting and elaborated synthesis.

The object of Tang's book is the activity of the human spirit, that is, everything that makes up the object and content of human knowledge. The activity of the human spirit actually is extremely varied. It is a real kaleidoscope. Tang succeeds in grouping the whole of it inside nine spheres, which are the nine spheres of activity we are going to describe, even though very shortly, here below. In this context, I gladly use the word 'Spirit' to translate Tang's word 'Xin',<sup>19</sup> because right from the basic structure of his work Tang reveals that he is taking the lead from Hegel. In fact, the work is structured like the 'Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences' of Hegel in a triadic way. Hegel's book is divided in three parts: Logic, Philosophy of Nature, and Philosophy of the Spirit; each of these parts subdivided each in three subsections, each subsection made up of three parts again. Also Tang's book is divided in three parts describing the three directions in the activity of the human spirit: the objective direction, the subjective direction, and the ultra-objective/ultra-subjective direction (that means the transcendent direction). Inside each direction we have to distinguish *Substance*, *Phenomenon*, and *Function*.<sup>20</sup>

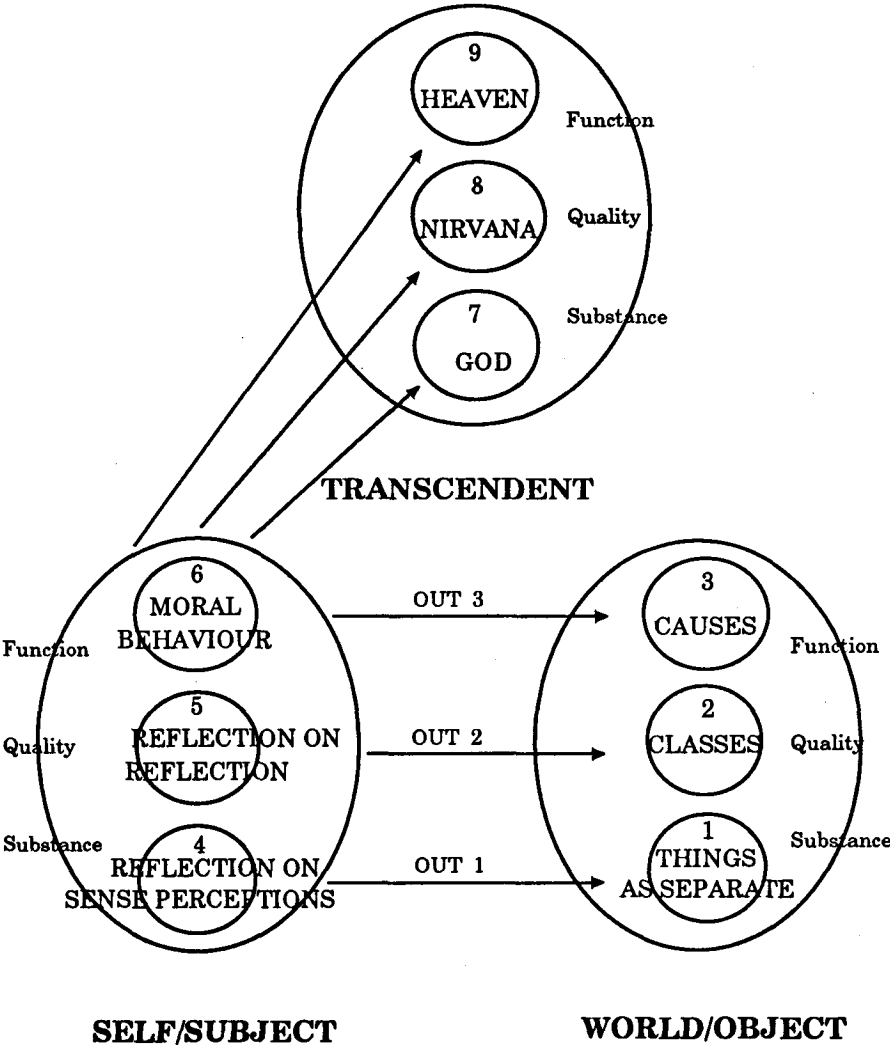
*Objective Direction:* It includes the movement from inside to outside in the cognitive process (that means objective knowledge).

*Subjective Direction:* It includes the movement of reflection internally to the knowing subject. In this case, there is no distinction between inside and outside, but there is the distinction between before and after (time factor).

*Transcendent Direction:* According to this direction, the human spirit goes beyond (transcends) the 'inside and outside' and the 'before and after.' The spirit goes beyond space and time categories, and aims to possess the Transcendent. In this case the directional movement is upwards.

*Before briefly describing the content of each sphere, we try to give a sketch drawing of the three directions and nine spheres, which for Tang comprehend the whole human experience, and we hope by it to make it easier to grasp Tang's plan.*

**TANG JUNYI'S OVERALL PLAN**



## **1. First Sphere: *Sphere of the distinction among the various beings*<sup>21</sup>**

This sphere includes the most basic knowledge reached by the knowing subject, when he/she perceives the external objects as separate among themselves, separate one from the other—and also the various moments in time as separate—without perceiving any relationship or causal connection between them. These objects are nothing else than the myriad of external things existing between heaven and earth and perceived as such according to common sense.

There are, however, various opinions concerning the working of this sphere of knowledge. Tang makes a survey of Western theories of knowledge from Plato down to contemporary philosophers, noticing that both the mainstream of epistemological realism (Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scoto, etc.) and the medieval nominalists as well as the materialists like Hobbes, all recognize the knowledge of the distinct substances through external perception. Only Leibniz is different: he holds that only 'monads' exist, and they are known only through reflection, not through experience. Later then we have the German and British idealists, who hold that the single substances are just expressions of the Absolute Mind, which is the only true Substance. Anyway, despite the variance of points of view concerning the concept of substance (there are many others, including Newton's), nobody has denied that we have this basic direct perception of separate substances as existing, a perception that the knowing subject may then examine, observe, gather, and so on, to produce his/her knowledge of reality.

## **2. Second Sphere: *Sphere of the knowledge by gender and species*.<sup>22</sup>**

The knowing subject, who formerly perceived the external objects as separate and independent, now perceives them as belonging to well defined species or categories. They formerly were perceived as different; now they are perceived as similar, and the similarities bring about the rise of classes of substances. In this world all substances belong to categories, and there are no substances that do not belong to some category. Humans, too, are a kind of beings, and each human being belongs to his own kind, like any other being.

Regarding to the existence of the species and to the criterion for classification, the philosophers have come out with differing explana-

tions. We have the school of epistemological realism, from Plato to Scholastic philosophy, holding that the species exist in reality. We have, on the other side, the nominalists who uphold that the species are just a fiction of the mind adopted for a practical advantage. No matter which the explanation, there is no doubt that the association into species is a fundamental condition for acquiring knowledge.

Tang also deals here about modern evolutionists, who deny the immutability of the species, and about other related problems. He also points out that the world of species has a limitation above and below. The limitation is the knowing subject himself: he/she is at the same time unique and also member of a species.

### 3. Third Sphere: *Sphere of the causes and effects*<sup>23</sup>

The human mind, after perceiving the external objects as individuals, and then perceiving them as gathered in categories, realizes also the causal connection between them. Both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas and the modern philosophers, as well as Indian and Chinese philosophers, have dealt in depth with the meaning and the various kinds of causes.

Tang analyzes the nature and meaning of causes; then he deals with some related problems, mainly with 'utilitarianism.' This is, according to him, a basic urge of humans: anytime humans do something, they cannot but do it for some personal end. Tang examines this fact and then comes to compare the utilitarianism espoused by Bentham, Stuart Mill, and Mozi (Motze). The 'Utilitarianism of the Human Community' espoused by these thinkers is no longer a narrowly selfish impulse. It is a true expression of the moral self concerned with the welfare of the human community as a whole.

*Note:* The three spheres described so far are all related to external objects, or else to the perception of the external objects by the knowing subject. Tang classifies the three as 'objective direction,' while the three spheres coming now here below will be 'subjectively oriented.' It is also important to notice that the three spheres, or better the contents of the three spheres, are related among themselves. Their relationship is that of *Substance*, *Phenomenon*, and *Function*. Thereby in human speech substantives (names) are used to indicate substances, adjectives to indicate specific qualities, and verbs to indicate actions (functions) of the substances.

#### 4. Fourth Sphere: *Reflection on sense perceptions*<sup>24</sup>

Now we start to examine the three subjective spheres. They are called subjective because they are related to the internal activity of the mind. This first subjective sphere includes the activity of the mind of 'reflection on its sense perceptions.' Thus the study of the relationship between external objects and the sense perceptions of them, and the various theories concerning this relationship. For instance, Berkeley believed that 'to be is to be perceived'—there exists only that which is perceived—. But other philosophers have denied that. Tang debates this problem at length, as well as other very important problems in this sphere, namely:

(a) the distinction, so important in ancient Greece, between substance and accidents;

(b) the existence of the substance/substratum of the phenomena. In the modern age there has happened the great debate between the rationalists, for whom substance is real, and the empiricists, for whom substance is not real. Then Kant came along, with his *noumenon* (the thing in itself);

(c) the problem of time and space: the theories of Newton, Leibniz, and Kant concerning these two important problems.

Tang reminds us that not only the perceptions of the knowing subject are the matter for this reflection covered by the fourth sphere. Also the sense perceptions of other knowing subjects are matter for this reflection. Concerning this problem of the existence of other minds in the world there have appeared many theories along the history of philosophy. Tang upholds the most commonly accepted explanation: that the knowing subject comes to determine the existence of his/her self through reflection on his/her various perceptions, and in the same way he/she will be able to determine the existence of the minds of other people as well. Tang takes sides against solipsism because according to him, external objects are not created by the knowing subject. They just come to manifest themselves—not to exist—when the knowing subject perceives them.

In Tang's view, human life is just a mutual gathering of sense experiences among fellow human beings. Even animals are doing it, but they stop at sense experiences connected with their instinct for survival. Humans do not stop there. They have the ability to develop moral choices. But this last dimension is no longer an achievement due to the fourth sphere. It needs the presence of the fifth and of the sixth too.



### 5. Fifth Sphere: *Reflection on reflection*<sup>25</sup>

The previous sphere included the activity of reflection on one's sense perceptions, that means reflection on external objects when they have already become internal images inside the subject's mind. This fifth sphere is instead engaged in reflecting on one's rational activity. Tang means reflection on one's reflection.

This sphere covers practically all of the commonly known branches of human knowledge. Tang, however, examines at length only the following main subjects:

(a) *Language*, as a means of expression of one's rational activity. Language makes it possible for the subject to express, to make external one's personal inner reflections and makes them accessible for other human beings to perceive;

(b) *Literature*: all literature is a means of expression of one's mind. As a matter of fact, literature describes one's inner experiences; it does not describe reality!;

(c) *Art*: same function as literature;

(d) *Mathematics, Logic, and Geometry*: These are three grand branches of human knowledge, associated together by a common denominator, which is their utter inevitability or ineluctability;

(e) *Philosophy*: it is a general, global, final expression of the whole content of the fifth sphere. Philosophy is an abstract elaboration of reflected knowledge. This does not mean that philosophy lacks any contact with external existential reality. On the contrary, the final outlet of philosophy is direct external action. Thus we plunge into the sixth sphere.

### 6. Sixth Sphere: *Sphere of moral conduct*<sup>24</sup>

While the activity of the fourth sphere elaborates the data coming from the senses, and the fifth sphere works on the reflection of the intellect, the activity contemplated within this sphere is the activity flowing out of the moral conscience. This sphere too, like the previous two, belongs to the subjective world, since it includes all the subject's personal ethical choices.

As a matter of fact, in the external objective world there exists no ethics. The objective world is just where humans manifest their inner

ethical values. Hereby, in this sixth sphere, a person is not engaged in perceiving the external world by means of reflection on his/her sensations. Neither is he/she engaged in systematically reordering his knowledge accumulations through abstract reflection. In the sphere of moral conduct, humans are instead busy *trying to rebuild —based on their subjective ethical ideals— the world they live in through their moral decisions*. It is because of this that quite often the expressions of the moral self are in opposition to reality. A human person finds out that real life is short of his/her ideals, and consequently strives for an improvement. Moral life is practical action coming out from the self (internal urgency) continually improving and continually striving for reaching a higher good.

Good and reality are found to be in opposition. Ethical actions are often in opposition to actual reality. The link between the two sides is desire (or 'passions'). Thus the opposition between ethical life and reality becomes the opposition between the ethical mind and the passions. In Chinese tradition one finds the opposition between *Heavenly Principle* and *Human Desire*,<sup>27</sup> and in Western religious language there is God vs. the Devil.

The beginning of the ethical life happens when the person attains to the distinction between Principle and Desire, and in the political sphere, when the distinction between 'wang' (king) and 'ba' (tyrant)<sup>28</sup> is perceived. The awareness of this distinction brings the person to try to get rid of the obstacles to one's moral actions. In other words, Principle tries to rule over Desires; or, as Mencius said, the Great Self tries to rule over the Small Self.<sup>29</sup>

Actually, there are countless obstacles to one's moral conduct and countless ways of overcoming them. In the first place it is the voice of conscience which issues some reasonable requests. This is an indisputable fact of life. Thereafter we have the moral action, which is the external expression of that fact. Social order, as well as all the laws of a country come from it. This also implies that other human beings have the same ethical urges as I have. For this matter —whether other subjects feel the same ethical callings as I do— Tang proceeds in the same way as when he was describing how a human mind discovers the existence of other minds (see the fourth sphere above).

Finally, the construction of a moral human personality is not a oneday job. It takes constant application. Moral life is continually improving. At times a conflict arises between two moral demands, for

instance: filial piety and loyalty to the ruler, and there is no way out but personal sacrifice, sometimes up to one person's death, such as when somebody gives up his life for a cause of justice. This is then to be viewed as the highest completion of a moral personality.

### 7. Seventh Sphere: *Sphere of the 'Return to the One.'*<sup>30</sup>

The first three spheres were objective; the second three spheres were subjective; now these last three spheres are subjective and objective at the same time. Practically they are trans-subjective and trans-objective as well. They are concerned with whatever is beyond the human world, beyond time and space. In other words, they deal with the Transcendent. Such world sphere is utterly beyond sense perception and beyond rational activity as well. Of the many achievements of the human spirit in the realm of the trans-objective and trans-subjective world, Tang chooses to examine three very distinguished ones, which in his view are symptomatic of the accomplishments of the three main cultural areas in the world: the Western world, India, and the Chinese world.

The seventh sphere described by Tang concerns the 'Return to the One,' to mean the faith in one only God. Western monotheism has its origin in the ancient Hebrew tradition. From the warrior god of the archaic tribe of Abraham, and from the Greek Zeus too, one arrives down in history to the three Western sophisticated religions of our days: the Jewish, the Christian, and the Muslim.

This great monotheistic current of thought is the result of the confluence of Hebrew religion and Greek philosophy, which happened during the Middle Ages, when God was at the same time the object of religious faith and of philosophical research. Tang finds fault with the ontological argument of Anselm, but not only on the usual ground of its basic logical invalidity. He criticizes as well the cosmological argument of Thomas Aquinas, and the argument from the 'causes,' but not on the usual bases of other thinkers who criticized it. Tang accepts the argument of Kant from 'practical reason,' but finds that it too is not without faults: for instance, one may ask, "Is it absolutely necessary to suppose a God for humans to be able to combine together Virtue and Happiness?" In case there exist some alternatives, then Kant's argument is out! And in case a human being does not feel this need for God, then God does not exist? Tang goes on to compare the theories of Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant and Fichte; but he concludes that the God the

philosophers can reach is inevitably and only an abstract concept, not the true God.

One therefore has to look for God outside of philosophy, and reach Him instead through religious faith. For Tang, however, even the God of the monotheistic religions is not perfect, because it is not absolute: He is opposed to His faithful. Therefore, He is 'relative.' For Tang, neither philosophy nor religion are sufficient for humans in order to reach God. Another way does exist, according to him. It is the moral progress of the human person, which in due process can bring humans to enter into a communion with the God who is above heaven and earth and all things. The moral experience is for Tang the highest experience one can ever reach of God, above the philosophical one and the religious one. Union between the human person and God, elimination of the cognitive opposition between subject and object, moral spirit without boundaries, which absorbs into itself all realities, absolute. Only through the maximum development of his moral self a human being is able to enter in communion with God the Transcendent. At that level, then, 'the spirit of man and the Spirit of God become one only thing, without being one external to the other, without any distance between the two.

### 8. Eighth Sphere: *The Absolute Void of Buddhism.*<sup>31</sup>

According to Tang, Buddhist thought is another expression of the human yearning for the Transcendent. The Buddhists try to reach the Transcendent by denying the existence of the knowing subject as well as of the known objects (the external world). Buddha discovered this way as an escape from sorrow and from the challenges of life. The Buddhists hold that real life and the world are just illusions. The true life sphere is reached by eradicating the illusions: that means by eradicating from one's mind the idea of life, of personal self, of external world. The meaning of life is then not to be found in active performances, in positive contributions to actual life; instead, it should be found in a negative attitude of shattering (eliminating) the actual experience of life. The true meaning and content of life is reached in this liberation from concrete life experience.

The Buddhist view is contrary to the common tenet that pain from desire should be eliminated by trying to quench the desire. Buddhists believe that desire will never be satisfied, that sorrow will never be eliminated unless one roots out desire. We shall try to have a clear grasp of the Buddhist view: it is not a total denial of the values of life; it is a denial only of those values that are not essential to pure life. By getting

rid of these, one reaches the Pure Land, a world in clear-cut opposition to the world of desires where the confusion and the excitement of the desires pollutes life. It is through the elimination of this excitement and through the creation of a Pure Land that Buddhism arrives to show the essential meaning of human life.

For the Buddhists, the way to get rid of the excitement is not a single one: it is a combination of learning, understanding, and behavioral drills. As for understanding, the goal is to understand that the self is not real and the outside world is not real either. Then all cravings, tempers, foolishness go away. How to reach this goal? By using the doctrine of causes and fate<sup>32</sup> that combine together the illusory phenomena, thus giving us the wrong opinion that the self is something real and the external world is real. The Buddhist analysis of the causes is exceedingly subtle, and through it the Buddhists demonstrate that the Self and the World are but empty words, and reach the conclusion that 'there is no birth and there is no death.'<sup>33</sup>

Tang feels that the doctrine of the causes and fate occupies in Buddhism the same importance as the proofs for the existence of God in the Christian tradition. However this doctrine, exactly like the proofs for the existence of God, is not free from doubts and perplexities. Anyway, the Christians have no doubts about the existence of God, although they may feel some doubt about the proofs for it. In the same way, the Buddhists do not have any doubts about the Nirvana: both these two realities are the highest goals of human yearning for the Transcendent; they are totally beyond empirical experience and beyond rational activity of the human intellect.

### 9. Ninth Spheres: *The Virtue of Heaven at Work*<sup>34</sup>

This is the Transcendent realm according to the Chinese thought tradition. Europe and India developed since antiquity the yearning toward the Transcendent. In ancient times it was a mythological-religious yearning in all places. Then it grew on, and in China it did not end up in a separate organized religion. Neither it developed—like in India and in the West—into a purely religious yearning. This same yearning in China revealed itself in the moral realization of the human person.

In the Chinese world the Transcendent realm can be defined as 'The Virtue of Heaven at Work,' as shown or visible in the moral growth of human personalities, or also as 'The Unity of Heaven and Man'<sup>35</sup>.

Seen from the side of Man, it is the human being who strives to develop his conscience to the utmost, in order to know Nature, and through Nature to know Heaven.<sup>36</sup> Seen from the side of Heaven, it is 'Ming,' (which means 'fate' but in our Western languages can find a corresponding word in 'Providence' or 'God's Plan') which realizes itself here in the world, and the Virtue of Heaven which manifests itself. The Virtue of Heaven manifests itself in the moral life of the single human person. This fact, for Tang, should not be included in the ethical sphere of existence (see Sixth Sphere above) because for Tang ethical links are of the person with his own self, or with the other fellow human beings, or with the human community (family, nation, mankind). Knowledge of Heaven and Unity with Heaven, instead, is no longer an ethical concern. A human being thanks to his moral life, elevates himself to Heaven, knows Heaven, and becomes one with Heaven. This means that from ethics and through ethics one reaches to the trans-ethical yearning, a realm which transcends practical experience and the conclusions of reasoning. In Christianity, this is the realm of the Divine. In Buddhism, it is the Nirvana. In Chinese thought, it is the Confucian ideal of the Unity of Heaven with Man.

If one looks at Chinese antiquity, one may notice that at the time of the Book of Odes and Book of Documents —beginning of the Zhou dynasty— the Chinese believed in a Heavenly Lord (*Shangti*). He was the God of their stirps that they worshipped. Then their culture developed, and Shangti became the highest God ruling over any other gods. He was the ruler of heaven and earth; all humans received life from Him and got from Him also an innate ability to elevate themselves and to communicate with Him. This is exactly the religious world-view which Confucius inherited. Confucius, however, was not a religious leader. He did not elaborate a theological doctrine based on the Book of Odes and the Book of Documents. He did not teach people how to reach God through faith or through mystical experience. Confucius did not teach people to deny the reality of the world and become free enough to reach the Pure Land of Nirvana. Confucius took the actual daily life as real. He believed that in human nature there is encased the virtue of Heaven. In his view, humans are training themselves through the multiform hardships they encounter during their lives, and are bringing to maturity their moral characters, so as to manifest the Virtue of Heaven and make the Virtue of Heaven active in their daily lives. Thus a human being may come to see the transcendental meaning through practical daily life and discover the intimate unity of his inner living self with Heaven. The self is therefore a revelation of the Heavenly

Principle. Confucius gives an example of this ascent to reach Heaven through moral growth in his own life experience:

*At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning.  
At thirty, I stood firm.  
At forty, I had no doubts.  
At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven.  
At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ (for the reception of truth).  
At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right.<sup>37</sup>*

Or again when he says:

*I do not murmur against Heaven.  
I do not grumble against men.  
My studies lie low,  
and my penetration rises high.  
But there is Heaven; that knows me!<sup>38</sup>*

In this way, according to Tang, Confucius opened for mankind a new road to the Transcendent world, to a stage where neither reason nor experience can bring the human heart.

After Confucius, the one who more than anybody else inherited this idea and developed it most was Mencius. He stressed the inner connection between mind and human nature, and between human nature and Heaven. Thereupon he came to develop his doctrine of:

*developing one's Mind to the utmost,  
in order to understand one's Nature,  
thus reaching to the knowledge of Heaven.<sup>39</sup>*

The above doctrine remained basic to Confucian thought throughout the ages and was enriched further by the *Book of Change*, by the *Ten Appendixes* (to the *Book of Change*) and by the '*Chung Yung*,' then by the Han scholars and by the Sung dynasty thinkers. The Sung thinkers in particular went very deep in this search for the Transcendent.

Similarly as with the other two ways, this way too has its difficulty. As a matter of fact, according to Tang, one can make the following statements:

- "God is encountered neither by means of experience nor by reasoning";
- "Nirvana is not reached by getting rid of the reality of life";
- "Heaven is not attained through practical daily life." This is

because daily matters belong to the actual world, while humans need to jump over from the daily stage to the Transcendent stage of reality. The Transcendent realm lies beyond the boundaries of daily routine, but it is intimate to daily life. However, it is not daily life. Therefore a distinction needs to be made between the present and the Transcendent. This is again the age-old distinction in Confucian tradition between Heavenly Principle and Passions. How to realize this distinction? The traditional Confucian response is to use 'Good Conscience.'<sup>40</sup> After the Sung and Ming dynasties, Heavenly Principle and Good Conscience practically came to be used as synonyms. The idea became widespread that this was the basis for realizing one's moral personality and thus reaching up to Heaven. But still there remains a hard point in explaining how to have 'Good Conscience' not covered up by selfish desires. It still remains difficult to define the process by which a person develops his/her own mind and comes to know his/her nature and thus reach to know Heaven. It is difficult to see clearly how from the subjective conscience one reaches out to the objective moral behavior and self-realization. It is not easy to reach the stage of neither suppression of desires nor submission to desires, of living a worldly daily life and still seeing through it the Transcendental values, of accomplishing one's moral character and thus arriving at being one with Heaven. The full comprehension of all this is still outside the range of life experience or of intellectual activity. Anyway, through the ages the Chinese have not—because of this difficulty—renounced their lofty and inspiring ideal of exerting one's Mind to the utmost in order to know Nature, and to know Nature to the utmost in order to know Heaven. Inspired by this ideal, the Chinese have lived moral lives and created a culture centered on Heaven's Plan and Human Nature.

As one can easily see from this brief summary, this book of Tang is definitely a grand undertaking. He tried to include into the nine spheres all the achievements of Western, Indian, and Chinese thought. One of Tang's basic ideas in working at this book was that—if we exclude phony preconceptions and contradicting or inaccurate theories—Western and Chinese philosophies can surely meet on a common base. Thus he tried hard to organize all the most disparate philosophical theories into a grand scheme. Tang sincerely believed that all of them organically could serve as tools for the education of mankind. Based on his personally held doctrine of the Virtue of Heaven at Work, Tang tried to absorb all that could be absorbed from the various philosophies. Since he handled too much material, often he did not go deep enough into the theories he defined as erroneous; sometimes he



mentioned them only superficially. Given the magnitude of the undertaking and the vastness of the material, maybe Tang could not have done otherwise.

In Tang's philosophical endeavors, we can see the echo of the philosophizing of his teachers, especially of Xiong Shili: in the equation of Life-Existence-Spirit—three terms which are used by him in a way as to become almost synonyms—and of Fang Dongmei, who felt the need for this kind of grand synthesis of mankind's heritage of thought. In Tang's view, in the huge kaleidoscope of cognitive experiences there must be a priority of time—some knowledges are obtained sooner, others are reached later in the cognitive process—and of importance. If we do not realize of this fact and of their position in the scale of importance, we cannot then arrive to correct knowledge and consequently to righteous behavior; neither could we attain the very scope of life, that is, the creation of the highest humanistic realization of mankind.<sup>41</sup>

### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL HINTS

Most of the books written by Tang Junyi have been published—or reprinted in recent years—by the Student Book Co., Ltd., 198, Ho-Ping East Road, 1st Section, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China. The same company prints also booklets with the list of Tang's works.

A fairly complete list of the articles written by Tang can be found at the end of the scholarly study of his thought by his disciple Li Du: see Reference Works here below.

#### Some Reference Works:

- \* 李杜著 唐君毅先生的哲學 台灣學生書局 一九八九年
- \* 劉述先著 文化與哲學的探索 台灣學生書局 一九八六年
- \* 項維新 劉福增主編 中國哲學思想論集 現代篇 3  
台北水牛出版社 一九八八年
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- \* 馮滬祥著 哲學與現代世界 台灣學生書局 一九八五年
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### NOTES ON TANG JUNYI (唐君毅)

1. 新亞書院
2. 新亞研究所
3. Tang was buried in 台灣台北縣觀音山朝陽墓園
4. The Chinese title of the booklet is 愛情的福音 Mentioned in  
馮滬祥著 哲學與現代世界 台灣學生書局 一九八五年
5. 荀子的性論
6. 道德自我之建立
7. 人生之體驗
8. 心物與人生
9. 文化意識與道德理性
10. 中國文化之精神與價值
11. 人文精神之重建
12. 民主評論
13. 人生
14. 中國人文精神之發展
15. 中國哲學原論 尊論篇  
中國哲學原論 原性篇  
中國哲學原論 原道篇 壹貳叁  
中國哲學原論 原教篇
16. 理·心·名與辯, 言與默, 辯與默, 致知格物, 道, 太極, 命.
17. 生命存在與心靈境界.
18. 李杜著 唐君毅先生的哲學 台灣學生書局 一九八九
19. 心

20. In Chinese: 體, 相, 用
21. 萬物散殊境
22. 依類成化境
23. 功能序運境
24. 感覺互攝境
25. 觀照凌虛境
26. 道德實踐境
27. 天理人欲
28. 王 and 霸
29. 大體 vs. 小體
30. 歸向一神境
31. 我法二空境
32. In Buddhist terminology: 因緣法
33. 不生不滅
34. 天德流行境
35. 天人合一
36. See Mencius, Book 7, Ch.I,1.
37. *Analects*, II, 4. See J. Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. I, p. 147.
38. *An.* XIV, 37. Translated by J. Legge, *Op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 288-289.
39. *Mencius*, Book 7, Ch. I, 1. See J. Legge, *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 448.
40. 良知
41. In Tang's own words, the scope of it all is to achieve for society the highest degree of humanism: 立人之極 and the ideal philosophy for him is:  
立人極之哲學.