

Cross-Cultural Agenda**Do Humans Need to Make Clear and Proclaim What They Believe?**

Martin Lu*

Recently I spent two weeks on a river cruise from Budapest to Amsterdam, seeing many castles, fortresses and churches / cathedrals along the Rhine river in Germany. They serve as timeless witnesses of both religious faith and conflicts. Afterwards I was resting in a small rural hot-springs resort town in South Eastern Taiwan. Opposite my hotel along the river, there is a tiny temple worshipping some unknown idols (as is common in Taiwan), which reminds me of St. Paul's experience in Athens:

“For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So, you are ignorant of the very thing you worship--and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.”¹

So, I would like to bring to this volume the following question for discussion: Do humans need to make clear and proclaim what they believe or disbelieve? The question may appear to be religious, but the concern is shared by adherents of all traditions regardless of what God or gods they believe or even whether they believe or not. The main theme of our conference is “Re-Learning to be Human for Global Times.” “Learning to be human” has been the peculiar catchphrase of Confucianism in recent interreligious dialogues. It is Confucius 's (551-479 BCE) idea that we should live in one world at a time, he says: “if you do not know how to live, how do you know how to die?”²

“Learning to be human” should be taken in this sense: “knowing how to live” paves the way for “knowing how to die”. It does not stop at “learning how to be human” in the secular sense or even in the sense of “being secular as sacred”. Being towards death is an important theme in Heidegger's masterpiece “Being and Time”. This is an echo of Christian soteriology. And the life and death issue are thematic in all schools of Buddhism. So, it is the unquestionable common ground of major traditions and religions of the world. But could we make clear what we believe or disbelieve? After two thousand years, the unknown God Apostle Paul encounters in Athens is still very much with us today. Christian history could be considered as persistent attempts direct or otherwise to make clear what God is and the result is often the opposite of what they expect. John Cobb, Jr., a 20th century Christian process theologian, reflects on his dialogue with Masao Abe, a Zen Buddhist dedicating his life to interfaith dialogues in the West:

“I argued that the Buddhist polemic against God was usually against a substantial God and against divine power acting on events from without. Process thought also opposed those notions and appreciated the Buddhist polemic.”³

So it is rather unique during our modern time that a Christian theologian and a Buddhist, a religious atheist, would both oppose the notions of God as a substance and God acting from without. John Cobb thought he had accommodated enough to Buddhism, but Masao Abe still considered the process theology not “empty” and “emptying” enough. Abe eventually found the

* Martin Lu, an emeritus professor at Bond University, Australia.

¹ The NIV Bible, Acts 17:23.

² Analects, 11:12.

³ Masao Abe a Zen Life of Dialogue, edited by Donald W. Mitchell, Kindle Version, Loc 1521 of 8494.

common ground of Buddhist / Christian dialogues in Sunyata (emptiness) and Kenosis (surrender of divinity).

The above dialogue illustrates the depth of “learning to be human” where the primordial experience of ultimate reality could serve as the common ground for various faiths or non-faith.

JUSTIFICATION OF BELIEFS - “THE DARK CLOUD WHERE GOD DWELLS”

Much of what humans believe or disbelieve has to do with God, which is especially true in the Abrahamic traditions. Moses saw darkness where God was (Exodus 20:21). The Christian Apostle Paul might mean well: He wanted to make clear and proclaim to the Athenians their “unknown God”. But at what price, which we may even appreciate more today? To be “ignorant” and “in the dark” may be something negative and empty from the modern Western perspective, but it is not necessary so in the view of Eastern wisdom. Socrates was considered wise by the Delphic oracle because he was ignorant and in the dark over certain heavenly matters. But his legacy to the West is still: “Virtue is Knowledge.” Confucius says: “If you know, you say you know; if you do not know, you say you do not know. This is knowledge.”¹ (My own literal rendering of 「知之為知之，不知為不知，是知也！」)

Ever since Moses, there has been a tendency in Western philosophical and theological traditions to dispel this dark cloud by justifying their beliefs one way or the other. The climax is the epistemological crisis of the enlightenment period when all objective standards to evaluate beliefs and knowledge are abandoned. In turn, the epistemological crisis leads to crisis of belief. Humans cannot live without moral, political or religious commitments and beliefs, which unfortunately often lead to conflicts within an individual and a group, and between groups.

I shall discuss below the Christian ecumenism of postliberal theology of George Lindbeck (“The Nature of Doctrine”), the metaphysical justification of Alasdair MacIntyre (“After Virtue”) over his own attempt to reconcile his Christian and Marxist commitments and subsequent conflicts, and finally Herbert Fingarette’s behaviorist interpretation of Confucius in the *Analects* (“*Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*”) as an alternative paradigm to Abrahamic traditions of “making clear and proclaiming what they believe”, which date back to Moses and Paul.

From the almost autobiographical accounts of MacIntyre and Lindbeck as exemplified in the former’s Prologue and the latter’s Afterword in the 25th Anniversary Editions of their respective books mentioned above, we see their lifelong quest for certainty and justifications. On the one hand, they need a clear identification of belief and sense of superiority in order to have commitment, but the epistemological crisis has rendered the attempt difficult if not impossible. On the other hand, the multi-religious / multi-cultural climate of their age opens them to a diversity of traditions whose resources they could all learn, but to do it may risk losing their identity, belief and the sense of community within their cherished tradition. So, either one-sided particularism or one-sided universalism is not the option for them. As a result, both of them seek for justifications in the tradition.

Perhaps the tension between the secular and the sacred leads to these dilemmas of belief and justification for both Lindbeck and MacIntyre, and the harmony between the two realms for Fingarette’s Confucius makes the appearance of the same dilemmas not even a rejected possibility. In the case of Singapore, many Chinese have the dual status of being both Confucians and

¹ *Analects*, 2:17.

Buddhists, or being both Confucians and Christians, but not being both Buddhists and Christians. Although historically there had been philosophical attempts in China to make clear the Confucian identity by philosophical justifications, but this is not the case in popular Confucianism as lived by ordinary people.

To address these issues, I will begin with the short-lived social engineering experiment in Singapore of “religious knowledge as moral education” during the period of 1984-1989.

“Religious Knowledge as Moral Education” in Singapore

When I participated in the promotion of Confucian ethics in Singapore during 1980s in my capacity as local adviser of the Ministry of Education and researcher at the National University of Singapore, the relevance of Confucianism to Global Times was then persuasive but not entirely convincing. But after a span of 30 years, the rise of China (economical and political) and the ever heightening of global crisis in terms of terrorism, regional and sectarian conflicts, and even unthinkable nuclear catastrophe have now made it more imperative for me to revisit the significance of Confucianism in dealing with our current global crisis.

If Confucianism could be expediently classified into Popular Confucianism, Political Confucianism, and Spiritual (Philosophical) Confucianism, the economic success and political stability of Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and China could be attributed to Popular and Political Confucianism of culturally hard-working Chinese and their inborn amenability even to "soft authoritarianism" under reasonable circumstances. But the ideal of Chinese rounded teaching (圓教), shared by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, is now even more pertinent to the shifting world of meaning and its associated crisis and apocalyptic catastrophe as we now experience on a daily basis.

Unlike the Socratic / Platonic view of philosophy as preparation for death (“Phaedo”), the Confucian view is “cultivation of humanistic learning in this life” (修道之謂教) as prescribed in Confucian 《The Doctrine of the Mean》(中庸). An object (物) is not just an isolated thing in the external world to be investigated by an epistemological subject, but something a human being could feel and give meaning to such as “family, state, and the world” (家、國、天下) as taught in the Confucian 《The Great Learning》 (大學).

In the early 1980s, Singapore Government was concerned about the encroachment of undesirable Western values and decline of Asian values. Dr. Goh KengSwee (吳慶瑞 1918–2010) , a Malacca Peranakan / Straits-born Chinese, was Singapore’s Minister of Education. He publicly admitted that he was a nominal Christian but believed that moral education without religious basis will not take root. So he introduced Religious Knowledge as a compulsory subject for upper secondary school students. In 1984, six options were made available - Bible Knowledge, Islamic Religious Knowledge, Buddhist Studies, Confucian Ethics, Hindu Studies and Sikh Studies. However, the project as social engineering lasted for only 5 years till 1989 when religious knowledge was no longer a compulsory subject, but optional outside curriculum hours.

According to Singapore’s 2000 population census, about 42 % is Buddhist, just under 15% Muslim, 14% Christian, 14% professing no religion, 8% Taoist, and 4% Hindu. The census shows “a strong correlation among ethnicity, home language and ... religion among the Malays and Indians”, where “almost all Malay-speaking residents were Muslims while most Tamil-speaking

residents were Hindus”¹ Confucianism is not regarded as a religion in the official classification of religions but most Chinese Singaporeans have the dual status of being a Confucian and another institutional religion such as Buddhism, Taoism or Christianity.

The strong correlation between race, language and religion is significant not only sociologically, but also philosophically in terms of “What do we believe?” and “Why should we believe?”. In Singapore, the practice of religion is closely related to ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. In some cultural or ethnic groups, people just accept the religion passed on to them, and they never doubt that this is also part of their “free choice”. Furthermore, not only one’s race or language plays a role in her faith; the government also makes sure that religious harmony is maintained. It is an offence to “cause ill-feelings between different religious groups.”²

Around the same time, when Singapore was promoting Confucian ethics, the debates over Asian values also emerged. The principal proponent of Asian values was Singapore’s founding father and the longest serving Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (1923-2015), who also made it possible for Confucian ethics to be included as one of the subjects of religious knowledge in upper middle schools. In no time, both Confucian ethics and Asian values were perceived by Western media as an attempt to perpetuate authoritarianism.

Around the same time, when Singapore was promoting Confucian ethics, the debates over Asian values also emerged. The principal proponent of Asian values was Singapore’s founding father and the longest serving Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (1923-2015), who also made it possible for Confucian ethics to be included as one of the subjects of religious knowledge in upper middle schools. In no time, both Confucian ethics and Asian values were perceived by Western media as an attempt to perpetuate authoritarianism.

If we look around the world today, it is a utopian fantasy to expect the emergence of a philosopher king. Even Chinese philosopher Mencius said that in Chinese history a sage king appeared only once in 500 years. So, we could fairly argue that, without the intervention of wise rulers and philosophers, religious harmony could only be postponed to the eschatological future.

George Lindbeck: Social-Linguistic Model of Religion

I have been conducting dialogues with Chinese Christians and Buddhists informally for decades. It has been difficult if not impossible to carry on philosophically meaningful and constructive dialogues especially with ordinary Christians if you do not accept and learn their cultural-linguistic terminology. (I understand the situation better now with the insights from “The Nature of Doctrine” by George Lindbeck.) The usual pattern of a dialogue is to start discussing the existence of God initiated by the Christian and often based on the “argument from design”. And it is meant to be cognitive and referential without even defining what God means. But at least some sort of universal and objective standards even including science could be appealed to. If both parties are harmonious and patient enough, we would move on to doctrines such as Christology, trinity, salvation and eschaton etc. without realizing that here no objective criteria are possible.

George Lindbeck’s small and yet monumental volume “The Nature of Doctrine“ (ND) makes clear the road map of such discussions. Are religious statements / doctrines cognitive and propositional, pointing to reality? Are they expressions of inner feelings and experience? Or are

¹ Department of Statistics, Singapore Census of Population 2000

² Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act, passed in November, 1990; also Ministry of Information and the Arts, “The Need for the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act”, 1992.

they just cultural-linguistic scheme of interpretation as Lindbeck puts forward? In ND, Lindbeck speaks of “truth” in three different ways: (1) categorial, (2) intrasystematic, and (3) ontological, which mean (1) meaning and reference, (2) warrant or justification, and (3) traditional notion of truth as corresponding to reality. ¹ Basically, he is interpreting Christian and religious doctrines in an ecumenical and neutral manner without committing himself regarding which Christian denomination or religion is closer to ontological truth. He defends his interpretative theory of doctrines as neither a relativism nor an isolationism, but a “particularistic universalism”. With his cultural-linguistic approach to doctrine, the adherent can open up without being enclosed in a “religious ghetto”, or she could reconcile without capitulation in her fundamental birth-right beliefs.

I would consider this original and creative approach of an ecumenical attempt as the starting point for interreligious dialogues. When we engage in such dialogues, at least we understand whether we are referring to the internal rules of language and the kind of truth we have in mind. As to our question of “making clear what we believe or disbelieve” in terms of doctrinal clarity, there is less of such needs in Eastern traditions such as Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

As an example, the late Jan Van Bragt (1928-2007), a Catholic scholar of Japanese religion and philosophy, has this Buddhist interpretation of the Christian Trinity, which in his view could be justified by Scripture:

“As is well known, the notion of *persona* entered Christian speculation from the discussion about the Holy Trinity, where one needed to think of a plurality of realities that would not destroy the unity of the one and only God. The notion of *person* was then coined to denote *entities* that have nothing in and by themselves, but have everything by their reciprocal relationship or total mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*); not entities that first exist and then get into relationships, but entities that are nothing but their relationships—*relationessubsistentes*.”²

The Trinity has been a controversial issue in Christian history. But if we internet the three “persons”, (God the Father, God the Son, and Holy Spirit), not so much as independent entities but as “nothing but their relationships,” then the issue is more readily resolved. So it takes more than an academic scholar to think through the issue, but someone, either a Buddhist Catholic or a Catholic Buddhist, who is able to speak the cultural-linguistic languages of both traditions.

Jan Van Bragt has also awakened me from the dogmatic slumber of following Greek Philosophy for years in my personal approach to Christian theology and religion. He writes:

“Greek philosophy, however, did not try to explain religious reality as such; it was geared at explaining and grounding the things of this world and basically took as its prototype of *being* the (immovable forms of the) material *things* around us. Let us have a quick look at the kind of problems this creates for a religious, specifically Christian, way of thinking. For example, if you take the being of a material thing, such as this desk here, as your model, you cannot really say that God *is*; and if you do so anyway, you posit God

¹ George Lindbeck, “The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age”, 25th Anniversary Edition, 2009. First published in 1984 by Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, with a new introduction by Bruce D. Marshall and a new afterword by the author, Kindle version, Loc. 332-339.

² Jan Van Bragt, edited by James W. Heisig & SeungChul Kim, “Interreligious Affinities: Encounters with the Kyoto School and the Religions of Japan,” 2014, published by Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, Kindle Version, Loc. 694-699.

as a substance over and against us and the world—something that has created a whole tangle of difficulties when it comes to speaking of the *existence of God* in the West, and may indeed be mainly responsible for the birth of atheism.”¹

Bruce Marshall in his new Introduction to “The Nature of Doctrine” refers to the divine mysteries of faith and also the source of religious doctrines:

“The business of theology is not to penetrate divine mysteries inaccessible to ordinary mortals, so to instruct the Christian assembly about what to say and do, but to make explicit, in a rigorous if fragmentary way, the grasp of those mysteries that any faithful worshiper has already been given.”²

The theologians in the West consider it their duty to make clear what the ordinary believers adhere to. And intellectuals prefer to contemplate in an isolated way without getting into what Lindbeck would call “traditional community life.” Most ordinary adherents of main religions tend to actually follow their “cultural-linguistic” schemes of interpretation in practice without knowing how to express them. If we engage them in dialogues, they tend to explain their beliefs cognitively, interpreting doctrines as referring to ontological reality as the corresponding meaning (even though they may not express it clearly).

Among the academics, as Lindbeck is well aware, the experiential-expressive approach as exemplified by Paul Tillich has been most popular because it satisfies the modern needs of pluralism, equality, and universality. It refers to the universal core experience which people of different cultures and traditions could express in their own ways. This core experience is famously expressed by Tillich’s “ultimate concern.”

In Japan, the cross-fertilization between Buddhism and Christianity had been deep, genuine, and fruitful so much so that Jan Van Bragt could write and lecture on “Contributions of Buddhism to Christianity” even before the Vatican II Council in these words:

“It is only in the perspective of Christianity not yet in possession of the full truth, and God (Christ) graciously at work also in other religions, that we can speak of possible contributions of Buddhism to Christianity.”³

Christianity’s above-mentioned encounter with Buddhism in Japan has shown that, despite its belief in supposedly perennial doctrines, the actual practice and doctrinal interpretation could still adapt to local cultural and traditional environments because “historical Christianity is still not yet in possession of the full truth.” When I visited the “Institute for Religion and Culture”, (Catholic Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan, (where Jan Van Bragt served as its acting director in 1976), as researcher in 2007, there was even a meditation room in the Visiting Scholars’ Lodge where I stayed. Meditation is the serious practice for genuine Buddhists in Japan. The medieval Christian monasteries also emphasized it. Even Pope Pius XII (1876-1958) in his exhortation to priests also advised daily meditation for priestly perfection.

Lindbeck may have stressed the significance of Christian doctrine in the traditionally embedded church, but Christian churches nowadays may not be so doctrine-oriented. For instance, the Chinese churches nowadays are the haven for those “who are weary and burdened”(Matthew 11:28). They are more concerned with human relationship and personal experience in the church community than the doctrinal issues such as the Trinity. The cultural-linguistic interpretative

¹ Ibid., Loc. 733-742.

² George Lindbeck, “The Nature of Doctrine”, Loc. 519-523.

³ Jan Van Bragt, “Interreligious Affinities”, Loc. 488.

scheme is only applicable to a certain extent. For many Chinese Christians, the church is only part of the secular world in which they live.

Alasdair MacIntyre: How Do We Justify What We Believe?

Alasdair MacIntyre may be right. In order to judge and assess one tradition we need to do it from the perspective of another tradition. Life is too short to immerse in another tradition, learning its culture and language in order to assess and justify our own tradition. Some people of dual traditional status such as Jan Van Bragt may be in a unique position to do it. Otherwise, we could only do it by imagining and projecting our situation into another tradition.

If George Lindbeck's focus is ecumenical and inter-religious, Alasdair MacIntyre's philosophical orientation tends to be more inter-traditional, as in his existential and religious conciliation between Christianity and Marxism, and between modernity and Aristotelianism. But the cultural-linguistic approach was what MacIntyre was following as he described in his autobiographical journey of a truth seeker and utopian dreamer, from a committed Marxist back to a Christian.

He was then looking forward to a revival of tradition such as a monastery of prayer, learning, and labor, which would not only survive but flourish in the new age of darkness. He had been waiting for this 25 years ago as he was then. Yet most people do not have this luxury of waiting for so long as they need to deal with everyday life here and now. Let us read MacIntyre's following comment on *After Virtue* after 25 years:

"I should also make it clear that, although *After Virtue* was written in part out of a recognition of those moral inadequacies of Marxism which its twentieth-century history had disclosed, I was and remain deeply indebted to Marx's critique of the economic, social, and cultural order of capitalism and to the development of that critique by later Marxists....And it was my intention to suggest, when I wrote that last sentence in 1980, that ours too is a time of waiting for new and unpredictable possibilities of renewal. It is also a time for resisting as prudently and courageously and justly and temperately as possible the dominant social, economic, and political order of advanced modernity. So it was twenty-six years ago, so it is still."¹

For MacIntyre, the loss of traditional context and justification (due to the epistemological crisis) leads to social and moral changes, which in turn result in new authority and justification. And often we need to see things from the vantage point of a different tradition such as Aristotelian ethics to review our own tradition:

"it is only from the standpoint of a very different tradition, one whose beliefs and presuppositions were articulated in their classical form by Aristotle, that we can understand both the genesis and the predicament of moral modernity."²

He also learned from Aquinas that an account of the human good is inadequate unless there is a metaphysical grounding with a purpose. In other words, justification of human actions and beliefs could only be teleological:

"... I had now learned from Aquinas that my attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, "After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory", Third Edition, 2007, previously published in 1981, 1984, The University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, Prologue of "After Virtue", after a quarter of a century, Kindle Version, Loc. 189-194.

² Ibid., Loc. 68.

of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do.”¹

He had been a Christian and a Marxist follower, trying to reconcile the two, and then abandoned his Communist membership, but retained the Marxist ideal of social justice. After the enlightenment epistemological crisis, his philosophical dilemma is whether to maintain the rational ideal of metaphysical justification, or to lapse into postmodern relativism. But he is determined to reject relativism as a genuine follower of Aristotelian or Abrahamic tradition in assessing the merits of one tradition against another:

“Yet, just because there are no such neutral standards, the protagonists of a defeated tradition may not recognize, and may not be able to recognize, that such a defeat has occurred. They may well recognize that they confront problems of their own to which no fully satisfactory solution has as yet been advanced, but it may be that nothing compels them to go any further than this.

They will still take themselves to have excellent reasons for rejecting any invitation to adopt the standpoint of any other rival and incompatible tradition, even in imagination, for if the basic principles that they now assert are true and rationally justified, as they take them to be, then those assertions advanced by adherents of rival traditions that are incompatible with their own must be false and must lack rational justification. So they will continue—perhaps indefinitely—to defend their own positions and to proceed with their own enquiries, unable to recognize that those enquiries are in fact condemned to sterility and frustration.”²

Is MacIntyre still optimistic of what he attempts to achieve: evaluating one’s own tradition from the vantage point of another? Yet the above passage seems to echo Lindbeck’s distinction between justified and true belief. In inter-religious dialogues, we need to assume that the rival traditions may be justified but not necessarily true. Nevertheless, if we are self-reflective enough, we may be able to critically examine our own tradition, which does not occur very often. Here we could apply the cultural-linguistic approach to such self-examination, and accept that all our religious doctrines are just second - order statements and subject to change. But what is this unknown goal we are striving for and aiming at?

After 25 years of first publishing *After Virtue*, MacIntyre wrote in his new Prologue: “Central to these (the theses and arguments in the book) was and is the claim that it is only possible to understand the dominant moral culture of advanced modernity adequately from a standpoint external to that culture.”³ This is a never-ceasing spirit of inquiry. It is also a religious and metaphysical mystery as to where we could find the neutral standards to compare diverse traditions and decide which tradition is not only more justifiable but also ultimately true.

Confucius: The Secular As Sacred (Herbert Fingarette)

Finally let us move on to a non-Abrahamic tradition as exemplified by Fingarette’s book, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*, to see a different view of human life in this multicultural world.

¹ Ibid., Loc. 83.

² Ibid., Loc. 148.

³ Ibid., Loc. 54.

The *Analects of Confucius* has been the valuable cultural heritage of ordinary Chinese and East Asian people in their daily life since the time of Socrates and the Buddha. Its spirit as revived by Herbert Fingarette's insightful work mentioned above has injected a fresh reading into the *Analects*. To a certain extent, his interpretation is true to the spirit of Confucius and also in harmony with what we have discussed above about the cultural-linguistic interpretative framework.

What is Confucius's humanness, which blends so well the secular and sacred to the extent of historically harmonizing and assimilating different cultures and people in East Asia? We tend to ask this question whenever we revisit the *Analects*. Traditionally scholars would consider *jen* (仁 benevolence, love or human-heartedness) as the Confucian core virtue and other virtues such as *li* (禮 rites or rules of social propriety) as expressions or manifestations of the core virtue. According to Fingarette, the translations and interpretations before him have read Christian, Buddhist or Taoist connotations into the *Analects*. His proposed "pure" rendition of the *Analects* is that Confucius's world is a "Human Community as Holy Rite", not relying on any superstitious acts, but on the power of ritual performance:

"The remarks which follow are aimed at revealing the magic power which Confucius saw, quite correctly, as the very essence of human virtue. It is finally by way of the magical that we can also arrive at the best vantage point for seeing the holiness in human existence which Confucius saw as central. In the twentieth century this central role of the holy in Confucius's teaching has been largely ignored because we have failed to grasp the existential point of that teaching."¹

The *Analects* is so close to everyday life on the one hand and also so traditional on the other that we could read it either as secular or as sacred. Confucius could be construed as a believer in *Heaven* (天 God) or a pragmatic agnostic. Fingarette helps us see the holiness in human existence in Confucius's world (despite the latter's maintaining a respectful distance from the traditional spirits):

"Devote yourself to man's duties," says the Master, "respect spiritual beings but keep (them at a) distance." (*Analects*, 6:20) He suited the deed to the precept and himself "never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders, or spirits." (*Analects*, 7:20) In response to direct questions about the transcendent and supernatural he said: "Until you are able to serve men, how can you serve spiritual being? Until you know about life, how can you know about death?" (*Analects* 11:11)²

But the Master's main focus is to mold the raw impulse and potential of man with the social forms of *li* (禮) into true humanity:

"The (spiritually) noble man is one who has labored at the alchemy of fusing social forms (*li* 禮) and raw personal existence in such a way that they transmuted into a way of being which realizes *te* (德), the distinctively human virtue or power. ... Men become truly human as their raw impulse is shaped by *li*. And *li* is the fulfillment of human impulse, the civilized expression of it - not a formalistic dehumanization. *Li* is the specifically humanizing form of the dynamic relation of man-to-man."³

¹ F Herbert Fingarette, "Confucius: The Secular as Sacred", Harper San Francisco, a division of Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1972, Kindle Version, Page 1.

² Ibid., Page 2.

³ Ibid., Page 7.

For our purpose here of stressing the cultural-linguistic approach, Fingarette's interpretation is more compatible with this approach than the experiential-expressive one of treating the inner life as something prior, spiritual, and transcendent. In some way, the fresh reading reflects more truly Chinese and East Asian people's understanding of Confucius in their daily practice. Their belief does not lie in ontological existence, power or otherworldly salvation.

The ontologically Heaven-endowed human nature in the *Doctrine of the Mean* much elaborated upon by later Confucianists during the Song (970-1279 CE) and Ming (1368-1644 CE) Dynasty, and Contemporary New Confucianists such as MouZongsan (牟宗三) is apparently a later development and interpolation of Confucius's original teaching in the *Analects*. Significantly, Contemporary Chinese Christian scholars have taken exception to this treatment of Confucian God (Heaven), almost equating human moral subjectivity with God, but would not object to Fingarette's interpretation.

Epilogue: Contemplating the Silent Mysteries behind Various Traditions

The question (posed at the beginning of this essay, "Do humans need to make clear and proclaim what they believe or disbelieve?") actually occurred to me when I witnessed an unknown god worshipped in a small temple in remote Taiwan. Many people there have never asked questions as to which gods to believe and why?

In the West, philosophers since Immanuel Kant have argued well that we cannot directly know what we believe by pure reason. Lindbeck's post-liberal cultural-linguistic argument is an attempt to justify what we believe without neutral and objective standards. And his argument relying on tradition is in harmony with MacIntyre's metaphysical justification of belief and Fingarette's interpretation of Confucius' *Analects*.

Perhaps Lindbeck is right that man is primarily a cultural-linguistic animal before he is a thinking animal. Even thinking is not necessarily something initiated from human experience: it could well be a gift of nature which just comes to us mysteriously from another world. To make clear what we humans believe may be the cultural habit of certain traditions rather than that of others. In the case of Confucius, historically whenever his followers turn to metaphysical justifications they tend to deviate from his original teaching. It is inter-religiously inspiring that we had to wait till 20th century for an American philosopher Fingarette to bring us back to a more original Confucius.

If we stay closely to the text of the *Analects*, the performance of rites in human community is related to music, of which Confucius was a devotee (as Fingarette reminds us). So Confucius' world is more cultural, linguistic and even artistic than metaphysically argumentative. He once states: "Do not look, do not listen, do not speak, and do not act, if not in accordance with the holy rites of conduct (*li* 禮)"¹ And the *li* is traditionally - embedded, but subject to change, being contingent upon circumstances (almost similar to the cultural-linguistic interpretative scheme).

Confucius had the foresight to know what we find out only after more than 2000 years as a result of epistemological crisis: "To be human is creatively and mysteriously traditional; there is no need and it is impossible to metaphysically make clear what it means." He said: "I am a transmitter, and not a creator."² (述而不作)

¹ *Analects*, 12:1.

² *Analects*, 7:1.

Furthermore, social performance of rites is like music performance. We could easily detect what is genuine and what is fake : there is no need to go into the performer's inner state of mind. As Fingarette interprets well: "We detect all this in the performance; we do not have to look into the psyche or personality of the performer. It is all 'there,' public."¹

Nevertheless, Zen Buddhist D. T. Suzuki describes the same performance in a different way because his tradition is more inwardly oriented; instead, he refers to the spirit and God's inspiration:

"Take the case of painting. I often hear Chinese or Japanese art critics declare that Oriental art consists in depicting spirit and not form....A real artist is a creator and not a copyist. He has visited God's workshop and has learned the secrets of creation - creating something out of nothing. With such a painter every stroke of his brush is the work of creation, and it cannot be retraced because it never permits a repetition. God cannot cancel his fiat; it is final, irrevocable, it is an ultimatum."²

But Suzuki is more of an experiential-expressionist than a cultural-linguist according to Lindbeck's theological taxonomy:

"In the same way every minute of human life as long as it is an expression of its inner self is original, divine, creative, and cannot be retrieved. Each individual life thus is a great work of art. Whether or not one makes it a fine inimitable masterpiece depends upon one's consciousness of the working of *śūnyatā* within oneself."³

The Buddhist has more to say about the secret of creativity than Confucius' adumbration and embodiment of the prosaic, secular and yet sacred truth of how to be human. If I may borrow Professor Patrick Laude's book title, "Shimmering Mirrors: Reality and Appearance In Contemplative Metaphysics East and West", somewhere behind the "shimmering mirrors" of various traditions there are mysteries of creativity no one can penetrate.

Confucius says, "Does Heaven say anything? The four seasons run their course, and the myriad things in the universe are naturally reproduced."⁴ Confucius's God is a silent One. For him, it is not necessary for humans to make clear and proclaim what they believe or disbelieve. Unknowingly, many ordinary people in Athens and East Asia share with Confucius's belief in their worship of the unknown God.

Last but not least, George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach and Paul Tillich's experiential-expressionist could after all be unified and identical if we go to the depth of "learning to be human" as examined at the beginning of this essay where Masao Abe and John Cobb agree in their opposing God as substance or as a divine power acting on events from outside. Human spirituality could only come from the same source, that is what we learn ultimately as humans about how to be human.

¹ Ibid., Page 53.

² Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, "Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist", 2017, Kindle Version, Loc. 450.

³ Ibid., Loc. 458.

⁴ Analects, 17:17k