

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AS A FORM OF EMPIRICISM

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In a paper read before the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Far Eastern Association at Washington D.C., in 1955, I made this statement: "Neo-Confucianism is, in fact, a type of empiricism in which the term 'experience' has a wider scope than in what we ordinarily understand as empiricism."* We find substantiation of it in the Neo-Confucianism of the Sung and Ming periods, in the philosophy of Liu Chi-shan and Huang Li-chou who continued the tradition of the philosophy of mind, and also in the philosophies of Wang Ch'uan-shan, Yen Hsi-chai, Li Shu-ku, and Tai Tung-yüan who in their various ways reacted vehemently to both the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of principle. None of these philosophers, however, had any inkling beyond the narrow confines of moral empiricism, a view just as partial and distorting as modern scientific empiricism when applied to life as a whole. It is the purpose of this paper to develop in the light of certain modern philosophical ideas a form of empiricism, which, while taking as its point of departure the philosophy of mind, would give us a synoptic view of life in all its stages of development as a whole. This paper may not, therefore, read like one strictly on Chinese philosophy. But the time has come for us to break through a regional approach to philosophical problems which are supposed to be beyond time and space. It is obvious that only an outline can be attempted here.

The mind is, according to the Neo-Confucianists, quiescent and unmoving, not evident through any tangible signs. It becomes active when it is stimulated. The assumptions of these statements are clear: there is the mind, and there is that which stimulates the mind. To the latter we shall give the name the field. These are the primary facts which have to be postulated before any reasoning can proceed, and one cannot be discussed separately from the other. In other words, there is nothing to talk about other than the mind's activity after it is

* This paper appeared subsequently in *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, Druzelles, Dixième volume: 1952-1955, pp. 347-364. This sentence is quoted with slight modifications from pp. 350-351

stimulated. This activity is what we shall call experience. To the Neo-Confucianists, this activity is the function or manifestation of the mind.

What is the nature of the interaction between the mind and the field? The mind, when stimulated, moves in the field, moulds it into forms, and, in moulding it, accepts the discipline imposed upon it by the stimulating field. Its activity does no violence to the nature of the field. And the field lends itself to the influence of the moulding mind. In being moulded, the field imparts its nature to the mind in the form of laws or categories limiting the extent of the mind's activity. Experience is the result of the mind's Odyssey through the field. As knowledge begins with experience and experience does not go beyond the stage of actual movement and activity, the mind and the field beyond that stage are forever beyond our ken. We have available only experience. To explain what experience is, however, is to show all the stages the mind goes through in its journey through the field.

Since experience is the result of the life of a journeying mind, it is evident that it is not limited to what is sensory. Everything that comes as the result of the life of the mind is experience. Thus from the mind's activity by means of the senses, the intellect, the aesthetic sense and the moral sense, respectively come sensory, intellectual, aesthetic and moral experience. And religious experience is no less an experience, being the result of that sense whose satisfaction demands a direct contact with what is taken to be the ultimate reality.

This larger conception of experience demands an equally comprehensive non-reductionist conception of the field. Like experience, the field cannot be limited to what is commonly called the physical world which confronts our senses. There are other aspects of the field which are no less objective than this physical world. We have: the intellectual world which confronts our intellect, the aesthetic world which confronts our aesthetic sense, the moral world which confronts our moral sense, and the religious world which confronts our religious intuition. In journeying through the different worlds, the mind works under different sets of conditions imposed upon it by the different worlds. These conditions express the nature of these different worlds, forming the limiting force of the field and restricting the mind's activity to specific sets of possibilities. They explain why things are what they are and not otherwise. They give these worlds their objectivity. They are laws. These laws are specific and unique. We have as many sets of laws as there are worlds in the field.

For the mind and the field to react to each other in the way we have described, there must be an element common to them both. There is a qualitative interpenetration between the two. This interpenetration may be described in terms of understanding or ignorance on the part of the mind and intelligibility or lack of intelligibility on the part of the field. We can see that they are really one and the same. What the mind understands is intelligible, and what it ignores unintelligible. When the field is enlightened by the mind and becomes intelligible, it is virtually absorbed into the mind and becomes a part of the mind. Understanding, then, may be conceived to be a process by means of which the mind overcomes the field in an attempt to transform it into a part of the mind. However, this process of overcoming is in complete harmony with the nature of the field. The field contributes significantly towards the forms the understanding takes with reference to the different worlds in the field. It embodies in its nature the laws which the mind has to follow in overcoming the field. History may be conceived in terms of the mind's effort to attain complete actualization by means of understanding the field or making the field completely intelligible. This is another way of saying that history is the mind's effort to transform the field into mind. History is indeed a record of the advancement of the mind from ignorance to understanding. It is a process of self-actualization of the mind.

Why the mind should ever be ignorant, why the mind is not all actuality at all times, are questions which have no answers. Perhaps, on the analogy of human experience a suggestion may be made. Life, such as is contained in a grain of wheat, must first lose itself before it can give forth life abundantly. Similarly, the mind may have to lose itself first and become non-mine, i. e., the field, before it becomes richer and more significant. The non-mind is the first condition which sets the mind on the process of self-cultivation, development, and progress. It furnishes the necessary discipline in the training of the mind towards a fuller realization. It seems as though the mine needs trials of this kind in order to become fully conscious of itself. The mind becoming self-conscious is the fully actualized and enlightened mind.

In the light of this suggestion, the process of the development of the mind becomes extremely important. If the mind does not proceed in the process of development, it would always remain in the state of ignorance. All errors, intellectual or moral, can be traced to this ignorant state of the mind as their source.

The possibility of knowledge demands that the mind and the world it knows have a point of identity. When knowledge becomes perfect, the identity is complete.

We said that the field lends itself to the influence of the moulding mind and yet limits its activity to certain sets of possibilities. These possibilities represent the extent within which the mind can express its creativity. We also said that the mind, in moulding the field, accepts the discipline imposed upon it by the field. This discipline indicates the condition under which the mind must work; and moulding or creativity means the eternal movement towards a fuller realization of the mind. The eternal and incessant movement, though limited by the nature of the field, forges its way forward undaunted. That it is limited gives it an incentive to break the limit in its advance. Thus the two primary facts, the activity of the mind and the limiting force of the field, though seemingly contradictory, are complementary to each other. Without the limiting force activity would have lost all its dynamic power; and without activity the limiting force would never become a reality. It is through this interplay of the mind's activity and the field's limiting force that this universe came into being. In point of fact, they have never been found in a state of separation. Where there is activity there is found certain limiting conditions; and *vice versa*. So not only has the activity of the mind the ability to reveal the nature of the mind, but the limiting force of the field also has the same ability, for it reveals the mind which moves creatively in accordance with the nature of the field. And conversely, not only is the field revealed by its limiting force, it is also shown by the activity of the mind, for this activity shows the nature of the field which lends itself to the moulding influence of the mind. In the course of its movement the mind has to go through different stages, all different in the measure of the limiting force they exhibit. This difference finds its correlate in the varying degrees of activity of the mind. The greater the limiting force, the more constrained the mind's activity; and the smaller the force, the freer the mind.

The worlds encountered by the mind in its Odyssey vary in an ascending scale, and this variation is reflected in the stages of experience which appears as the result of the Odyssey. Since the limiting forces of different worlds vary in measure, the principles or laws that are expressive of the nature of these worlds are consequently different. That which limits our senses comes from the

physical world, and this physical world has its specific order and principles. Similarly, the intellectual world, the aesthetic world, the moral world, and the religious world, each has its own specific order and principles, its *raison d'être*. Each of these worlds takes the principles of the preceding stage or stages as its basis, and builds on this basis something new. This new element is not to be explained by the principles of the preceding stages alone, but to be explained in terms of these principles in conjunction with the new principles specific to the new stage. These principles explain why things are what they are and not otherwise. On the one hand they are expressive of the nature of the field in all its stages; and on the other they are the tools the mind uses to bring order into the field. Being tools they reveal at one stroke both the nature of the manipulator and the worlds on which they are applied. Thus the laws and principles of the different worlds reveal both the mind and the field.

The fundamental nature of experience is change; experience is forever in a flux. However, its change or movement is not limited to a mechanical nature. A mechanical change is completely conditioned by a force external to itself. Not only that, but without an external force no change can take place; and the nature of the external force also determines the nature of the change. The change of experience is not so confined. An analysis of our own experience will reveal that the change of experience takes two forms; change as initiated from within and change as growth and development.

We shall first consider change activated from within. Take any experience as an example. A certain object is presented. Sight gives us the quality of whiteness, and touch gives us the quality of hardness. Now the question is: do these qualities belong originally to the object and enter into our experience unmodified? Does our mind in receiving them add nothing to what they originally are? Is the mind to be conceived as *tabula rasa*, recording faithfully the incoming impressions as they are? Or, do they owe their coming into being at least in part to the work of the mind? Should the former be the case, then how are we to explain the common phenomenon that when we are absent-minded we may stare and appear to listen and yet we are not a whit the wiser for the staring and listening? It is evident that there must be some force coming from the mind which acts as formulating (moulding) influence in bringing about the phenomenon. And yet it is equally evident that if there were the mind alone, the phenomena would not appear either. There is something from the field

which makes the qualities what they are; for in spite of its formulating influence, the mind cannot call white black or soft hard. There are definite conditions under which the mind can be active. These conditions are what I have called the limiting force of the field. Hardness, softness, whiteness and other sensory qualities are the simplest data in our experience; and yet their appearance will be impossible without the contributing activity of the mind. *A fortiori*, percept, concept, hypothesis, law, etc., which are much more complex than sense perception, depend ever increasingly on the active participation of the mind.

Hence the change that we observe in our experience does not depend merely on the stimulus from without. It is true that where there is a stimulus there will always be a response, whether in a world of experience or in a mechanical world; but this bond of stimulus-response need not hold in our world of experience in exactly the same way as in a mechanical world. For the form of response in the world of experience is to a certain extent determined by the mind. We may therefore say that the mind in a sense is constitutive of the phenomena of the world, which is known to us as a world of experience. Of course, the part played by the mind in the formation of phenomena depends on the nature of the world by which it is confronted. In the domain of sense-experience, the activity of the mind is limited to attending or not attending to the object presented; there the mind is the least active and the limiting force of the field the greatest. And yet even here we find the active and selective power of the mind. From now on as the world of experience expands, the active power of the mind increases with the process of development. At the point where the mind becomes self-conscious, making itself its field, its activity becomes creativity; because the limiting force by which it is confronted comes from none other than itself. To work under self-imposed conditions means freedom, the primary condition for creativity.

Secondly, let us consider change as growth and development. There are two ways to consider it: 1) temporal-spatial, and 2) logical. First, changes in experience are identical with time. No experience is anything when abstracted from time. Time changes with whatever forms its being and substance. Abstract time does not exist, because it provides no mark for the distinction of what is present, past, and future. They are all points in time, without any characteristic which would make the past past; the present present; and the future future. In real time, past, present, future, each has its specific mark. The movement from

the past to the present is not merely one dimensional flow from one time-point to another time-point. It is a process of growth, for the past is never really past; it is gathered up and brought into the present. The present receives and preserves what the past has to impart and brings it along together with its own additions into the future. The temporal flow may be likened to the expanding of a river from tiny springs. In the process nothing is lost, hence, nothing is ever past. The stream of experience accumulates all that has been and hurries along into the future.

One-dimensional time flow is an abstraction. Time cannot be considered apart from space. Time and space are the warp and the woof of our world of experience. Without either, there would be no world of experience, neither would there be time or space. In this factual concrete world of experience, we find that the movement of our experience is a process of growth; what is past becomes preserved in the present, serving as a background in our act of judgment and as a foundation for future growth.

Second, experience has a tendency to expand toward the direction of the more comprehensive, and ultimately toward the most comprehensive whole. No experience is self-sufficient. All experience endeavor to transcend their own limits in an effort to come into relation with other experiences to form a greater and more coherent whole. In getting into a greater context, an experience becomes more meaningful. It also becomes more and more intelligible. "Meaning" and "intelligibility" mean the same thing. When a piece of experience has a definite place in the scheme of things it has meaning; and when a thing can be placed in such a scheme of experience it is intelligible: two ways of saying the same thing.

It is apparent that the process of growth and expansion of experience does not and cannot stop at any stage short of a complete whole. From one point of view we may say that we desire a perfect understanding of things, and we will not stop at any partial understanding. From another point of view, we may say that our experience is seeking its fullest meaning. This urge is so fundamental that ancient philosophers described it as the incentive to philosophizing.

Our experience is never more than some fragmentary piece; it is limited and finite. It is limited and finite because it is conditioned by things beyond it. Because it is limited and finite, it craves always to attain to ever greater and higher levels. Because it is conditioned by things beyond it, its fullest meaning

cannot be deduced from within itself. If we wish to get its fullest meaning, if we wish to have a perfect understanding of it, we have to understand its conditions. But these conditions, being finite, have, in turn, their conditions, which need to be mastered first. And these again have their conditions, which have again their conditions. It is thus evident that before we reach the whole no complete understanding or fullest meaning of anything is possible. The whole alone can be said to be in possession of a perfect meaning; that is, we can deduce its complete meaning from within itself without reference to anything beyond it. "Its existence is its meaning and its meaning is its existence." This whole, whether attainable or not, is present in finite experience, an inspirational ideal that forever beckons us onward into ever higher and greater realms.