

**KANT in ASIA**

**The Unity of Human Personhood**

**International Conference**

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**METACRITIQUE OF PRACTICAL REASON**

**Back from Kant's universalized egocentrism via Kongzi's moral reciprocity  
and Mengzi's compassion to Huainanzi's reciprocal resonance and Zhuangzi's  
ethos without Ego**

**Keynote Speech**

**Günter Wohlfart /Tuchan - France**

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## Introductory remark

Dear Steve,  
Dear colleagues and guests,  
first of all I have to thank Steven Palmquist for his brave invitation.  
I say brave, because he gave me, the Post-Kantian, the chance to talk about Kant.

I have to apologize for reading from a paper – a bad old German habit – instead of giving a free speech. But after 5 years in France I'm losing my English.

I also have to apologize for the length of my paper.

Do you know the little Mark -Twain- story?

One day he visited a church and listened to the priest. After 30 minutes he was so fascinated by the sermon that he decided to give 5 Dollars for the collection. The priest continued to speak and after 45 minutes Marc Twain thought that it would be better to give nothing.

The priest kept on speaking and when Marc Twain left the church after 60 minutes, he took out 5 Dollars from the collection.

Well now, I'm going to speak 65 minutes today.

It will be the longest keynote speech of my life, the day of reckoning with Kant.

Before I start, let me add some words to my CV.

In the roaring sixties I started as a Kantian. Adorno was my teacher in Frankfurt and Habermas had to take over as the supervisor of my PhD.-thesis – of course on Kant.

Now I am an Ex-Kantian.

After a long round-about way via ancient China, after a long way with many 'turns', I finally became something like a – *horribile dictu* – 'Euro-Daoist'.

Correspondingly the first and longest part of my paper (3 quarters of an hour) will deal with the West, with modernity, with Kant.

In the second much shorter part of my paper I'll go East and I'll go back to antiquity, to ancient China and make some brief remarks on Kongzi, Mengzi and finally on Huainanzi and on my favourite: on the Zhuangzi.

I hope, that this long distance in space and time will make a change of aspects possible and let us see the Kantian sky-scrapers of our home-town of philosophy in another light – after having left it.-

I promise you a provocative lecture. Let's go.

**Part one**  
**The West :Kant**  
**1.1 Kant in Asia**

‘Kant lebt’ – Kant lives, that is the allusive title of a book that appeared in 2004, 200 years after Kant’s death. The epigonic Neo-Kantians celebrate his resurrection every year. Kant is the national hero of German philosophy. The most famous and influential German philosophy professors are little Kantians, ‘Käntchen’ as Jean Paul called them - first of all my, so to say, doctor-stepfather Jürgen Habermas.

Kant’s moral philosophy, his so-called ‘practical reason’ appears as the politically correct philosophy in Germany. Kant is Germany’s best-selling philosophical export.

But Kant’s tree of knowledge is not only an evergreen in Germany.

Kant’s reloaded moral philosophy seems to become the proto-global-morality with a claim for universal validity. Kant seems to be omnipresent.

Kant is in Asia. Kant is in China – in several up-dated versions.

From my own experience during the last years I can mention two examples: The Academia Sinica in Taipei as well as the Academy of Social Sciences in Shanghai are breeding grounds for little Neo-Kantians.

Kant is in Hongkong, he is here right now.

I agree with the Chinese writer Zhou Derong who already said some years ago: “The spiritual achievements of the Chinese in the last two decades are solely based on Kant’s critical theory of reason. Ironically enough Kant’s comeback in the early eighties had to do with Deng Xiaoping’s statement, which roughly reads: practice is the sole criterion for verifying the truth ( of a practical theory)”<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Kant I’m deeply convinced that this is true. To vary Hegel’s words: The truth of a practical theory is practice. A pure practical theory which is not practicable is untrue. It is only theoretically practical – like Kant’s ‘practical’ reason. I am convinced, that Kant’s main principle of morality is in fact unsuitable to regulate moral action. It even might be dangerous. Why?

I’ll try to show that during the next 30 minutes.

And because I believe, that the ‘source’ of Kant’s critique of pure reason is so pure, so distilled that it is impossible for fish to live in it, I think, that Kant’s critique itself must be criticized.

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<sup>1</sup> Zhou Derong, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 21.7. 2004.

## 1.2 Critique and metacritique

Please remember Kant's prophetic admonition in the preface to his *Critique of pure reason*: "Our age is the true age of criticism, to which everything (sic ! G.W.) has to submit."<sup>2</sup>

Yes, I agree: everything, even criticism itself.

To follow the consequences of Kant's own critique finally means to go beyond Kant and to be consequent is, following Kant, the highest virtue of a philosopher. You remember the famous words from the end of the *Critique of pure reason* "Der kritische Weg ist allein noch offen" – the critical way alone is still open". Yes, I agree, but I would like to go with Kant one step further than Kant and say: The metacritical way alone is still open. Especially a metacritique of practical reason is necessary.

The term 'metacritique' was created by Kant's contemporary and his first criticizer Hamann and later on borrowed by Adorno.

Metacritique means critique of critique. Without this critique of critique, criticism is in danger to become itself a form of dogmatism.: dogmatic criticism.

I repeat: the task is to go with Kant beyond Kant, to climb on Kant's shoulders without falling back behind Kant into bad old dogmatic metaphysics.

And by the way: Kant himself emphasized that it is not at all unusual to understand a philosopher better than he understood himself.<sup>3</sup>

Well: Especially as for moral philosophy my *credo* is, I repeat:

The metacritical way alone is still open.

We have to go this way, if we want to avoid the dogmatism of an uncritical criticism.

We have to go this way, if we want to avoid the dialectics of an unenlightened enlightenment, which is as Adorno showed in his *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, totalitarian.

The *apex* of Kant's critical theory was his critique of an uncritical unenlightened use of God as the crux of dogmatic metaphysics.

But what about metacritique ?

What is the crux of dogmatic criticism?

What is the dogmatic core, which hides under the guise of critique and enlightenment?

Could it be, that this crux is the idea of our Ego, the same idea which also lets us be a person, as Kant says?

Could it have something to do with the supposed 'unity of human personhood'?

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<sup>2</sup> Kant. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A XI Anm.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Kant, *KrV*, B 371.

### 1.3 The modern Ego as the executor of the Christian God

The first and presumptuous sentence in Kant's *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* reads – I translate: "That man in his conception can have the 'I', elevates him endlessly above all other creatures on earth. This is the reason why he is a person and because of the unity of his consciousness despite all changes which may happen to him (he is) one and the same person, that is a living thing which is, concerning its rank and its dignity totally different from things like animals, which are not endowed with reason and which one can treat as one likes."

Kant in the footsteps of his protagonist of modernity: Descartes.

The 'I' elevates human beings endlessly above all other living things.

The pathos of this 'ascension' of the Ego reminds us, that this Ego still reflects the glory of God.

The modern Ego is a creation in the image of the Christian God.

Our person with its supposed unity is the *persona*, the mask of God, the mask of the Christian God as the only true one God with his supposed uniqueness.

God was the highest being, the transcendent *apex* of dogmatic metaphysics in pre-modern times.

In modern times the Ego replaced God and inherited his diseases.

Since Descartes, the forerunner of enlightenment, the Ego is the *credendum*, the first article of faith in modernity. *Ego cogito, ergo sum*, this was Descartes' famous fallacy, something like an ontological Ego-proof.

Nietzsche's later diagnosis was: "God is dead". Maybe it was a bit overhasty, because God revived. God revived in the shape of our modern Ego with its omnipotence-fantasies. A resurrection of God in form of the erection of our modern Ego. I'm tempted to call it our 'Egod', if you permit me this neologism. The Ego, the I, the subject became the *ens realissimum*, the most real being in modernity. The Ego is the executor of the Christian God.

The enlightenment of the Ego is the profane, mundane metamorphosis of the 'light' of God. Egocentrism is secularized theocentrism. I repeat:

God was the highest being, the transcendent *apex* of dogmatic metaphysics.

The Ego is the highest being, the transcendental *apex* of dogmatic criticism.

Kant calls the 'synthetic unity of transcendental apperception' the "highest point, on which all use of reason, the whole logic itself and after it, the transcendental philosophy must be fixed, yes, this capacity is reason (Verstand) itself."<sup>4</sup>

What a pathos!

This unity of apperception is for Kant the 'vehicle of all concepts', the 'pole star' of his philosophical horizon – as he himself says.

Or we even could say, that the Ego is the sun, which enlightens our modern cognition.

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<sup>4</sup> Kant, *KrV*. B 133 Anm.

The Copernican turn was, that the earth revolves around the sun and not vice versa.

The Kantian turn, his ‘Revolution der Denkungsart’ was, that everything revolves around our Ego and its cognition.

Copernican heliocentrism and Kantian egocentrism.-

Once upon a time we believed in God and its uniqueness.

In modern times we believe in our Ego and its identity and unity. But our Ego is a black box, a *asylum ignorantiae* – like God.

But what about the supposed ‘unity of apperception’ as the reason of the unity of our person?

Is the synthetic unity of apperception, this vanishing point in which the lines of thinking seem to intersect, is this supposed synthetic unity in truth only a synoptic illusion?

Is the transcendental apperception a transcendental illusion?

And if I say ‘transcendental’ I use it in the strict Kantian sense : I call it a transcendental illusion because it concerns the conditions of the possibility of our cognition. But nevertheless it is only an illusion. Like the vanishing point is only a *focus imaginarius*.

Ego cogito? I think? No, I only think that I think. It thinks. Thinking thinks. You don’t believe it? Think about it! - We act, as if there would be an actor, called ‘I’. But in fact, the I is thinkers fiction. Take a conspicuous example for that, what happens in cognition:

Every morning you see the sun rising, but it is only a practical illusion. We learned from Copernicus: not the sun moves, but the earth.

You see: As the sun ‘rises’ in the morning and ends the night, so does our Ego ‘wake up’ in the morning and end our dreams.

But as the sun nevertheless remains in the centre of our solar system up there in the silent night of the universe, Ego’s waking itself is only a dream, a butterfly-dream of the unity of human personhood.

#### **1.4 The Christian God and Pope Benedict Monotheism – Monism – Universalism**

A little excursion in order to point out the dangers of universalism.

Our subject today is: Kant and the unity of personhood.

I tried to sketch Kantianism as a secularized form of Christianity.

I tried to uncover some connecting passages between Kant’s concepts of Ego and person and its supposed ‘unity’ on the one hand and the Christian God and its ‘uniqueness’ on the other hand.

I underlined the necessity of a metacritique of Kant’s criticism and especially of his critique of practical reason. But I didn’t give an answer to the question:

‘Why is such a critique *in concreto* necessary?’

I already told you: I believe that such a metacritique is necessary, because a dogmatic uncritical critique of practical reason à la Kant can be dangerous. But why?

More concretely speaking:

I believe, that the faith in the universalization of my will, claimed in Kant's categorical imperative, which is based on the unity of my person can be dangerous. We'll see.

I'd like to take a run-up again and start with the crux of universalism in Christianity in order to jump to the crucial problem of universalization in Kant's categorical imperative.

Western culture is deeply rooted in Christianity. Christianity is, like the Islam and the Jewish religion, a monotheistic religion.

Monotheism is a form of monism (from Greek: *monos*, one ). Monotheism is the faith in one God as the only true one.

Monotheism is dangerous; dangerous insofar as it claims to have a monopoly on truth. This involves the danger of dogmatism and fundamentalism.

But in reality there is not only one true religion , *una vera religio*, as Augustine defined Christianity. There is not only one God, not only one 'chosen people' and not only one 'God's country', as many Americans believe. Nobody has the monopoly on truth. There are many equally true, unique religions. Untrue are only those ones, which pretend to be the only true ones.

If two such monotheistic religions with the claim to the sole representation of truth are confronted with each other, than there is the danger of a clash. Think for example of the continuous war between Israel and Palestine. Monotheism is dangerous insofar as it has a missionary impact and may easily lead to fundamentalism.

When I think of Christianity, I think first of the trails of blood which its crusades left behind over the last 2000 years. I think of the crusades at the beginning of the last millennium ( 1096 – 1291), blessed by pope Urban, in which about 5 million people lost their lives.

Monism and universalism are two sides of the same coin (The Latin *unus* is the translation of the Greek *monos*, one). The Christian claim for universality is based on the 'universality of truth'. Pope Benedict confirms " the obligation to send all peoples in the whole world into the school of Jesus Christ, because he is truth personified and therefore the way of personhood."<sup>5</sup> Dixit Benedictus , the *pontifex maximus* of the *una vera sancta ecclesia*.

Benedict believes in Jesus Christ as "the only saviour of all men."<sup>6</sup>

I believe, that the world would be saved, if it would be saved from saviours who presume to be the only saviours of all men. Jesus Christ may be the saviour of many people, this is a faith one may have or not have.

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz, Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Herder, Freiburg, 2004, 3. Aufl. ,55f.

<sup>6</sup> Loc.cit 44 and 90.

By the way: I don't have it. Thank God I'm an atheist.

But the faith in Jesus Christ as the only saviour of all men is a dangerous superstition.

The light of Christianity is waning, but as the sun going down at sunset it throws long and dark shadows. The evil missionary enthusiasm and militant moralism among Christian fundamentalists like the American so called 'new born Christians', the 'evangelicals', is still alive and was strong enough for a new bloody crusade at the beginning of our millennium. I think of nr. 43 and the American crusade against the 'axis of evil' – for God's sake.

I talk about the unlawful war against Iraq in which about one million civilians were killed during the last six years. "Collateral damage"?, "mission accomplished"?

This is what I called a militant Christian universalism. The creed of love, but indeed: hate and violence. 'An ihren Früchten sollt ihr sie erkennen.'

So far so bad.

But what about Kant and the dangers of his moral universalism?

Modern enlightened people don't believe any longer in the will of an almighty good God (*deus benignus*); in the face of reality one rather could believe in the evil will of a *deus malignus*. Modern enlightened people don't pray any longer: *fiat voluntas tua*. They rather believe in their own free will and as Kantians in their own good will. *Ego cogito et volo*.

The *una vera systema* of Kant's *philosophia practica universalis*<sup>7</sup> is a secularized form of the *una vera religio* and its universal pretence.

God's universality and omnipotence is to be found in a secularized disguise in modern moral philosophy, first of all in Kant's categorical imperative to universalize my own will.

Wasn't Schopenhauer right when he said, that the categorical imperative finally results out of a calculated egoism?

Let's go a bit deeper into it.

Before I do that, allow me a marginal note on the representative of modern Kantianism in Germany: Jürgen Habermas, the most famous German philosopher at the present time, our policeman of moral correctness.

In Habermas' 'universal morality of enlightenment' we recognize the same problem of universalism. Habermas' universal pretence is the secularized heritage of the Christian claim for universalism, which Habermas adopted from Kant and 'de-transcendentalized' it, to use his own word.

Despite the gap between the pre-modern pope Benedict and the modern philosopher Habermas: the claim for universality shows their spiritual affinity. I hold the view, that universalism is dangerous, whichever.

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<sup>7</sup> Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Reclam, Stuttgart 2007, 37 u. 55.



We should take good care, that we don't universalize our own morality, the own one as the only true one and as the superior one. I quote a sentence, I already quoted several times at different places, because it is very telling. Habermas said: "that our Western European morality of abstract justice is developmentally superior ( sic! G.W.) to the ethics of any culture lacking universal principles."<sup>8</sup>  
You see: The best comes from the West.

## 1.5 Kant's Ego and its good – i.e. universally valid – will

What is morality?

You know: According to Kant the principle of morality is the categorical imperative.

It is the one basic moral law of what he calls pure practical reason.

According to Kant, the categorical imperative is the only true expression of freedom and freedom means for him the autonomy of will.

The categorical imperative goes: "Act so, that the maxim of your will may at the same time be regarded as the principle of a universal legislation."

To simplify Kant's iron rule a bit: beware of the potential universality of the principle of your actions. Only if you do that, can your will be a good will, because 'good' means for Kant : 'allgemeingültig', universally valid and please mind: Kant speaks *expressis verbis* of universalitas not only of generalitas.

If you act with a good, i.e. universally applicable will, you act dutifully and your action can be called moral.

That is – in short – Kant's so-called universal morality of pure practical reason.

Another instructive version of the categorical imperative reads:

"Act so, that the maxim of your action should – by your will – become a universal law of nature."<sup>9</sup>

Here Kant's idea becomes clearer: the parallel of the law of morality with the law of nature. Even moral philosophy must go the 'secure course of science'.

This was Kant's dream in the dogmatic slumber of his rational moral philosophy *more geometrico*. Like every law of nature Kant's law of morality is characterized by universality and non-self-contradiction.

Let's recapitulate to be clear and distinct:

According to Kant the moral question par excellence is: can you universalize the maxim of your will to act. This ability to universalize is what Kant calls the positive criterion of moral actions. And strictly speaking there is a second criterion, which Kant calls the negative one. This negative criterion is self-contradiction. Both together are necessary and sufficient if your will with its

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<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Habermas, in : H.L. Dreyfus/ S.E.Dreyfus *What is Morality? A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Ethical Experience* in: D.M. Rasmussen ed. *Universalism vs. Communitarianism*, London 1990, 251.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, AA. Bd. IV, 421.

maxim is to pass the test of morality. That means, the test-question is: can you universalize the maxim of your will without self-contradiction?

Sounds a bit complicated. An example may clarify.

Let's take a command which is obeyed every day, everywhere in our warlike world, the command to kill.

If we would universalize the maxim to kill, this would finally lead to mass extermination and the final consequence would be my own death. With regard to human life the result would be: no more human beings on earth. Therefore this maxim doesn't pass the test of morality, for Kant.-

But does it really not pass this test? Let's have a closer look.

The total destruction of mankind may be deplorable for a philanthropist like Kant to whom mankind was 'sacred' as he said.

But, and please pay attention to the following argument: the universalization of the maxim to kill does not at all lead to logical self-contradiction! Already Hegel criticized Kant's 'empty moral formalism' and asked: 'Where is the logical contradiction in the idea, that there are no more humans on earth?'<sup>10</sup>

I repeat: The total destruction of human life may contradict the idea of the 'holiness of mankind' (Kant). It leads to real self-destruction but it does not lead to logical self-contradiction.

Conclusion: the maxim 'you shall kill' can be regarded as a principle of universal legislation without leading to self-contradiction and that means, that this – admittedly misanthropist – maxim is indeed in accordance with the categorical imperative!

Isn't this remarkable: the total extermination of mankind in accordance with the basic moral law of Kant's so called pure practical reason!?

No misunderstanding: If we only rely on logic in a moral philosophy *more scientifico*, which was Kant's original intention, then the categorical imperative is not tenable as the basic moral law.

The categorical imperative can only be saved if we take refuge in religion.

This is exactly what Kant does when he supposes the 'holiness of mankind', He says: "The moral law is holy(...) Man is unholy enough, but the mankind in his person must be holy for him."<sup>11</sup>

Really? At best for heaven's sake! But for the sake of our earth it could turn out one dooms-day, that it would be best, if man vanishes, vanishes like a face in the sand next to the sea, 'comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable', as Foucault said in the last words of his book *Les Mots et les Choses*.

Anyway, Kant still believed in the 'holiness of mankind'. He emphasized: "thus the moral law (...) leads to religion, that is to the realization of all duties as commandments of God."<sup>12</sup> God comes back through the back door.

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<sup>10</sup> Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, § 135.

<sup>11</sup> Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 155.

<sup>12</sup> Kant, loc.cit. 232.

God becomes a postulate of practical reason. *Deus ex moralitate*. God as a ‘postulant’ in the church of Kant’s moral universe.

In transcendental moral philosophy no answer is possible to the question, if God really exists and with regard to Kantian moral philosophy such an answer is not necessary. It is only necessary that we – as good Kantians – act, as if god exists. But only pretending God’s existence: isn’t that a form of transcendental hypocrisy?

## 1.6 Moral progress and the French Revolution

Well, let us forget about the ‘transcendental ideal’, let us forget about God and his dubious existence. Let us come down to earth again. Welcome to reality and the alleged ‘holy mankind’.

Kant believed that the destiny of mankind is an incessant progress.

According to Kant pure practical reason entitles us to presume, “that the world on the whole always progresses for the better.”<sup>13</sup>

I doubt it! Hope for progress, especially hope for moral progress is dope, Pandora’s dope. It produces sweet dreams instead of facing reality.

I agree with John Gray, who lately showed in his book *Straw Dogs* again that the hope of progress is an illusion. “As the hope for a better world has grown, so has mass murder.”<sup>14</sup>

One day, when the ‘totally enlightened earth will shine in the sign of triumphant disaster’ as Adorno said shortly before the end of the second world war in his *Dialektik der Aufklärung*<sup>15</sup>, humans will be burned like Laozi’s ‘straw dogs’<sup>16</sup> - like the victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Anyway, let us not be unfair: Kant had no chance to compare his sweet dream of eternal peace with the nightmare of two world wars and mass-destruction weapons in the 20<sup>th</sup>. century.

But in his late essay *Der Streit der Fakultäten* from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>. century (1798) Kant refers to the outstanding historical event of his time, the French Revolution, which – in his opinion – ‘proved the moral tendency of mankind’.<sup>17</sup> (More precisely he speaks of the way of thinking of the spectators of the French Revolution. I’m sure he didn’t mean the spectators of the executions during the years 1793/94.)

The historical background of Kant’s ‘revolution of thinking’, especially in his moral philosophy is the French Revolution.

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<sup>13</sup> Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Bd. VI, WB Darmstadt, 1966, 58.

<sup>14</sup> John Gray, *Straw Dogs*, Granta Books, London, 2002, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Querido Verlag, Amsterdam, 1955, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Laozi, Chap. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Bd. VI, 357f.

As for the *terreur* of the French Revolution I remind you of the chapter *Absolute Freedom and Terror* in Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, where he demonstrated the dialectics of moral fundamentalism.

Listen to the following words and guess whose words they are:

“We want to substitute morality for egoism, principles for habits, duty for propriety and the power of reason for the obligation of tradition.”<sup>18</sup>

These are not the words of Kant as I supposed, when I read them first, but the words of his contemporary Maximilien de Robespierre, the executioner of the French Revolution, a man who said, that he would even use terror as a means to achieve virtue. And he really did this until his reign of ‘morality’ which turned out to be a reign of terror came to an end in 1794 and he himself was executed on the guillotine.-

Moralistic purism, related to fundamentalism, has a predisposition to turn into moral terrorism. They are two sides of one coin. And the categorical imperative of pure rational morality has a predisposition to become its own opposite. This is its dialectics.

## 1.7 Duty ethics and its dialectics

You remember: To act according to the categorical imperative means to act with a good, that is a universally applicable will. If we do this, our acts are purely rational and not emotional. In other Kantian words: we act only dutifully(aus Pflicht) , not out of inclination or affection (aus Neigung).

I always found Kant's histrionic exclamation suspicious: “Duty! You great lofty name (...) you demand submission ...”<sup>19</sup>

Duties as ‘commandments of God’ excite a ‘holy shudder’ in Kant's soul – wie schauerlich!<sup>20</sup>

Following Kant, the respect for authorities (‘Gehorchet der Obrigkeit’) is a ‘categorical imperative’ - as he says.<sup>21</sup>

Because ‘all authorities are from God’ - oh my God! -, for a subject no resistance is allowed, not even against a tyrant. (I'll come back to this dark point when I say something about the Mengzi.)

Following Kant, the only thing the subject has to do, is to obey. The trial to kill the monarch because of tyranny is high treason and must be punished with death penalty, as Kant says.<sup>22</sup>

(*Nota bene*: Kant was an advocate of the death penalty. The only just answer to murder for him was the death-penalty. He called it the ‘categorical imperative of jurisdiction’ and condemned the *compassibilitas* of opponents as an ‘affected

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<sup>18</sup> M.de Robespierre, zitiert nach H. Mainusch, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Weltethos*, in: *Dao in China und im Westen*, Bonn 1999, 200 Anm.2. Übersetzung vom Verfasser.

<sup>19</sup> Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 154.

<sup>20</sup> Kant, *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Bd. VI, 142.

<sup>21</sup> Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, Reclam, Stuttgart 2007, 241.

<sup>22</sup> Kant, loc.cit. 177ff.

humanity’.<sup>23</sup>)The resistance against Hitler would not have found Kant’s approval.

I repeat: the unquestioning respect for authorities is a categorical imperative for Kant, because the resistance against the highest power would be self-contradiction. (If the resistance would be successful, there would be a higher power than the highest power.) Here you see, how the categorical imperative can be used, or misused to protect tyranny.

By the way: Arthur Seyss-Inquart, who was executed 1946 as one of the ten main guilty persons of the NS-regime said at the court in Nürnberg, where the trials against the Nazis took place: ”The number of human beings you can kill on the basis of hate or fancy for massacre is limited, but the number of those you can kill cold-bloodedly and systematically in the name of a military ‘categorical imperative’ is unlimited.”<sup>24</sup>

Is this a malicious distortion of Kant’s categorical imperative?

No, I don’t think so, although what he is talking about is nota categorical imperative *sensu strictu*.

I have to add here some very serious and alarming sentences from chapter VIII : *Duties of a Law-Abiding Citizen* in Hannah Arendt’s book *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil*: “...during the police examination...he (scil. Eichmann G.W.) suddenly declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant’s moral precepts, and especially according to a Kantian definition of duty. (...) And to the surprise of everybody, Eichmann came up with a approximately correct definition of the categorical imperative (...) Upon further questioning, he added that he had read Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*.”<sup>25</sup>

After some critical remarks on Eichmann’s (mis)understanding of Kant, Arendt concludes: “ Whatever Kant’s role in the formation of “the little man`s” mentality in Germany may have been, there is not the slightest doubt that in one respect Eichmann did indeed follow Kant’s precepts: a law was a law, there could be no exceptions. (...) No exceptions –this was the proof that he had always acted against his “inclinations”( Neigungen G.W.), whether they were sentimental or inspired by interest, that he had always done his “duty”.”<sup>26</sup>

Is this a diabolical distortion of Kant’s duty-ethics?

I think that it is the dialectics of duty-ethics. The ‘radical good’ has the intrinsic tendency to become its very opposite, the ‘radical evil’ or the ‘banal evil’.

Maybe Nietzsche had a good nose when he said: “The categorical imperative smacks of cruelty.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Kant, loc.cit. 196.

<sup>24</sup> Werner Stegmaier, zitiert nah H. Mainusch, *Auf dem Weg zu einem Weltethos* ,in: *Dao in China und im Westen* ,Bonn,1999,205. Übersetzung aus dem Deutschen vom Verfasser.

<sup>25</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Penguin Bocks , 1963, 135f.

<sup>26</sup> Loc. Cit 137. Compare the German version. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem, Ein Bericht über die Banalität des Bösen*, Piper, München/Zürich, 3.Aufl. 2008, 231 ff.

I owe these references to Steven Palmquist and Wong Kwok Kui.

<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, 2.Abt..6.

My metacritical conclusion : I believe that it is our unconditional duty to be very sceptical in view of unconditional duties.

My ‘categorical imperative’: no categorical imperatives!

## 1.8 Ratio et emotio – Kant on compassion

Let’s recapitulate a last time before we go East.

Kant’s pure practical reason commands to act only dutifully , not out of inclination or affection.

In other words: Pure practical reason commands to act only rational, not emotional, because only then is the potential universality of the principle of our action guaranteed.

I vary a famous word of Kant and admit: emotion without rationality is blind.

But I object: rationality without emotion is empty.

*Homo sapiens est animal rationale et emotionale.*

A radical ‘emotivism’ is as blind as a radical moral rationalism à la Kant is empty. It is an ‘empty formalism’ without any protection against abuse.

I tried to show, that pure practical reason is dangerous, because obeying the categorical imperative as its basic moral law may have disastrous consequences.

As I said at the beginning of my paper: Kant’s categorical imperative, his so-called practical reason and his good will is not a good guide on our way to practice. It is unsuitable to regulate moral action.

It is practical only in theory, not in practice. If we try to go along with it in practice, it may easily lead to our fall.

As Wittgenstein, the second, the Post-Kantian said in his *Philosophical Investigations*: “We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk, so we need friction. Back to the rough ground!”<sup>28</sup>

Friction in a moral sense is affection, emotion, sentiment. Hume was right when he said: “Morality is determined by sentiment.”<sup>29</sup>

But Kant kept on dreaming the sweet dream of good will in his dogmatic slumber of pure practical reason.

Before Kant it was Hume and after Kant it was Schopenhauer, who knew that ethics doesn’t work without sympathy and compassion. Schopenhauer knew, that abstract concepts a priori never can motivate humans to act morally.

But for Kant, devoted only to cold abstract duty, the ‘warm feeling of compassion is weak and always blind’ – as he said. He admitted, that a suffering

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<sup>28</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 107.

<sup>29</sup> Hume, *Enquiries concerning the Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Selby-Bigge, L.A. Oxford 1955, 289.

child may fill our heart with ‘melancholy and compassion’, but he adds, that this compassion never has the ‘dignity of virtue’ (‘die Würde der Tugend’).<sup>30</sup> For Kant compassion is an affect (Affect) and affects are ‘pathological attacks’ (‘krankhafte Zufälle’), which interfere with our freedom and impair the self-control.<sup>31</sup> For Kant compassion is ‘effeminate’ and ‘childish’...

No comment – only compassion.-

But, dear colleagues, please imagine a playing child, which is about to fall into a well. Next to the well sits a Kantian re-reading his *Critique of Practical Reason*. He just reads and re-reads the passage: “Act so, that the maxim of your will...” He sits and reflects... and then we hear a splash.

I’ll come back to the poor Chinese child in a minute.-

Meanwhile mind: It is not reasonable to be only reasonable.

I’ll go back now from Kant’s iron rule to Mengzi via Kongzi’s golden rule. I’ll go back with a remarkable passage in Kant’s little book *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, where he quotes the golden rule; not Kongzi’s version but the nearly identical Latin version. He calls it trivial and unsuitable as a guiding moral principle. Why? ‘It can’t be an universal law, because it does not contain the reason for the duties human beings have...’<sup>32</sup>

Now I feel a strong affection for leaving Kant and going back to Asia.

## PART TWO

### The EAST: Kongzi, Mengzi, Huainanzi, Zhuangzi

#### 2.1 Kongzi’s golden rule

The Roman Emperor Alexander Severus was so delighted with the *regula aurea*, i.e. the golden rule, that he posted it on his palace:

*Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris.* Translated into a well known German rhyme: ‘Was du nicht willst, das man dir tu, das füg auch keinem andern zu.’ ‘What you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do to others’.

The oldest secure reference to the golden rule in the West is to be found in ancient Greece in the words of Isokrates (436 – 338 BC.). We also find it in the Old Testament (Tob. 4, 15a) and in the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament (St. Mathew’s gospel 7.12 and Luke 6.31).

Different versions are to be found in Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism.

If there would be a universal moral rule, then it would be the golden rule.

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<sup>30</sup> Kant, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, 2. Abschnitt. (VIII, 14 ff.)

<sup>31</sup> Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, Schriften in sechs Bänden*, Bd. VI, 582, 585 u. 601.

<sup>32</sup> Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, AA Bd. VI, 429 f.

The *locus classicus* of the *regula aurea*, the most prominent and probably the oldest reference of this world-wide spread ethical law, is in Kongzi's *Analects* : "Is there any single saying that one can act upon all day and everyday? The Master said: Perhaps the saying about consideration: 'never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.'"<sup>33</sup>

The one word that will keep us on the path to the end of our days is *shu*. Waley translates 'consideration'. Others translate 'reciprocal consideration'. I prefer 'reciprocal empathy'. In *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary* (no 5875) it reads: "*shu*, the principle of reciprocity, making our own feelings(sic! G.W.) a rule whereby we are guided in dealing with others." Indeed, the crucial point seems to be that the word *shu* – with the radical *xin* – concerns primarily our own feelings and empathy with others.<sup>34</sup>

Originally it is not (only) aimed at our (head-)mind, at our reason and self-reflection. It is rather aimed at our heart-mind (*xin*) and compassion, our empathy and sympathy. Kongzi's golden rule basically is not an abstract rational operation of universalizing my own will or the intentions of my own Ego. It is not something like a half-baked categorical imperative as some German philosophers and sinologists ( G.Paul and H. Roetz) have it. Kongzi's golden rule deals with reciprocal empathy and responsibility in the literal sense of this word which has to do with response and being responsive to somebody in a concrete situation. The Chinese character *ren*, humanity, shows that humanity has to do with two people.

I understand the golden rule as a verbal formulation of a preverbal intuitive way of sympathetic resonance, as the verbalization of an archaic reciprocal resonance. I'll come back to it in a minute.

But what we already see: What a difference to Kant!

The Neo-Kantian attempt to kantianize Kongzi is ideological Neo-Colonialism or philosophical figurism. I recommend to those Neo-Kantians: Back to Rousseau! He emphasized correctly, that the real fundamentals of the golden rule are conscience and feeling. This applies exactly to Kongzi's words. In my opinion, the true path does not lead from Kongzi to Kant. The other way round! Via Rousseau it leads from Kant back to good old Kongzi.

## 2.2 Mengzi on regicide and on compassion

There are different versions of the golden rule in the *Mengzi*. I quote a passage from *Mengzi* 4A9, which shows the political relevance of the golden rule. Legge translates: "There is a way to get the people : get their hearts, and the people are got. There is a way to get their hearts: it is simple to collect for them what they like, and not to lay on them what they dislike."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Kongzi, *Lunyu* 15.24, transl. by A. Waley.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. U.Unger, *Goldene Regel und Konfuzianismus* in: *minima sinica* 2/2003, 19 – 41.

<sup>35</sup> *The Chinese Classics* by James Legge, Vol II, 300.



The point in the *Mengzi* is: The golden rule is true of ordinary people as well as of the reigning monarch. What he forbids the people to do, he himself also shouldn't do. I remind you of the famous passage in *Mengzi* 1B8:

“Is regicide right?”

‘He who outrages benevolence is an outrager,

He who outrages righteousness is a cruel fellow.

He who is a man both cruel and outrageous is a despot forsaken by all.

I have heard that Zhou, the despot forsaken by all was killed, but not that the killing was regicide.”<sup>36</sup>

The political consequences of Mengzi's understanding of *shu*, of reciprocal empathy, and the political consequences of Kant's understanding of his categorical imperative show clearly that their ways of thinking lead into different directions.-

But the differences between Kant and Mengzi do not only concern despots. It also concerns everyday life, it concerns for example compassion in dealing with men, with children and even with animals.

For Kant's rational intelligence of head-mind, compassion was an ‘affect’, ‘weak and blind’, lacking the ‘dignity of virtue’.

For Mengzi compassion is the *punctum saliens*, the most important point of humanity. For him it is the heart-mind (*xin*) which thinks (*si*).<sup>37</sup>

(*Nota bene*: The radical *xin* is also a part of the character *si*.)

Mengzi's emotional intelligence reminds more of Pascal's *raison du coeur* than of Kant's ‘reine Vernunft’.

For Mengzi all men have a heart-mind which ‘cannot bear’ (*bu ren*) to see the sufferings of others.<sup>38</sup> “When I say that all men have a (heart-)mind which cannot bear to see the sufferings of others, my meaning may be illustrated thus: Even nowadays, if men suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress,”<sup>39</sup>

Usually the *bu ren*, ‘cannot bear’ is translated by ‘compassion’.

The word *ren* is instructive: the character has a knife over the heart.

Please mind: Kongzi's *shu*, ‘reciprocal empathy’, as well as Mengzi's (*bu ren*) ‘compassion’ have the radical *xin*, ‘heart-mind’. Isn't that telling?

And last not least it is the double meaning of the character *xin* itself which is telling: heart and mind – for Kant a contradiction.

In contrast to Kant, for whom animals are merely things, objects one can treat as one likes, I finally quote a last passage from the *Mengzi* 1A7, where the *bu ren* occurs again.

“The king(...) was sitting aloft in the hall, when a man appeared, leading an ox past the lower part of it. The king saw him and asked: ‘Where is the ox going?’

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<sup>36</sup> Mencius, *Library of Chinese Classics*, 1999, Human People's Publishing House, 43.

<sup>37</sup> Mengzi, 6A15.

<sup>38</sup> Mengzi, 2A6.

<sup>39</sup> *The Chinese Classics* by James Legge, Vol II, 202.

The man replied: 'We are going to consecrate a bell with its blood.' The king said: 'Let it go. I cannot bear (*bu ren*) its frightened appearance, as if it were an innocent person going to the place of death.'<sup>40</sup>

Kant would have condemned this *compassibilitas* as sentimentality ('teilnehmende Empfinderei einer affektierten Humanität')<sup>41</sup>.

Well, *tempus fugit*.

Last not least let's have a short look at the *Huainanzi* and the *Zhuangzi* and for time reasons let me concentrate on the character *ying*, which also has the radical *xin*.

### 2.3 Huainanzi's reciprocal resonance: *ying* and *ganying*

The concepts of *ying* and *ganying* are basic concepts in East-Asian ethics. Especially in Daoist 'ethics', which we could rather call an ethos without morality, these concepts play an outstanding role.

What does *ying* mean?

In *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary* (no.7477) we read that *ying* means : 'ought, should, must; suitable, right, fitting; necessary etc.' And with a different intonation: 'to reply, to respond, to echo, to correspond etc.'

And *ganying* means (no 3232): 'moved to response through the feelings and affections: induction'.

Charles le Blanc, the translator of the *Huainanzi* emphasized that it was around the idea of resonance (*ganying*) that the philosophy of the *Huainanzi* was elaborated. Chapter six is devoted explicitly to the idea of resonance.<sup>42</sup>

The origin of the notion of *ying* is an acoustic and musical one.

Chapter VI, 6b of the *Huainanzi* gives a famous example of spontaneous reciprocal resonance, the example of the two zithers: "When the lute-tuner strikes the *kung* (*gong*) note (on one instrument), the *kung* note (on the other instrument) responds (*ying*). (...) This results from having corresponding musical notes in mutual harmony."

The two instruments cor-responding, responding to each other reciprocally (*xiang ying*) and being in mutual harmony, are like Zhuangzi's fishes enjoying each other and the heart-minds of people who vibrate in reciprocal resonance and sympathy.

By the way: The Greek word *sympathy* originally meant something like a sympathetic vibration, for example of bronze vessels. In music it was used of chords which vibrate together.-

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<sup>40</sup> Loc.cit, 139.

<sup>41</sup> Kant, *Metaphysik der Sitten*, 196.

<sup>42</sup> Charles le Blanc, *Huai-Nan-Tzu, Philosophical Synthesis in Early Han Thought*, Hongkong University Press, 1985, p.9.

The heart-minds of these people who feel sympathy react in reciprocal spontaneity (*xiang ran*) without acting on purpose. They even forget each other (*xiang wang*) and respond in reciprocal oblivion, in reciprocal resonance and con-cordance. This intuitive spontaneous reciprocity and empathy results by itself (*ziran*) without any selfishness, without any rational reflection and without moral principles. This inductive, sym-pathetic, com-passionate cor-respondance results from a natural feeling of ‘responsibility’ which is beyond morality and before morality in the sense of moral principles, laws and duties. It is a *resonance du coeur* , a resonance of the heart-mind without reasoning.-

Is all this too harmonious, too idyllic, too romantic ? I don’t think so.

This spontaneous natural resonance follows the spontaneous necessity to do what has to be done. Please remember that *ying* also means ‘necessary, fitting, and suitable. *Ying* means the necessary fitting response according to the changing situation.

“Right and wrong are situational. In the appropriate situation nothing is wrong. Without the appropriate situation, nothing is right.”<sup>43</sup>

In the *Liezi* we read the remarkable words: ”In any case, nowhere is there a principle which is right in all circumstances, or an action that is wrong in all circumstances. The method we used yesterday we may discard today and use again in future, there are no fixed right and wrong to decide whether we use it or not.”<sup>44</sup>

The highest principle is without principles. The one who acts according to this principle without principles acts primarily without rational reflection.

First of all he only reflects, i.e. mirrors the actual situation.

Speculation and re-flexion re-sult out of it.

In chapter VI, 6b of the *Huainanzi*, in a context, in which the author talks about *xiang ying*, reciprocal resonance, he gives the interesting example of a burning mirror, which gathers fire from the sun. Probably this burning- mirror was a concave bronze-mirror which was used in Zhuangzi’s days to focus the sunrays in order to set fire.<sup>45</sup>

Isn’t the ‘response’ *ying* of this burning mirror a very practical and striking example for the Daoist *wei wuwei* or *wuwei ziran*? It is an example of doing something without interference of myself, only by responsive self-so-ing (*ziran*). It is an example of ‘speculation’ ( from Latin *speculum*, mirror) without intellectual speculation.

I come to the end with a little remark on the *Zhuangzi*.

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<sup>43</sup> *The Tao of Politics – Lessons of the Master of Huainan*, translated by Th.Cleary, Kuala Lumpur 1992, 39.

<sup>44</sup> *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, translated by A.C. Graham, New York 1990, p.163.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. H.H. Oshima, *A Metaphysical Analysis of the Concept of Mind in the Chuang-Tzu*, in: V.H.Mair ed. *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*, p.63ff.

## 2.4 Zhuangzi's ethos without ego: the empty mirror

Looking for older sources of the Daoist key-term *ying*, we have to go back to the *Zhuangzi*. In the 'miscellaneous' chap. 33.5 we find a saying, which I would like to call the *minima moralia daoistica*. It deals with the 'true man of the *dao*'. It reads: "His movement is like water, his stillness is like a mirror, his response (*ying*) is like an echo."<sup>46</sup>

At the end of the 'seven inner chapters' (chap. 7.6) it says:

"Just be empty, that's all. The mind of the ultimate man functions like a mirror. It neither sends off nor welcomes, it responds (*ying*) but does not retain."<sup>47</sup>

But how can the heart-mind of a true man respond like a mirror?

We already heard it: he must be empty, he must be without an Ego.

The first chapter (chap.1.1) of the *Zhuangzi* closes with the path-breaking words:

"...the ultimate man has no self (*wu ji*). The spiritual person has no accomplishment, and the sage has no name."<sup>48</sup>

No name, no fame – no ego.

I agree with Feng Youlan, who said that to be without a self is the essence of Zhuangzi's philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

The true man of the *dao*, who follows nature (*ziran*- self-so) has no personal self. He is not a person.

I personally believe that this is true.

### Final remark : mirror neurons

What I wanted to say in one sentence:

The Daoist ethos without morality, this ethos of reciprocal resonance and pre-rational reflection pulls us from our top-heavy head back on to our feet and enables us to walk on the 'way'.

Please don't think that the old Daoist stories of mirror-reflection are outdated.

On the contrary!

One of the latest hits in neuro-biology are: mirror-neurons.

The Indian neuro-physiologist Ramachandran, as far as I know the discoverer of these 'mirror-neurons', calls them empathy-cells and claims that they are the neurological basis of ethics and morality.

Mirror-neurons are spontaneously and unintentionally activated in the heart-mind of a passive observer as if he would act himself. Without mirror-neurons there is no empathy, no sympathy, no compassion. Mirror-neurons are responsible for pre-rational, spontaneous intuition. Mirror-neurons are

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<sup>46</sup> *Wandering on the Way*, translated by V.H.Mair, Bantam Books 1994, 341.

<sup>47</sup> Loc.cit. 71.

<sup>48</sup> Loc.cit. 5 f.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Chuang-Tzu, A New Selected Translation* by Yu-Lan Fung, New York 1964, 81.

responsible for our ‘emotional intelligence’. Some scientists called this communicative resonance an ‘intersubjectivity without subjects’.<sup>50</sup> What a pity that these new neuro-biologists and philosophers don’t know that they are neo-daoists.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. J.Bauer, *Warum ich fühle was du fühlst*, Heyne 61501, München, 2005.,63.

<sup>51</sup> During a little radio-interview before the beginning of the conference the interviewer asked me: “Who are you?” I replied.”I’m the German scholar.” “ Oh, I understand “, he said, “ you are here to make the conference more sexy.”- I’m still wondering if he was right.-