

The Ontology of Coexistence: From *Cogito* to *Facio*

Diogenes

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Introduction

Crisis is the ontological disorder seen from a deeper point of view. Crisis is not a natural phenomenon, for nature operates as always being right unto itself. But the human world can go wrong when misled by wrong ideas. Where our world has been misled, it can be claimed that philosophy is fundamentally, if perhaps indirectly, responsible for this. This is the reason for undertaking a reflexive critique of ontology as the deep structure of our understanding of the world. I will argue that philosophy has been derailed for quite some time by the *metaphysics of things*. Consequently, a change in philosophy towards a *metaphysics of facta* might be a useful way to rethink the problems of the world.

Alternative ontologies for different worlds

As more relevant to the natural world than to the world of human life, traditional ontology questions *being* and *what there is*. These questions do not matter so much to the human world, even though they are not totally irrelevant to it. Correlative ontological inquiries into the world of human life should concern what a man does rather than what he is.

Heidegger is right in thinking that the Dasein exists not in its factuality but in its facticity; thus, a man is a being-in-the-world whose life-story is embedded in historicity. But Heideggerian ontology is limited by its concern with the individual life-story, so much so that it unfortunately misses the most important ontological problems of the human world, those that are constituted and organised politically and ethically through human relations. The key point is that the life-story of any individual is essentially not *my* story of my questioning and experience of being but *his* story, written by others in practical ways.

It is the human fate to have now found an ontological problem of human being. And “those who are other than I” stand at the centre of this problem, for it is those others who decide our fate. The seriousness of that fate indicates that the ontology of the human world of life has to find a metaphysical approach to address the political problems. We have to recognise that the fact of

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human relations is fundamental to any possible ontological inquiry of the world of life and is logically prior to any possible situation of being-in-the-world, because human relations create and define the world of life as a world of *facta*, meaning a world of *things done*, one that is essentially different from the *world of things-as-they-are*.

Fact or thing

The knowledge of things as they are is not of the realm of philosophy but of science. Philosophy engages fact rather than things,¹ and philosophical inquiry is not into *the things*, but *from what is fact*. In a proposition that states “a thing is so and so”, we find a description of something instead of any philosophical thought. The failure of the *metaphysics of things* to live up to its ambition to provide a thorough general knowledge of those things has led to the unfair rejection of metaphysics as a field of meaningless propositions. But the problem is that post-metaphysical philosophy has not become sounder; on the contrary, it suffers from the loss of a necessary grounding. What philosophy really needs is a less ambitious *metaphysics of facta* instead, to explain the world of *facta*. Just as Confucianism asserts, philosophy can only talk about what human beings do rather than what God did.

A thing is as it is, and never becomes a problem by itself unless it is involved in a *factum*. A *factum* is something done, and thus it carries intentionality. It is the *factum* that forces us to think because our life is made up of such *facta*. A *factum* by itself poses an immediate question to be answered and very often a problem to be solved. We are confronted with explaining why *this* and not *that* has been done, and we have to justify our reasons. In short, we do (in the sense of “we act”), and therefore we must be responsible for what is done. Our creation of the *factual* world, our world of life, is the primary ontological problem that cannot be evaded.

The problem of the creation of the factual world

God’s creation of the natural world, of the world of things, does not constitute a philosophical question, for the matter it relates to is complete and there remains no problem with regard to it. But the human creation of the factual world remains a disturbing problem as a work of creation that is never finished. The world of *facta* is always a *becoming of that which it is not* rather than a *being that which it is*, due to human free will, our capacity to alter our ideas, our arrogance and the suspect *sophos* of human rationality. Philosophy should take seriously human responsibility for the human creation of the world of life, instead of arrogantly questioning the nature of being. The answer to the question of being is kept in God’s transcendent mind and is not accessible by human beings. The practical and immediate relevance to the fate of *human-being* is the imperious need for a meaningful metaphysics.

If philosophy were reoriented and adjusted to the world of *facta* instead of to the world of things, this would bring about an essential change in ontological logic, a transformation of ontological inquiry from “*to be*” to “*to do*”. Such an ontological change is fundamental for philosophy in that ontology and the *creationology* of the factual world are now considered one and the same. It indicates that any explicable or answerable ontological questions must be closely related to the question of the creation of the world of *facta*. The factual world is the only world whose essence we can explain and for the making of which we can give justification, because it is our creation. In this sense, the ontology of the world of things, on the other hand, could be recognised as a pseudo-ontology, for it questions the post-creational world that has no problem left for us.

Perfect being marks the end of ontology and the beginning of theology. The ambition to know the ontological essence of the world created by God derives from arrogant human subjectivity. The Confucian principle of epistemological humility is correct in affirming that the true respect for God is to keep as much distance from God as He is.

To be is to do

Applying the ontological logic of human-being, the world of life is therefore neither being-as-it-is, nor being-as-it-is-perceived, but rather a world constantly being created through different and unexpected ideas, as well as a world of self-deconstruction, always becoming what it is not. As argued above, the ontological question relating to the world of life is reconfirmed as a *creationological* problem of the world of *facta*. Human-being has to make a world of life by itself. We can thus say in relation to the world of life, *to be is to have been done*, and in relation to human-being, *to be is to do*.

The shift from *being* to *doing* reveals the *deontological* problem inherent in the factual world. It does not mean the replacement of ontology by ethics, but indicates the special coherence of ontology and ethics in the world of *facta*. As generally considered since Hume, *ought-to-be* and *to-be* are two independent and irreducible dimensions, between which there is found a value-fact gap, in that *ought-to-be* cannot be inferred from *to-be*. But a different case could be observed in the factual world where the being of *facta* is determined by a doing that is impelled by preferences, purposes and values. In this context, *to-be* becomes a consequence of *ought-to-be*. People choose to do or not to do, and what to do or what not to do, and even have to decide, along with Shakespeare's Hamlet, *to be or not to be*. The world of *facta* is designed and made according to values, so much so that it encounters the deontological question of ontology at the point where the problems of facts and values join.

Facio ergo sum

Descartes's *cogito* has established subjectivity as the foundation for the constitution of our epistemological consciousness. In the logic of subjectivity, as Kant and especially Husserl have further argued, knowledge of anything is based on the transcendental consciousness of the object perceived *as such*, the pure *cogitatum qua cogitatum* intentionally constituted by the *cogito*. Yet this great project of philosophy is still insufficient to understand the world of life, which remains ungraspably beyond the reach of subjectivity. The *lived-world* cannot be reduced to and explained by the *seen-world*, and it is not constituted and controlled by the *cogito* because the *lived-world* essentially relates to the matter of *heart* more than *mind*, so that it is beyond the limits of a philosophy of mind. As the original and immediate world where human beings find themselves, the *lived-world* calls for another philosophy. The first characteristic of the world of human life is that being as human-being is immediately defined by doing. As argued above, *to be is to do*, so that, in the world of life, the primacy of doing, *facio*, leads in consequence to a new metaphysical principle: *Facio ergo sum* (I do, therefore I am).

The *cogito* is dictatorial and *monologic*, if that term may be used, whereas the *facio* is cooperative because of its necessary and inevitable involvement of others in making life possible. Whatever I do develops a relationship between others and myself in an open and ever-extending network that defines the world of life. Human relations are the invisible interfaces between hearts, laying out the destinies of possible lives. It is the others who in practice give licence and support to what I do, and who recognise and reconfirm the meanings and values of what I do.

Because of the necessary involvement of those others, the *facio* means not only the affirmation of my existence but also my coexistence with others.

The great success of the *cogito* is said to be the transcendental concept of the world inhering in its own subjectivity. But it is also true that the *cogito* constitutes for real life only the conceptual world instead of the factual world; hence, the *cogito* stands outside of the world of life, and I as a subjectivity perceived through it am actually nobody and nowhere. It is thus extremely doubtful whether the principle of subjectivity, along with its concept of the world, is really relevant and useful for the world of life. This is why the world of life has to be grounded in a different metaphysics and understood through a different epistemology. The new starting point is the *facio* which, through its praxis, creates me as a someone, somewhere.

Thus, I am a someone somewhere when and only when I am formed by the *facio*. The *facio* carries an existential intentionality to go beyond subjectivity so as to create a potential life constituted of realised relationships with others. Any solitary self-presence will become isolated from the world of life and its values and meaning. The process of the *facio* is impossible outside of coexistence. No one exists before coexisting with others, just as Confucianism claims that being cannot be human-being unless humanised by relating to others.

Theology or philosophy as the path to choose

The ontological status of human-being could be interpreted through either theology or philosophy. A theological interpretation places human-being in an ontological position of dependency and self-insufficiency, such that human-being is essentially imperfect and even meaningless in itself, since it is thereby not an *autotelic* being. This is a dispiriting interpretation. Human-being without autotelicity is unable to be protected from scepticism about human virtues and categorical imperatives. God's law is perfect, but the difficulty is that our understanding and interpretation of it is always imperfect because of our human imperfection in intellectuality and virtue, so that any self-claimed authoritative interpretation of God is essentially a cheap device for attaining political ends. The serious problem is that human-being might become totally meaningless through this lack of autotelicity, finding nothing of absolute value or categorical obligation in itself, and so be easily led to a misunderstanding of what is right and good. Even worse, theological argument is never sufficient to incontrovertibly establish any concept of goodness or rightness, for it never provides any factual and tangible evidence to confirm the universality and accessibility of God's truth. The only coherent alternative is to trust what is done rather than what is said. This recalls the Confucian scepticism that does not deny God and heaven, but distrusts any religious or theological interpretation of an ontological meaning for human-being and the human world.

Following Confucian realistic thinking, if something is considered most important in our lives, it must be justified by tangible and accessible evidence in the world of *hereness*, instead of through belief in a world of *thereness*. Confucianism trusts in what is done much more than in what is said, and even than in what is seen. It seems Confucianism is more reasonable in seeking the ontological principles of the human world in terms of the autonomy of the world of life. From this point of view, the respectable *law of heaven* is too remote of access, thus effectively irrelevant, despite its greater elevation. Thus, human-being has to take care of itself, to be fully responsible for what is done, and to discover a *human way*.

We have to take into account the problematic special essence of human-being in its dual identities: the *dependent being* as being created in the natural world, and the *independent being* as the creator of the world of life. It is true that human-being has no complete independence in all senses,

but it does enjoy autonomy and autotelicity in its creation of the world of life. The Confucian solution is to recognise the law of heaven as the higher principle while realistically recognising human-being's responsibility for the world of life, so that human-being has to define the values and worldviews for the world of life *only* in terms of humanity and human relations. In short, the *factum* has to be explained in the *facio*.

The Confucian approach might remind us of that derived by Giambattista Vico for their similarity in their emphasis on the *factum*. But one of the differences between these two approaches is that Vico's *factum-verum* correlation is apparently a stronger principle than the Confucian approach in search of the *optimum* in the *factum*, the best of the possible lives. It is interesting that Chinese philosophy is much less ambitious in epistemology and is always satisfied with the best instead of with the truth.

Having resort to mind or heart

For Kant, human beings are absolutely responsible for their behaviours. As one of the most important philosophical realisations, the Kantian solution is to find categorical imperatives in the authentic consciousness of subjective reality. This is really a wonderful solution except for the partiality of the subjective view. Subjective rationality is a monologue and is unreasonably exclusive of others, as Habermas has latterly criticised. In the logic of subjective rationality, the fundamental universal concepts and principles found on the horizon of the *cogito* are unfortunately self-referential, thus suspect. It seems that the Kantian transcendental argument (transcendental deduction, as Kant firstly called it, an interesting and perhaps the strongest reflexive approach), could manage to be a good strategy of defence for the epistemological validity of *a priori* concepts and self-referential propositions. But the problem we are facing here is that none of the transcendental strategies can be a valid defence for any self-referential *normative* claims, because the concept of goodness, as any normative principle, is not deducible from, or necessarily implied in, what I will do in the name of rationality. Instead, the subjective view implies, though secretly, a dangerous ideology of privileging monologue. The truth is that any possible values need to be justified and universalised until finally adopted and ratified by others. It is time that the justification of universal values be recognised as a matter of *compatibility of hearts* instead of *uniformity of minds*, and as a problem to be resolved within the framework of the *facio* rather than the *cogito*.

A worthy persistence of the framework of the rationality of mind is Habermas's updating of Kant from subjective rationality to communicative rationality and from monologic to dialogic universalism. This seems successfully to rescue rationality from the problem of subjective monologue, but it gets caught up in the problem of intersubjectivity instead. In proposing his principle of communicative rationality as a process towards realising universal agreement, Habermas constructs a utopian environment in which all people enjoy an *ideal discourse situation* and everyone will tell truths rightly and sincerely, such that the state of universal agreement is expected to be reached by means of deliberative discourse in which an idea is accounted convincing only by the "better argument" accepted through mutual understanding.² It sounds like a revival and improvement of the Greek *agora* in the Kantian spirit of perpetual peace. A utopia is definitely a possible world, but a possible world might be *practically* useless if it is not accessible to our factual world. Unfortunately, the Habermasian communicative utopia clearly does not fit the real world of life in major cases. This suggests there must be something very important that is missing or neglected in the Habermasian project. That is the problem of the hearts of others which still remains completely untouched even when all the problems of mind are settled.

Modern philosophy usually sets most store by rationality and prefers to think with the mind. It is believed that rationality has the capacity and power to solve all problems, or at least to seek the best of all possible strategies for solving them. But this is a pitiful self-limitation on the part of philosophy. An often observed fact is that the conciliation of different minds does not necessarily imply the conciliation of different hearts. Especially in the case of communicative discourse, perfect mutual understanding cannot necessarily guarantee perfect mutual acceptance, and better argument cannot ensure more reasonable cooperation. There is thus an obvious consciousness gap between understanding and agreement, while the missing bridge between them is precisely the mutual acceptance of each other's heart. Communicative intercourse simply reflects rather than resolves the inter-subjective problems and the differences of hearts cannot be eliminated by rational dialogue. Far from as projected by its modern philosophical illusion, language cannot in fact do everything. The serious problems of hearts will remain, even when better arguments and rational powers have all been applied. The point is that universal agreements have to be approved by the others' hearts as well. And the heart takes what is done more seriously than what is said.

As an uncontrolled and disturbing trouble beyond the power of rationality, the problem of heart, a complex amalgam of spirit, values, faith and feelings, cannot be removed by rationality nor reduced to a matter of mind. On the contrary, heart is fundamental to mind and without it mind would be indifferent, inhuman and totally alienated from life. It is usually supposed that mind sees truth while heart recognises the good. But this does not mean a dualism. To separate mind and heart is a metaphysical as well as an epistemological error. The first truth is that truths will be nothing at all unless good for life. And the never-settled conflicts of the world may bring us to recognise that heart is prior to mind, just as the *facio* is prior to the *cogito*.

As earlier argued, the *facio* has primacy over the *cogito* because it is the original circumstance of the world of life as well as the very beginning of any possible life. The intentionality of the *facio*, the pursuit of heart, has to be achieved by means of cooperation with others and through their approval. This indicates that the *facio* generates the problem of relationship. Instead of the distinct individuals, it is the *relations* between them that define the ontological situation of the world of life, announcing an *ontology of relations* instead of an *ontology of individuals*. It is a change in the basic unit, as well as of the framework, of philosophical thinking. Hence relations, rather than individuals, must be reconsidered as the foundation of philosophy, as Confucianism did.

My emphasis on the fundamental position of the *facio* and heart in philosophy could be understood as a renewal of Confucianism as a radical humanism that insists on the autotelicity of the human world, hence a refusal of any religion or theology, and as a philosophy of relationalism that is the opposite of individualism. The difference between the approaches of the *cogito* and the *facio* now becomes clear. The *facio* creates relationships that provide a validity for values and norms through their recursive reciprocal reconfirmation by those others who are joined by those relationships, so much so that it avoids self-reference, whereas the *cogito* resorts to reflexive consciousness that fails to escape from self-referential egoism.

Relational rationality

Being the intentional outcomes of the *facio*, *facta* are changeable and will always change. From the viewpoint of Chinese philosophy, the changeability of *facta* is a more important condition for explaining human fate and fortune than the certainty of things. To bring about a *factum* is to create a certain relationship between people, and to develop a relationship is ontologically, though

not physically, to change who we are and what the world of life is. In other words, the being of the world of life and our individual existences are always reconstituted and redefined in and by the relations we ourselves make.

The formula [...] “ x has a relation R with y ” (xRy) has a very different meaning in the world of *facta* from the world of things. As far as the world of *facta* is concerned, nothing has an absolute essence, whereas relation R is a creative and active “factor” to determine the “factual” presence of x and y . It means that the presentation of x and y depends on what relationship they are in. According to this ontological grammar, a person *does* rather than *is*. No individual is good in himself; he is good only insofar as he is good to someone in a certain relationship. His presence as a good person is decided in the context of his relations with others. From this relationological point of view, it is relations that determine the existential situation and values of facts in the world of life. Fate and fortune, success and failure, events and history, love and hate, goodness and evil, freedom and bondage, happiness and misery, all are determined by human relations.

The *inter-personality* of hearts, shaped by concrete relations, is a much more complicated question than the general inter-subjectivity of minds. In the heart-oriented world of *facta*, the value of everything is decided and judged by its relation to the heart, whether *close* or *distant*, *far* or *near*, whereas everything is essentially value-free in the world of things, just as Lao-tzu says that nature is amoral.³

The principle of values, in terms of relations, cannot be misunderstood as irrational. On the contrary, it is an alternative, and probably more robust, principle of rationality: a *relational rationality*, with the capacity to correct the usual misunderstanding of rationality as rational self-interest. Upon a taken-for-granted presupposition of the absoluteness of individuality, modern individualism gives pride of place to that self-interest, defined and calculated in terms of the individual. And it tacitly implies that the monopolised, thus exclusive, interests of the individual are the most important ones, above common and shared interests. But contrary to this expectation, such individualism could be considered the more irrational stance in that the best and maximal interests available and accessible to an individual are not necessarily exclusive. In fact, the best and maximal interests of an individual are more often those shared ones found only in relationships, such as the happiness of family, love, friendship, trust, reciprocal recognition, respect, support and help, all of which cannot be divided and enjoyed unilaterally. In the world of life, the maximal self-interests always happen to be the shared interests with others. It is clear that the concept of individual interests is misleading and has been misinterpreted by modern individualism; it should be re-expressed as “the interests accessible to the individual” so as to better fit the understanding of rationality. Modern individualism is not only an epistemological but also an ontological misconception, because it is fundamentally a misunderstanding of what constitutes the best of all possible worlds as well as the best of the possible lives for an individual. Seeing that people are rational only when in search of the *best* instead of an *exclusive* life, we have to re-establish the concept of rationality on the basis of coexistence rather than of individual existence.

Coexistence precedes existence

In virtue of the metaphysical framework of relationship, ontology has now a chance to turn to the key question of coexistence in place of the traditional question of being or existence.

Ontology has been misled from the very beginning by the very strange question of being or existence. The ontology of being is too ambitious a task to undertake, for it asks a question only answerable by God who has created the world. As for human creatures, the question of being is

not answerable at all, but it has in fact been answered by “being as such” although we do not understand it. We do not see the truth of being either in metaphysics or in poetry.

As to the question whether I exist as being-in-the-world, it is meaningful, but it is the second rather than the first question that we should pose. We have to answer firstly the question of the being of the world of life in which we could find a place to be. The first question about the world of life is that of its creation, as we have earlier affirmed. The key point of the creation of any possible world of life is the fact of coexistence in terms of human relations. We make the world of life through the process of the *facio*, hence we are in the world. My existence is possible and meaningful if and only if I am in coexistence with others. Moreover, all problems associated with existence, such as conflict and cooperation, war and peace, happiness and misery, have to be resolved in and through coexistence. Therefore it can be asserted that *coexistence precedes existence* and is ontologically fundamental to any possible world of life.

The principles of optimal coexistence

In the context of the ontology of coexistence, an optimal world of life would be constituted by virtue of the principles of a coexistence that aims at the maximisation of cooperation and the minimisation of conflict.

The *principle of the inclusion of all peoples* must be the paramount principle, emphasising a world of life open equally to all peoples, admitting no refusal of or discrimination against any people or culture. This principle implies a politics devoid of the concept of an ideological enemy or barbarian outsider. It has a significant commonality with the Chinese political theory of the “all-under-heaven” system.⁴

In the second place, the *principle of universal benefit* means that universally accepted coexistential relations must be *practical* rather than *conceptual*, that they should benefit all people instead of just assuring the partial improvement of some people. By this standard, the concept of Pareto Improvement cannot be considered satisfactory. Instead, a harmonious improvement that might be called “Confucian Improvement” would seem to be preferable. In brief, it could be described thus: (1) Given any two players X and Y, harmony is a reciprocal equilibrium in which X and Y share their fortune to such an extent that X benefits if Y also benefits, and loses if Y loses; (2) X attains fulfilment if Y attains fulfilment, to such an extent that the promotion of Y’s fulfilment becomes X’s dominating strategy, so as to promote his own fulfilment, and vice versa.⁵

Third is the *principle of no negative retribution*. If an action or a strategy does not beget negative retribution when it is *universally initiated*, it could then be said that it is a representation of universal values. According to this principle, many modern strategies seem suspect and highly risky, such as military competition, trade protectionism or trade wars, financial trickery and fraud, as well as pollution and overuse of resources etc. In the same way, individualism is also questionable, for its implied egoism seems to deepen isolation, weaken true love and friendship, and reduce reciprocal aid and inter-personal warmth.

But the most important factor for coexistence might be the *principle of the priority of human obligations*. This restores the Confucian concept of human obligations as the absolute and necessary qualification for the humanisation of a creature to be a true human being. Confucianism believes that humanisation makes the human being and humanity equates to human *culture* rather than human *nature*. It takes for granted that a human being *does* rather than *is*; and human obligations, such as those of providing unconditional help to others in difficult situations and of repayment to and gratitude towards those who have offered unselfish help, are considered the

qualification for being a human being. The reciprocity of human obligations creates a tangible, accessible and true salvation for the world in contrast to the uncertain and unreliable salvation that God may provide from heaven.

The universal principles grounded in rational reality are thus strongly to be recommended. This seems to be a better grounding than Kantian subjective rationality, which is the representation of a general mind but which fails to represent different hearts. The Kantian categorical imperative has proved universal in itself but has not yet proved universally *necessary in itself* as Kant expected. In other words, the Kantian argument has the power only to assure the formal universality of categorical imperatives but falls short of the power to ensure their universal and necessary benefit to all people in all possible cases. In consequence, some dubious radical ethical claims could be argued to be in conformity with Kant's categorical imperative. For instance, radical egalitarianism, radical conservatism, vegetarianism and even egoism could be made to conform to this imperative.⁶ And relational rationality is also better than Habermasian communicative rationality which is supposed to be able to settle the problems of different minds but fails to solve the problem of hearts. Saying is not a good substitute for doing, for the heart is not something to be bargained or bought by words. In summary I would argue that the relational rationality of the ontology of coexistence is a better and surer theoretical foundation for the universal values and principles of world of life since it is capable of satisfying both hearts and minds.

Human obligations above human rights

Respect for human rights is recognised as the fundamental condition for a better world of life and its importance has been well argued by modern philosophy. But a rights-oriented world is still far from being a better world from the viewpoint of the ontology of coexistence. Asserting the supremacy of human rights implies the somewhat questionable logic of placing rights above obligations. And to claim unconditional rights risks the playing of a social game that involves the potential danger of upsetting the necessary balance of rights and obligations, for it may grant extra favour to those who deny any obligation to others while still claiming and enjoying their supposed personal natural rights. Licence given to the free-riders of human rights may give rise to a serious and unacceptable paradox, such as would be the case if a murderer should be allowed unconditional enjoyment of his personal human rights while having destroyed the unconditional human rights of another. It is not easy to justify this human rights paradox, and it is very difficult to explain to the innocent victims. Hence, we must take care not to be dazzled by the powerful glare of human rights demands.

A reasonable balance of rights and obligations involves either the correlation of *unconditional rights* with *unconditional obligations* or *conditional rights* with *conditional obligations*. The imbalance that arises from the correlation of *unconditional rights* with *conditional obligations* or *conditional rights* with *unconditional obligations* is of impossible justification in either case. Clearly, the symmetrical correlation of rights and obligations is imperative. Otherwise the justice of the human world will disappear, under either the sharp knife of tyranny or the blunt knife of hypocrisy.

The recognition of both human obligations and human rights is necessary to any possible better life for each of us. The protection of human rights provides the *negative security* while the acceptance of human obligations supplies the *positive security* for any better world of life. Without the assurance that human obligations will be honoured, the preservation of human rights will be practically impossible, because the acceptance of human obligations is precisely the practical

condition for the realisation and guarantee of human rights. Human rights protect our freedoms but are unable to guarantee themselves. The truth is that human rights are protected by the free and willing adoption of human obligations. Thus it may be seen that in the necessary association of rights and obligations, it is the fulfilment of obligations that constitutes the active factors of responsibility for protecting human rights and for making a better world of life. Naturally, human rights are important, but more important is how they are to be protected. Ronald Dworkin's call to take rights seriously should go deeper into the question of taking human obligations seriously as well. As the latest evidence shows, the crisis around the reluctance to accept human obligations is even more serious and dangerous than the crisis of the denial of human rights. In this sense, I would assert that human obligations stand above human rights in importance.

The crisis of humanisation

Modernisation has greatly improved the human world through developments in economics, technology and civilisation. Underlying the idea of modernity is a most important notion, that of the individual. The modern world is made possible and operated on the principle of individualism. A brilliant contribution of individualism is the liberty that has proved to be the most important condition for a better world. On the other hand, individualism has a serious side-effect in the estrangement of people from each other, especially through the affective separation of hearts. The claimed supremacy of the individual represents a devaluation of virtues, and tacitly implies the devaluation of others. Even worse, individualism taken to its absolute limit implies even the negation of happiness, because happiness is not self-made but always depends on how the individual relates to others. No one can be happy by himself. Happiness is the noble gift of others, or the generous favour granted by others. A human being is always humanised through the human relations of reciprocal happiness-giving.

It is important therefore to rethink the philosophy for the world of life. It seems, as we have argued, that our world of life cannot be supported by a philosophy of the individual. A better foundation might be a philosophy of coexistence, which is logically closer to cooperation, peace and happiness.

Notes

1. In Chinese the word “事” means *factum*, what is done, while the word “物” means *res*, the thing.
2. The Habermasian deliberative or argumentation theory has been well discussed in his books, especially in *Between Facts and Norms* and *The Inclusion of the Other*, both published by Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1997 and 1998.
3. Lao-tzu: *Tao-de-ching*, ch. 5.
4. Cf. Zhao Tingyang (2005) 天下体系. Nankin: 江_教育出版社.
5. Zhao Tingyang (2009) “A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven”, *Diogenes* 56(1): 15.
6. I mean the “single” categorical imperative: “act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become universal law”. See Kant (1989) *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Section II, tr. Lewis White Beck. London: Macmillan.