**humanism/仁(Rén)**

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| Final Remarks | ZHAO Tingyang, Dominique Lambert | 04 May 2022 |

ZHAO Tingyang: Dear professor Dominique Lambert, I appreciate your interpretation of western humanisms so much. Let me further discuss a metaphysical divergence between a bilateral or relational humanism based upon Ren and the individual humanism based upon absolute humanity。By absolute humanity I refer it to the European definitions of human, either in terms of Aristotelian rationality or Kantian free will of autonomy. The absolute humanism supposes the essence of humanity in individual human being, no matter be defined in born nature or active subjectivity. By the way, Sartre’s theory is not included for it seems more likely a nonsense that existence is before essence. It is logically invalid. A self-conscious existence should have his subjectivity to choose an essence for him, therefore this subjectivity must have been in him as his essence a priori.

It seems to me that the absolute humanism could be good, if it does not suggest an imperative ethics, such as that of human rights. Hume is right in that *ought* cannot be deduced from *is*. So I think that Aristotelian concept of humanity in terms of rationality is more convincing than the modern one in terms of subjectivity, since rationality is biologically convincing, whereas the egoist subjectivity should be considered a suspended claim of *ought*, which cannot be deduced from *is*. Alternatively, bilateral or relational humanism in terms of Ren does not promise an essence a prior of a human. It argues that humanity is being developed, or cultivated, through the inter-subjectivity or reciprocal relation with others so much to be a form of trans-subjectivity, so that it is found a functional value of the intersubjective variables that nurture humanity.

Dominique LAMBERT: Dear Professor ZHAO Tingyang, thank you very much for your deep analysis of the uses and interpretations of the term *Rén* in the Chinese tradition. It was for me very interesting and enlightening. In the Occidental World, today, one could find three main philosophical trends concerning the definition of “humanity”.

The first one is inherited from Antiquity and the Middle-Age defining human being, as an individual, a person, starting from a metaphysical foundation (essence or nature). This conception is what you call “absolute humanism”. In this conception the relation between human beings is not a fundamental element of the definition of humanity and it is only derived from the metaphysical foundation. The nature of human being allows her/him to initiate interpersonal relations. Idealism, giving up an ontological position, preserves nevertheless an individual conception of humanity. In these traditions (realist and idealist) the definition of humanity has ethical implications (what human “is” implies what human has “to do”) These individual and “subject centered” positions are indeed diverging from the Chinese tradition of *Rén*.

The second one is inherited from Nominalism and, later, from Empiricism (John Locke for example), and is defining humanity from human “performances” (cognition, …) leading progressively to a distinction between human *person* and human *being*. This position is rather similar to the one which defines humanity starting from a biological description (for example defining humanity from the brain cognitive abilities as source of rational activities). Here the definition of a human being has no immediate ethical dimensions (biology provides empirical descriptions and not ethical norms).

The third one is more recent in the European culture and would be *relational*: human person is constituted by intersubjective relations. You can consider here a position rooting ontological definition of humanity in an ethical position (I think about Emmanuel Levinas). But you could refer also to various kinds of more recent structuralist positions or relational ontology. The latter seems to be very similar to the Chinese interpretation of *Rén*. The dialog with the Chinese tradition is fruitful precisely because it emphasizes the importance of the *relational* definition of humanity, long forgotten in some Occidental traditions. Love, fraternity, and friendship are at the core of what we would like to call “humane relations”, humanity and humanism. But, several issues remain, and will allow us to continue this interesting dialog: can we neglect or suppress completely (without logical or philosophical problems) the question of an ontological foundation of the relation? can we really disconnect the moral aspects of humane relation from a deeper definition of human (in order to avoid the complete arbitrariness of ethics)? Could one maybe say that relation (whose best instantiation is love) is the deep nature of humanity? All these questions could be tackled and discussed maybe in the context of another EU-China Forum.