

# HUMAN DIGNITY RECONSIDERED

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## **Abstract**

This paper conjectures a possible reduction of the conflict of contrasting systems of values. Here, the Confucian social values and the Christian religious values are taken as the objectives of our investigation, due to their different and somewhat contrasting outlooks. My choice of Christianity and Confucianism is, of course, not at random but intentional, simply because they form an integral part of my life-world. I was born in a society of pluralistic belief: I was nourished by Confucian values, but raised up in Christian tradition and educated with Western scientific and humanist knowledge. However, in order not to be fallen into the trap of generality, I will deal more specifically with the concept of human dignity.

This work develops further the thesis that any reduction of conflict can be possible if mankind share common values, have common interests and are guided by common aspirations, in a word, if there exist human commonalities. The thesis begins with an examination of the thesis of diversity: our life-world is constituted by different values, interests, and aspirations. That means the rightness (or the error) of any system of values cannot be judged by the yardstick alien to their life-world. Hence, any one-sided criticism of (either Chinese or Christian) values seems to commit the so-called category-mistake. In this context, I would argue along the line of Ludwig Wittgenstein, R. G. Collingwood, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and others, that human dignity can be understood in the context of their (our) life-world only. That means any claim of a universal human dignity would complicate the matter more than to help to settle down this conflict, since one has to foresee a universal world before hand.

However, such a thesis would be of little help to reduce human conflicts. Thus, I share the Hegelian (and of course, the Christian) optimistic belief in the so-called forces of reason (or the force of hope in

the Christian tradition, or the emancipatory interests in Habermas), and conjecture a possible *sensus communis* as the basis for understanding.

The work consists of three main parts: the first part studies the Confucian understanding of human dignity in its moral system, and the second part reflects on its relevancy to a global society. In the first part, we investigate the process of constitution of human dignity. It is evident that such concept has been conceived, nourished, formed and developed in the life-world of the people at Confucius' time, i.e. the Springs-Autumn period, cherished and developed further from generation to generation and becomes an integral part of the Chinese life-world (and of other life-worlds influenced by the Chinese one). The second part deals exactly with the Christian view of human dignity, and with the claim of being universal of the West. In the third part, we are searching for a possible solution to the conflict of the Confucian and the Christian view of human dignity.

Our argument is based on the insight that any understanding of human dignity is primarily implicit in *our* understanding of human nature which is *constituted* and *reconstituted* in-and-from our life-worlds. In the second part reflecting on the relevancy of the Chinese concept of human dignity, I argue for a possible contribution of the Confucian concept of human dignity to the world. The fact that the world is right now becoming a global village - which demands for better mutual understanding, reciprocal activity (solidarity) and more communication (in the sense of Habermas' theory of communicative action) - would fortify our belief in the possibility of a common understanding of human dignity. Human dignity would no longer be the product of a particular culture, but rather a human common aspiration for an ideal world. In this sense, human dignity cannot be cut off from divinity, which, in its original sense, expresses human deepest and insatiable desire for perfection.

Keywords: Christian philosophy, Asian philosophy, Confucian human dignity, human nature, life-world, human self-perfection, theory of communicative action, Confucius, Thomas Aquinas, Wittgenstein, Collingwood, Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas.

## Remarking Introduction: Human Rights, Human Nature and Human Dignity

The issue of human rights has been the main concern of mankind; it constitutes the kernel of all cultural traditions, especially of great religions.<sup>1</sup> With Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and then with the success of a series of revolutions, from the American Revolution to the French Revolution, from the Labour Revolution to the Bolshevik Revolution (1917), from the Hsin-hai Revolution (1911) to the Movement of liberation, human rights becomes today the most cherished, most sacred objectives sought by humankind. The irony is, no one can say precisely what human rights mean; no society can offer their exact criteria; and there is no warrant of a certain concept of human dignity acceptable to all human beings. What we are witnessing is a constantly shameful abuse of human rights, an often biased, one-sided and even cynical understanding of human dignity. Human rights, human dignity, people power, etc., all are but sheer slogans often perniciously abused to cheat on the people, and to be misused as a tool to grab, to defend and to expand power. Ironically, precisely the same ones who most loudly advocate human rights, who fiercely champion human dignity are their worst offenders. They jealously keep these rights to them by denying other people, other religions, other races, other cultures, etc. from these rights.<sup>2</sup> To be more precise, the issue of human rights has been taken as a weapon to inflict wound on (or in many case, more brutally, to destroy) those who stubbornly resist the super-powers, the states, and the likes. If peace in the past is *pax romana* (the roman peace), then today, human rights may be just either *jus sovieticum* (the Soviet justice claimed by Stalinists), or *jus sinicum* (the Chinese justice of Mao Dze-dung) and today, *jus americanum* (the American justice), or in a broader context, *jus occidentalis* (the Western justice). On the name of human rights, these powerful states, governments, or persons have destroyed the rights of other people, without ever questioning which rights they possess, which are the rights other people have and need. In bottom, to say in the manner of Blaise Pascal's sarcastic remark of reason, and Anatole France's mockery at the concept of justice,<sup>3</sup> human rights are mistreated as the whores serving everyone: aggressors find in them the best tools to suppress

their victims, while, on the other side, the suppressed may abuse them as a no less destructive weapon to wage a merciless battle against their oppressors.

The controversy on human rights may be born in human different, even conflicting understanding of human nature, and of course, on human lack of respect for humankind. Thus, a reduction of human rights abuse demands first a minimizing misunderstanding of human nature, and then an increasing of respect for human dignity. That means, any discourse on human rights requires a further discourse on human nature, and any discourse on human nature suggests a concern for human dignity. Since these issues are well debated I would prefer to tackle on a relatively small aspect of *our understanding of human dignity*. As an Asian born in and nourished by Asian cultural heritage, especially by the Confucian values, and educated in the Western knowledge and Christian faith, *our own understanding*, in the strictest sense, rather reflects *my personal modus vivendi*, which is inseparable from these two great traditional cultures. From my own living experience (Erlebniss), I am fully convinced of a possible fusion of two quite contrasting systems of values. Thus, the title “A Confucian-Christian Understanding of Human Dignity” represents my personal search and answer to the above question. It does not pretend to claim any common understanding among all Asians, or even among Chinese, as the title of my paper hints. I will concentrate on the Confucian values in particular, partly because I am more or less directly nourished by them, and partly due to my lack of a solid knowledge of Taoism and Buddhism.

The paper consists of three main parts: the first part investigates the concept of human dignity expounded in the main doctrines of Confucianism, the second part deals with the Christian concept of human dignity as seen in the constitution of *Lumen gentium* promulgated by the Council Vatican II,<sup>4</sup> while the third part would reflect on its relevancy to our Asian society in the global age. This part, in a certain sense, is an attempt to incorporate the Confucian concept of human dignity into the Christian concept of human dignity in a broader and more integral way, to make it universal. In the conclusion, we argue that human dignity should be understood in the context of the process of human participation into the process of self-perfection.

## Part 1

### A Confucian Understanding of Human Dignity

Confucius was certainly not concerned with typical metaphysical question on human nature and its foundation. He was rather obsessed with practical question of human self-realisation.<sup>5</sup> Thus, not the question of what is human nature but that of how do we recognise man as a man, and more importantly, of how to make man as man, has been the objectives ardently sought by him. And indeed, in *The Analects*, almost no clear-cut definition of human beings, God or human nature was given.<sup>6</sup> The master even refused to answer to those who questioned him on matters of deity and evil.<sup>7</sup> Whenever Confucius had to refer to human nature, he would opt for a valuation and not a description. *The Analects* devote 6 paragraphs to deal with human nature,<sup>8</sup> but none of them could be regarded as a definition of it in the strictest sense. The reason of why Confucius resisted temptation to make any definition of human nature is quite simple: human nature can be known only as long as the actual man is living, i.e. thinking, sensing, and especially acting in a certain circumstance, a certain community. That means, one would understand man as long as one be able to participate into this kind of living,<sup>9</sup> or as his followers insisted, to follow the way (Tao) of living.<sup>10</sup> Hence the important issue here is what does Confucius mean by human life? To express Confucian thought in modern languages, one would say that Confucius might have understood human nature in a process of growth *in toto* (moral, intellectual as well as physical growth). Thus to him, any demand for an exact understanding of human nature by birth (or *a priori*) is superfluous, and even dangerous (as we later witness with Mencius and Hsun-tze, who had attempted in vain to understand human nature *in se* as innate goodness or original evil).<sup>11</sup>

If human nature is understood in its total aspects, then one has to arrive at a conclusion that human dignity reflects this human totality. Such a conclusion seems to be a little bit adventurous, if not dangerous, if one has no idea of what Confucius meant by human totality. Thus, we need to go a step further to pinpoint what we mean by total aspects, and their difference.

First, one might argue that human dignity rather reflects the values aspect, since it is this aspect that makes man *transcending* animals. That means that not all aspects are equally essential. That is true to some extent. Confucius himself had made clear of the distinction of human various aspects: the survival and the moral, and he seemed to lay more weight on the latter, when he regarded the noble man (chun-tzu) with noble deeds as the true representative of authentic humanity (existence).<sup>12</sup> Actually, such an understanding was not false, but only partial correct. Confucius never neglected the aspect of survival.<sup>13</sup> But he was fully aware of the fact that not all aspects are equally essential, that it would be necessary to classify them in the order of values: the survival and the progress, or in Confucius' own words, the basic needs, the need for security and humanity.<sup>14</sup> Only when forced to make a final choice, then one would opt for the values of higher order.<sup>15</sup> Following Confucius' idea, I would like to propose to distinguish human existence into the *bare* existence and the *authentic* existence (to borrow the language of Soren A. Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre). Human bare existence is often understood as material life, while authentic life as spiritual (moral, aesthetic) life. Bare existence is possible if basic needs for survival are met, while authentic existence requires values of higher order, the one of progress. That means in order to be human in its full sense, i.e. to be an animal *par excellence*, a bare existence is insufficient. To be human demands to have an authentic existence that requires a life of values.

Second, if human existence consists of bare existence (with survival values) and authentic existence (defined by values of higher order), and if as Confucius insisted, the last one would be prevalent, then one may argue that human dignity, as the value of higher order, would be more prevalent. As corollary, culture (arts), spiritual values, and moral values are not essential to human bare existence (since man can survive without them), but categorically necessary for human dignity.

Third, as a logical consequence of such a distinction, human nature (which consists of bare existence and authentic existence) is not equal to human dignity (which refers to the authentic existence). Human dignity hence expresses the *value* of human existence, and certainly not identified with it. Human dignity can be possible only if man can find an adequate answer to the question concerning the reason of our own

existence. Confucius made this point very clear in his distinction between the superior man (noble, worthy man) and the inferior man (little means man), as we have pointed out earlier. Now we can understand of the reason why Confucius set his mind on the practical program of human self-realisation, i.e. on the value of human progress: “Let the ruler be a ruler, the minister be a minister, the father be a father, and the son be a son.”<sup>16</sup> He was fully conscious of the fact that without human dignity, then all of our attempts of a bare existence would be meaningless: “The duke said, “Excellence! Indeed when the ruler is not a ruler, the minister not a minister, the father not a father, the son not a son, although I may have all the grain, shall I ever get to eat it?”<sup>17</sup>

Now, the question is whether such view of human dignity could be practical, and whether it could be acceptable to us in the age of globalization? Any claim of a definitive answer to these questions is too premature, since it involves our awareness of the diversity of life-worlds, of the gradual (or even sudden) transformation of our own life-world, and certainly of our knowledge of the possible future. Furthermore, we are aware of the fact that nobody can remain fully autonomous even if he deliberately chooses to be so, and that no system of values could claim to remain monolithic. We all become *global*, consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly. If so, then any understanding of human dignity from a single, pure, and monolithic system of values is no longer sufficient. It could become reactionary, dangerous for human progress. As history testifies, the jealous defence of monolithic Confucian values of the conservative Confucians in the later Man-Ching had done great damage to Confucian humanism, reducing it into a kind of rigid ideology, impeding human progress, and hence offending human dignity. Aware of this treacherous ideology, I am inclined towards the view that, a modern Confucian understanding of human dignity must be interpreted in accordance with the spirit of authentic existence and with the actual *modus vivendi* of the Chinese (Far Eastern) people. In other words, the idea of a globalization of Confucian moral system seems to be rather adventurous (and even dangerous). In contrast, I argue that a Confucian (living in a global age) may further the Confucian insistence on human progress (in terms of searching for higher values). And as such, he has to incorporate into the Confucian body any system of values that contributes

to human progress and renders human values more universal, eternal and perfect. Here is the reason of my investigation into the system of Christian values, and my search for a kind of fusion of two systems of values, in the sense of a fusion of horizons, once proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002).<sup>18</sup>

## **Part 2**

### **The Western Understanding of Human Dignity**

#### 2.1. The Christian Concept of Human Dignity

The concept of human dignity in *Lumen gentium* is based on the metaphysical principles of human nature as *imago Dei* (The image of God),<sup>19</sup> and of human community (ecclesia) as a communion of God and humankind: “Signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totiusque generis humani unitatis” (the sign and instrument of an intimate union with God and of a unity of all human beings).<sup>20</sup> As creature created in accordance with the image of the Creator, human nature is *similar* to the divine nature. Hence, if human dignity means to be worth of being human, then it does mean also to be worth of being divine.<sup>21</sup>

The point here is, if human nature is made *after* the divine nature - the image of God-then what is the nature of God, and why only human beings (and not all creatures) are created after His image. These questions force us to put our faith in the bracket (to follow phenomenological method) and to venture into the sphere of human understanding. Whether we can understand the nature of God, as well as His Will by means of rational arguments?

Let us not return to the whole history of how philosophers dealt with this question, and concentrate on a point, namely, up to our times, no answer (given by whomever) is definitively final. The safest way seems to adopt the Kant’s strategy of excluding the sphere of faith from rational discussion. But, such a strategy backfires. As Kant himself conceded, it does not help much to our understanding of human beings as such. It rather leads us to a certain agnosticism that excludes all human activities except the knowing activity. Thus, I would argue that even though faith is not identified with human capacity (or faculty) of understanding, they are inseparable. In my view, understanding expresses our approach to

faith. And our understanding may consist of the so-called the rational understanding based either on the common sense, or on rational basis, or on our own personal life, personal feeling, and so on. To put in a straightforward word, the same faith can be expressed in different ways, often rational and consistent, but sometimes contradictory and even irrational.

Let us return to the question of what is the nature of God, or how do we know that the nature of God is as such? The Scholastic tradition would prove by means of an *analogia*, that man as an image of God, i.e. a part of the Absolute God, would bear the same characteristics of the Absolute, though in lesser, imperfect and partial degree. St. Augustine's argument of the ray and the source of light (theory of *illuminatio*) may at best present this Neo-Platonic theory.<sup>22</sup> Analogically, one may argue that (in accordance with Aristotle), since God is the Absolute, the Logos, the Perfect, then human nature (as a part participating in God) is tending towards the Absolute (transcendence), then it is rational, and then it is guided by moral principles.

Such an *a priori* argument would give little light on the divine nature, and of course, would hardly produce any proof, strong enough to ascertain the existence of God. It requires before hand a certain faith, which cannot be rationally understood, much less to be proved. The argument of *credo qui absurdum* seems to be of no value in persuading rationalists. The Thomist approach tried to avoid this embarrassing conclusion when it chose the rational path. To Aquinas, the idea of God must be proved *a posteriori*, through a careful examination of the works of God, namely nature. Since, he argues, if nature is created by God, it must bear some of His imprint. In other words, one may know the existence of God by knowing nature (in its form, structure, order, and so on). If there is a certain order, if anything happens must have some cause (because nothing can be the cause of itself), if there is a scale of value, etc. then there must exist a certain perfect order, the *causa in se*, the source of values, etc. In a word, God is precisely the absolute order, the final cause, the value *in se*, etc.<sup>23</sup>

Here one has to make a short note: Aquinas did not demonstrate God *in se*. He wants to show us the cause for believing in the presence of God. Thus, his arguments are not directly based on God *in se* but on the

presence (appearances) of God in the world.<sup>24</sup> His arguments (in his so-called five proofs) can be resumed in a sentence: if the world and all beings are created by God, then the world must be reflecting His will, then the world must display his presence. Consequently, the order we found in the world reflects the divine order. Similarly, human desire for happiness is unlimited. But any happiness may short live, in the sense that it can satisfy us only temporally. And as such, it cannot be the ultimate happiness, which human beings are seeking. The idea of a God emerges here as the ultimate Happiness, i.e. as the Cause of all kinds of happiness.

If one follows the Neo-Platonians (like Plotinus and St. Augustine), then the orders in the world are only the rays of light which are coming from the Sun. God is the Sun i.e. the source of all rays. The ray may be diminished, or disappeared, but not its source. Similarly, the order in the world may be imperfect, but not the legislator who made orders. This theory of *emanatio* (initiated by Plotinus) is the backbone of the above mentioned arguments: it points out the existence of a perfect state, a perfect order. God is conceived by as the Creator of these orders. Thus He must be perfect, absolute.

As an image of God, and as the chosen people of God, human beings are called to live up to this divine image. They are called to fulfill the sacred mission assigned by God to them. Or more precisely, they are assigned the responsibility to build a *regnum Dei* (the reign of God), or a *civitas Dei* i.e. a perfect society (the city of Jerusalem as St. Augustine explicitly named) after the model of the world which reveals the nature of God: “The very order, disposition, beauty, change and motion of the world and of all visible things silently proclaim that it could only have been made by God, the ineffably and invisibly great and the ineffably and invisibly beautiful.”<sup>25</sup>

If God is known by His nature, and if His nature is displayed in the world, then one might say that, the divine nature can be discovered precisely in nature. But such a conclusion seems to be rather Spinozian. As most of theologians agree, the world reveals only a part of the divine nature. Thus, what we know about God is only a partial knowledge. There is no complete picture of God. And even such partial knowledge is not directly apprehended, but only by means of an analogy (and by means of a pure speculation). In this sense, the nature of man reflects *a part of*

the divine nature. First, since God is the creator of man, then man is His product (or His image). But God is by no means identified with man, and man could never become God. As an image, man reflects only a part, incomplete part of God. There man is imperfect. In this sense, the imperfect is a characteristic of man and not of God. Thus, any defect, incomplete, insufficient... could not belong to the nature of God. Aquinas' *via negativa* clearly demonstrates that what God is not. That means, human nature could not be identified with the divine nature, simply because human nature is full of defects. In contrast, the divine nature must be the perfect, good *in se*, self-sufficient, etc.

If we follow Aquinas to the letter, then the argument regarding human dignity as worth of being divine seems to be inconsistent. How could a part become the whole, the defect to be transformed into the perfect, the finite to be the infinite? The inability to give a satisfactory answer would persuade us to return to Augustinism: man is worthless before God; he can never become God (with an exception of course, of the Nietzschean *madman* who proclaims himself to be God). Unwillingly, we have to go back to the starting point and content with it: human dignity means worth of being human.

Now it is clear that Aquinas might have proposed a different view of human dignity, namely, that human nature *in se* is orienting towards perfection, and human dignity can be seen in human act of following this nature. The act of refusal of this nature leads to what we might label as human indignity. Since, as we have seen, Aquinas' proofs of the divine existence point out rather the difference between man and God. Thus, human dignity cannot be understood in the sense of worthiness of being divine, because it would tacitly accept an identity of God and man. To follow Aquinas' spirit, we may have to understand human dignity not in the framework of the logical identity, but of the logic of faith: the concept of human dignity is built on our knowledge of humanity *and* on our faith in God. On the one hand, the knowledge of humanity suggests that man is man simply because he has the capacity to transcend natural world to become better. In this sense, his nature is defined by his progress. The language of faith, on the other hand, would prove that if God is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, the Good *in se*, etc. then as His image, i.e. as someone most close to God, human nature should be in some way more

close to His nature. Thus, to become holy means to become better. Similarly, human vocation is the call to *become* perfect. As a finite proceeding towards the infinite, human nature means a dynamic essence (dynamis) possessing the energy (energeia), not at the static stage but proceeding (or developing) towards the perfect (telos). To say in the language of faith, we are called to become perfect. Hence, to become perfect is the essence of humanity.

## 2.2. The Western Claim

As we see, the history of human understanding of God, and of the concept of human dignity in the constitution *Lumen gentium*, and other documents of the Vatican II yields a view of monolithic character: the character of Western thinking. The triumph of the West in the fields of sciences, military and economics has consolidated its own character and constituted its own self-consciousness (as Hegel had fabricated: the world is the West, and its soul is Christianity, its spirit is reason, its form is science and its force is economics. As corollary, the West dogmatically dismissed or arrogantly downgraded the views (values) of other cultures. Of course, such monolithic, iconoclast view is no longer shared by even Western intellectuals. R. G. Collingwood is not the only gentleman who once warned the West: “Savages are no more exempt from human folly than civilized men, and are no doubt equally liable to the error of thinking that they, or the person they regard as their superiors, can do what in fact cannot be done. But this error is not the essence of magic. And we should be careful how we attribute it to the people we call savages, who will one day raise up and testify against us.”<sup>26</sup> Much earlier, the legendary Matteo Ricci had eloquently testified the greatness of a China, just as great missionaries like De Nobili had brilliantly demonstrated the grandeur of Indian civilization. A Voltaire, a Leibniz, a Schopenhauer, a Legge, a Wilhelm, and other great Occidental learners, were certainly not the only and the last ones who wholeheartedly echoed the view of these missionaries. Since, it is not our scope to argue for the greatness of other non-Western cultures; it is sufficient to limit our work in unearthing the source of biases in the world of Western philosophers.

To avoid any possible and unnecessary misunderstanding, it is important, however, to make a short clarification: my criticism of some

views of some Western philosophers does not mean my objection to Western values. Quite in contrast, I am fully aware that nobody would be foolish, or too radical to throw away the Western values. In fact, there is some truth in the claim of the West: their triumph was possible due to its own *character*. However, such triumph could not be the backbone of its universal claim, and much less demonstrate its *universality* as Hegel had done in vain in his immortal (but very controversial) *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>27</sup> Thus we have to turn now to the second question of whether such concept could be regarded as universal, or whether it is rather a particular product of the Church fathers (and of theologians of the Western world, or Western educated theologians). The answer to this question is of important significance, because, in our view, biblical understanding advocated first by Martin Luther, and recently by theologians *of, from and for* the world outside Vatican,<sup>28</sup> has been rather the fruit of their world. To borrow Hegelian expression, their view reflects the spirit of their age (*Zeitgeist*) and their people (*Volksgeist*). Thus, the condemnation of their view by the *Sacra Congregazione della dottrina della Fede* in the past, and even in recent days,<sup>29</sup> may be understood as an objection to (possible) understanding of the message of God of the world outside the Vatican, or in a broader sense, outside the Western world.

As we have seen, the concept of human dignity has been *constructed* in the womb of the Greco-Roman culture, *guided* by the Christian spirit, *nourished* by the thoughts of the Church fathers, and *developed* by modern Western philosophy. More concretely, the concept of human dignity defended by the Vatican II may be regarded as a *synthetic product* of the following traditions: the Homeric tradition of regarding the divine world and the human world as homogeneous, the Judaic tradition of considering human beings as the image of God (and the Israel as His selected people), the Christian tradition of believing in Christ as the son of God and the son of man, and the Western modern idea of equality among all people. The point now is, whether such a synthetic view could represent other traditions, say the Chinese tradition, the Indian tradition, the African tradition, and others, or, more universally, whether it could include all traditions. Since, as we may agree, we would not be able to understand the concept of human dignity if we do not have any idea of the culture in which the idea of human dignity is born; and

certainly much less can we perform it, or obey its laws, or apply it in our own life-world, if it is alien to us.<sup>30</sup>

Here I have to repeat once again that I do not deny the effort (and the merit) of our Church fathers in searching for such a synthesis. My suspicion is about their claim of a final and complete synthesis that is *theirs* and *theirs only*. As an Asian, nourished in the womb of Chinese culture (and partly Buddhist culture),<sup>31</sup> my reflection begins with whether the concept of human dignity understood by our Church fathers reflects, or represents our Asian understanding of human dignity? If it does, then the claim of universal may be justified *for Asians* (of course, not yet for other peoples). If not, then such a claim is still questionable, or at least *not definitive*.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is very important to clarify here that my question focuses on the claim of universality of the concept of human dignity and not of that of truth. As I have previously pointed out the distinction between faith and understanding, so I have to accept that the sphere of understanding is not identified with that of truth. The same truth may be understood quite differently, and consequently, interpreted in different ways.

Let us return to the definition of human dignity: human dignity means to be worth of human beings. No doubt, such definition does add nothing new to our understanding of human dignity, since it is rather of tautological essence. But no doubt, no one would question its correctness either. Thus, it would be superfluous to treat such definition *in se* and waste time for such an answer. One has to venture beyond to pose a series of questions concerning the meaning of worthiness of being human like what we mean by human nature, whether human nature is an image of the divine nature, and why should we live up to this nature. Since I am rather concerned with Confucian understanding of human dignity, and of whether such an understanding is compatible with the concept of human dignity promulgated and defended by the Vatican II (as we have presented in the second part of this paper), I would like to tackle the problem from two angles: their compatibility and the possibility of a fusion of them.

## Part 3

### Divergence and Convergence

#### 3.1. The Difference

In this section, I will follow Thome Fang's and Fu Pei-jung's analysis of the concept of life in the *Analects* to some extent, to make clear the divergence between Christianity and Confucianism in matters of human life, and human dignity.

The first difference between the Christian view and the Confucian view of life lies in its metaphysical foundation: the *Ursprung* of life and its importance. If life, in the Christian belief, is created by God, then it is inseparable from the divine life. It is not us but God who determines our life. As consequence, life itself matters little, because it can be given, or taken away by its Creator. In this context, it is not life but its *Ursprung* must be human concern. The Confucian view of life does not object to this view (Confucius' avoid to tackle this problem does not mean his objection), but it does not regard it as essential to our understanding of life either. It rather concentrates on life itself, and certainly on its process, putting aside its metaphysical *Ursprung*. As a matter of fact, Confucians do rather question the metaphysical foundation of life; they would prefer to ponder on practical question of living.<sup>32</sup> In the context of process, life is producing life in the way of self-generating.<sup>33</sup> Thus, it is a matter of urgency to follow the natural way of this process (The Tao of *I-king*, the Taoist Tao), or to correct human behaviour to follow this Tao.

The second difference lies in the attitude towards life. To the Confucian, a true human being does not contradict, jeopardise, or destroy one's own life. And it is also true with regard to the life of others. Thus, one knows a man worthy of being human only by his conducts which fulfill the aims of human life: preservation, prolong and development of life.<sup>34</sup> But life can be preserved, prolonged and developed not by one's own force alone, since it cannot be separated from the cosmic force which encompasses heavenly force (tien), earthly force (ti) and human force (ren). That means human life generates its own life by the co-operative force of other lives (the cosmic life, human life, etc.). In a single word, life is possible only by means of other lives.<sup>35</sup> Thus, one may say with confidence that human life is primarily cosmic life and social life. In this

context, human nature is known as first cosmic nature and then as social nature. Similarly, human essence is firstly cosmic essence and then as social essence. In the Christian view, life is given by God, and rooted in God, therefore, man has no right to claim over one's own life. Even human participation in the divine life is not an act of human self-developing, but a special grace bestowed on them by God. Evidently, the Christian man is rather passive in comparison with the active Confucian man.

Furthermore, as the logical consequence of human self-generation and self-determination, the meaning of human life is determined by one's own contribution to this social essence. In other words, human nature cannot be understood albeit from social nature, since man reveals oneself through one's own social acts, or better say, by means of one's contribution to the growth of humanity.<sup>36</sup> Here is the reason why Confucius reserved most times to the theme of humanity (jen), to the ways of being human (superior man, filial piety, righteousness, etc.).<sup>37</sup> These themes are concerned with human acts in a society. Better say, they are the practical categories, which any human being as a social being must take. Not quite in the same line, Christian view is centred on the divine grace and salvation. One cannot, due to human sin, free oneself from the external and internal conditions. Thus, only by divine grace or by the intervention of God that man would be liberated. The incarnation of Jesus Christ and his redemption clearly indicate that man by himself is incapable of determining his own fate. This dogma also suggests that while the substance of man is divine, his social nature is rather of accident character. The dualist separation of soul from body unmistakably sidelines the needs of human body, which constitute an essential part of human world. Of course, this dogma has been slightly changed by the Council fathers, when they adopted the view of social nature as a manifestation of divine nature. Nevertheless, its substantial part remains intact, namely, human nature is divine, prior to the fall of Adam and after the redemption.

### 3.2. Christian View and the Confucian View of Life.

I will not delve into their analysis of the difference between Christianity and Confucianism in general, which is quite interesting but, nonetheless, irrelevant for our discussion here. Thus, for the sake of brevity and for a fruitful discussion, and as a logical consequence of the concept

of human nature as social essence, one may venture to argue that human dignity must be understood in the following contexts:

Firstly, since human nature is shaped in the process of living, and since human beings are different by birth,<sup>38</sup> then in order to attain this social essence, education is necessary: “By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become apart.”<sup>39</sup> Education is an art of living, in the sense of living in accordance with human nature, social nature and the world nature.

Secondly, Confucius insists on the fact that human nature can be evaluated by social (moral) standards. Thus, to him, to obey rules, to respect social orders, to execute duty... contribute to what we may regard as human dignity.

Thirdly, social standards, laws are not beyond human capacity. They are for human beings and not the reverse.<sup>40</sup> Thus human dignity can be known through our most noble principles of existence, co-existence, and progress, just as in the more negative forces, which do harm to human existence, and human progress.

From these main currents of thought, one easily finds that human nature is regarded not as something *inborn*, *innate* but as substantial products in the living process. If this view can represent the so-called Eastern view, then it seems to be quite different, if not contrast to the West-Christian view of human nature as *imago Dei*, i.e. a pre-planned, pre-determined and unchangeable nature which human beings cannot change by any means. If there were some change, then this would be rather a change for worse, a change that is interpreted as original sin, the sinful decadence of humanity. Of course, the difference between Chinese culture and Christian culture is not only seen in their different view on human nature. This is only one of many controversial points,<sup>41</sup> which are sufficient to make doubtful the claim of universal of the West.

The above mentioned differences are only a part of a deeper divergence that discourages any claim of a universal view on human nature. Despite this seemingly unbridgeable divergence, it seems to me that *Lumen gentium* had let the door open for more reasonable interpretation concerning human nature. It had made a tremendous progress in comparing to the old dogmas promulgated by earlier Councils, especially by the Council of Trent (1545-1563), or declared and enforced

by the so-called *Magisterium*. Due to the limit of this discussion, I will not repeat here the major contribution of *Lumen gentium* to human understanding and to promote human dignity that I have referred elsewhere.<sup>42</sup> I would prefer to conclude my paper with a conjecture of a possible convergence of different views, kind of a fusion of different horizons which Gadamer has projected in his now becoming classical work: *Truth and Method*.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

### The Possibility of a Common Understanding of Human Dignity

Gadamer's thesis of the fusion of horizons exposed in *Truth and Method* and in other works<sup>44</sup> can be resumed in following main tenets:

- First, each tradition (each culture, each historical consciousness, each life) is like a horizon. In Gadamer's own words, horizon expresses or displays the "range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."<sup>45</sup>

- Second, horizon changes with our own move, just as the range of vision is changing with the change of our life, or more exactly, with the change of our life-world. The change usually takes the form of widening (in space), or broadening (in terms of consciousness), and deepening. That means, the more our life-world is extending, the wider is our vision, the deeper is our consciousness, and the richer is our life. That is, the more cultures we encounter, the richer, wider, and deeper is our life-world.

- Third, the widening, broadening and deepening of horizon follows a dialectical path: the next stage (vision) absorbs the actual stage and previous stages, just as the actual present stage includes all previous stages. Of course, this kind of synthesis is not a non-reflective mathematical summing up, but a selective one, in the sense of Hegel's *Aufhebung*.

- As such, human beings always possess a certain horizon, and his (her) horizon is permanently changing in the sense of self-enriching, self-broadening, self-deepening, and the like. The point here is such an expansion of horizon could be possible if and only if one has to move up, i.e. to expand one's own life by going into other cultures (or life-worlds).

The more one advances, the more one discovers one's horizon expanding; the more one is rooted in other life-worlds, the more one is deepening one's own horizon, and so on. To apply to culture, we can say analogously: the more cultures we learn, the wider is our life-world; the more open we are, the more possibility we may encounter; the deeper we dig in traditions, the deeper is our own historical consciousness.

Of course, not all human beings are able to expand their horizons, and not all horizon-expansion takes the dialectical course. Followers of Marx would rightly doubt Gadamer's over-optimistic expectation, by arguing that these horizons (cultures, religions) might have been manufactured (fabricated), falsified or instrumentalised; that we might have been alienated by the same cultures we are born in, etc. If so, then the so-called expansion of horizon is rather a regression back into the "darkness" of pre-Enlightenment ages (Habermas' criticism of Gadamer). In my view, Habermas' over-caution of Gadamer's "uncritical" and "unreserved" attitude in favor of horizon-fusion has served as a good warning. However, in bottom, as Habermas himself conceded later (after his debate with Gadamer in the later 1970s), that his over-zealous defense of the so-called force of reason (of the Enlightenment) does not contradict the Hegelian insight that the spirit is in a permanent process toward the absolute, and that its process follows dialectical path.<sup>46</sup> If so, then what Habermas insisted is nothing new with regard to Gadamer's proposal. Only one thing worth to be said is his insistence on reason as the guiding force behind the any act of fusing.

Following Gadamer, and in line with *traditione catholica*, my reflective conclusion is, in the strictest sense, not a conclusion but, in contrast, an invitation for further reflection on the concept of human dignity. My main thesis is as follows: if human dignity means what is constituting human essence, and if this essence cannot be separated from other essences (the physical, the social, the spiritual, etc.), and if these essences form human nature, then any definition of human dignity in terms of divinity, or pure humanity, or in its material essence alone is perhaps incomplete and, consequently, misleading. Just as any definition of human nature in terms of a single essence is rather dogmatic. One has to search for a more encompassing understanding of the concept of human dignity, divinity and humanity. As a corollary of my tentative proposal

to understand human nature as social essence - which reflects human deep and eternal aspiration for self-perfection by means of mutual, reciprocal and communicative activities - I would venture to go a further step by arguing that the concept of human dignity, thanks to the new discovery of archeologists, anthropologists and biologists, has been significantly modified in the last century. Similarly, the Christian Churches have made a revolution in redefining human beings, no longer in terms of immortality but also in terms of our existential worlds. As we have argued elsewhere, the concept of human dignity in *Lumen gentium* (the constitution of the Catholic Church) is going through a process of self-renovating (*aggiornamento*), self-enriching, and self-bettering by means of cultural fusions. The recent apostolic exhortation of John-Paul II to the Asian Bishops Conference, *Ecclesia in Asia* (The Church in Asia, 1999), most vividly reflects this wide and deep change: human nature, and consequently, human dignity must be understood in the context of human common concern, common vocation, and common aspiration for perfect life,<sup>47</sup> which is implicitly found in almost all cultures.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>It is well known that almost all great religions have devoted most energy and resources to the cause of human rights. One of the greatest achievements of the Council Vatican II is the Church's determination to protect and to promulgate human rights. In fact, the Vatican II had devoted an entire section IX of the Council on human rights. See the Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis humanae* (7 December 1965). Recently, the Muslims have also devoted more research to the issues of human rights. Muffi University in Iran, with the strong support of the Iran government and the President of Iran in person, had organised two international conferences on human rights in 2001 and 2002, respectively.

<sup>2</sup>Aristotle had excluded the slaves just as the Romans had denied to the non-Romans the right of being human. Similarly, the Christians had been denied of basic rights by many states and governments.

<sup>3</sup>Pascal's criticism of Cartesian rationalism as useless and uncertain (*Pensees*, 2, 78, p. 361.). Similarly, Anatole France, a reputed French novelist, once remarked against justice, justice gives to everyone what he (she) deserves, to the riches property, to the poor poverty.

<sup>4</sup>Council Vatican II, *Constitutio pastoralis de Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis – Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen gentium* in Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, *Constitutiones, Decreta, Declarationes* (Vatican: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1966). Quotations with abbreviations: GS (*Gaudium et Spes*), LG (*Lumen gentium*), DH (*Dignitatis Humanae*). For a specific discourse of the concept of human dignity in *Lumen gentium*, see my work: Tran Van Doan, "Human Dignity in *Lumen Gentium*." Paper presented at the International Conference on Christian Philosophy and Human Dignity, Fujen University, Taipei, Dec. 2002. Further, I have objected to the so-called "universal understanding" of human rights. See my: Tran Van Doan, *Whose Rights? Deception or Illusion of Monological Thinking.* Paper written for *The International Conference on Human Rights*, Muffi University, Iran (April, 2001).

<sup>5</sup>*The Analects*, 6:18: "To know it is not as good as to love it, and to love it is not as good as to take delight in it." Trans. by Chan Wing-tsit, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963). **All English quotations in this paper are from Chan Wing-tsit.** Hereafter as Chan. Note that the followers of Confucius like Mencius and Hsun-tze might have different view in their mind, when they searched for a metaphysical foundation of human nature. According to Thaddeus Hang, Mencius argued for human self-perfection and for heaven mandate as the metaphysical foundation of human nature. Starting from a reverse angle (human nature as evil), Hsun-tze arrived at the same conclusion, human nature is grounded on the metaphysical principles of Tien-tao (The Way of Heaven), and Jen-tao (The Way of Man). See Thaddeus Hang, "The Metaphysical Background of Mencius-Hsun-tze' Concept of Human Nature" in *Chung-kuo Ren-hsing Lun*, op. cit., pp. 68-71. For further discussion on this question, see also Li Ming-hui,

“Meng-tze yu Kang-te di Dz lu Lun-li xuye” (Autonomous Morality of Mencius and Kant) (Taipei, April, 1988), mentioned by Thaddeus Hang, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>6</sup>*The Analects*, 5: 12: “Tzu-kung said, we can hear our Master? [view] on culture and its manifestation, but we cannot hear his views on human nature and the Way of Heaven.”

<sup>7</sup>*The Analects*, 11: 11: “Tzu-lu asked about serving the spiritual beings. Confucius said, “If we are not yet able to serve man, how can we serve spiritual beings?”

<sup>8</sup>According to the classification of Prof. Chan Wing-tsit, op. cit., 6 sentences are 5: 12, 6: 17, 6: 19, 16: 9, 17: 2, and 17: 3.

<sup>9</sup>*The Analects*, 6: 18.

<sup>10</sup>As seen in the thought of Mencius, Hsun-tse, Wang Yang-ming, Chu-hsi, etc.

<sup>11</sup>The debate on human nature between Mencius and Hsun-tse may obscure the central doctrine of Confucius on humanity. Actually, even their so-called debate on the metaphysical foundation of human nature did not bear the same characteristic as seen in the debate of Western philosophers. By regarding human nature either as originally good *in se* (Mencius) or bad *in se* (Hsun-tse), they did not contend that goodness or badness must be the real and universal foundation of human nature. Actually, they wished to solve the enigma of our understanding and our revaluation of the so-called good and bad.

<sup>12</sup>*The Analects*, 4: 16: “Confucius said, “The superior man understands righteousness (I); the inferior man understands profit.” Similarly, *The Analects*, 4: 12: “Confucius said, “The superior man thinks of virtue; the inferior man thinks of possessions.”

<sup>13</sup>*The Analects*, 6: 28: “Tzu-kung said, “If a ruler extensively confers benefit on the people and can bring salvation to all, what do you think of him? Would you call him a man of humanity? Confucius said, “Why only a man of humanity? He is without doubt a sage. Even Yao and Shun fell short of it.”

<sup>14</sup>*The Analects*, 12: 7: “Tzu-kung asked about government. Confucius said, “Sufficient food, sufficient armament, and sufficient confidence of the people.”

<sup>15</sup>*The Analects*, 12: 7: “Tzu-kung said, “Forced to give up one of these, which would you abandon first?” Confucius said, “I would abandon on the armament.” Tzu-kung said, “Forced to give up one of the remaining two, which would you abandon first?” Confucius said, “I would abandon food. There have been deaths from time immemorial, but no state exists without the confidence (social essence) of the people.”

<sup>16</sup>*The Analects*, 12: 7.

<sup>17</sup>Id.

<sup>18</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. English translation by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed & Ward ) pp. 273 ff.

<sup>19</sup>Col. I, 15; LG I, 2.

<sup>20</sup>LG I, 1: “Cum autem Ecclesia sit in Christo veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totiusque generis humani unitatis, naturam missionemque suam universalem, praecedentium Conciliorum argumento instans, pressius fidelibus suis et mundo universo declarare intendit.”

<sup>21</sup>This kind of understanding of human dignity is often repeated in almost all documents. In the *Declaratio de Libertate Religios* (Dignitas Humanae), one reads: “Primum itaque profitetur Sacra Synodus Deum Ipsum viam generi humano notam fecisse per quam, Ipsi serviendo, homines in Christo salvi et beati fieri possint.” (De Iure personae..., DH 1); “Homines vero cuncti tenentur veritatem, praesertim in iis quae Deum Eiusque Ecclesiam respiciunt, quaerere eamque cognitam amplecti ac servare.” (DH 1). Of course, human dignity can be known in terms of reason, morals, responsibility... also: “Secundum dignitatem suam homines cuncti, quia personae sunt, ratione scilicet et libera voluntate praediti ideoque personali responsibilitate aucti, sua ipsorum natura impelluntur necnon morali tenentur obligatione ad veritatem quaerendam, illam imprimis quae religionem spectat.” In *Gaudium et Spes*, parts on “De homine ad imaginem Dei, De hominis constitutione...”.

<sup>22</sup> St Augustine takes a theme (*Soliloquia* 1, 8, 15) that was found in Plato’s comparison of the idea of the Good with the sun, according to which the idea of the Good irradiating the subordinate intelligible objects or ideas. Plato, *Republic*, 514-518. *Summa Theologica*, Ia, 2, 3, 10.1, 13, etc.

<sup>23</sup>*Summa Theologica*, Ia, 2, 3; 10. 1, 13, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Rahner, the widely acknowledged as one of the greatest theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has brilliantly expounded this Thomistic idea in his now becoming classics *Gott in Welt* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1943) and *Hoerer des Wortes* (Muenchen 1947).

<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine, *Soliloquia*, 3, 11, 26.

<sup>26</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 67-68; See also Peter Winch, *Understanding a Primitive Society* (London, 1967), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> G. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). English translation of A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>28</sup> Johannes B. Metz, *Zur Theologie der Welt* (1968), Eng. trans. (ET) by William Glen-Doepel, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969); Juergen Moltmann, *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes* (1975), ET by Margaret Kohl, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977); R. Munos, *La Iglesia en el pueblo* (Lima, 1983); Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988); Lee Jung-Young, ed. *An Emerging Theology in World Perspective: Commentary on Korean Minjung Theology* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third, 1988); R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991); Leonardo Boff and Virgilio Elizondo, ed., *Theologies of the Third World: Convergences and Differences*

(Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); Song Choan Seng, *Third-Eye Theology: Theology in Formation in Asian Settings* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982), and others.

<sup>29</sup>See the polemic declaration *Dominus Iesus* issued by Joseph Card. Ratzinger, Prefect of the *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith* in 2000. In this declaration, Asian philosophy, as long as it is understood as the opposite to the Western rational thinking, is considered as incompatible with faith. Though, as Archbishop Giuseppe Bertone, the then secretary general of the Congregation insisted, the declaration is consulted and accepted by Asian bishops, its language seems to be a little bit inappropriate. How can Asian philosophy, a very complex web of different thinking, be simplified and reduced into some rude ideas as seen in *Dominus Iesus* (2000)?

<sup>30</sup>The seemingly violent and arbitrary request from the Occident (the USA in particular) that the world must follow its order (and values) is a case in point showing how impracticable is the belief in universal values, or unified science. The discordance about the meaning of human rights between the East and the West, the West and the Muslims, etc. could not be settled down by means of violence, or as in the case of Habermas, by the rational standards invented by rationalists. So long the West hegemony (and rationalism) still imposes their own order, criteria and values on other cultures, then not only misunderstandings but, more tragically, violent reaction would be unavoidable. See George F. McLean, *Hermeneutics for the Global Ages*, Introduction. (Manuscript). The human tragedy does not arise from the break down of the Babel tower but from the idea and the claim of human absolute power. The disorder after the tragedy of Babel tower is the necessary consequence of such a claim. See my “The Search for the Pentecostal Spirit” in *The Acts of the Fourth International Conference of The Asian Association of Catholic Philosophers: Humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Towards a New Vision* (Seoul: The Catholic University of Korea, 2000), pp. 213-228.

<sup>31</sup>Actually, no one can doubt that Chinese culture (as we conceive today) and other cultures influenced by Chinese culture) is far from purity. It is rather a continuing synthesis of different currents of thought like Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and, particularly, the folklore culture. See Tang Yi-chieh, *Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Chinese Culture* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1989).

<sup>32</sup>*The Analects*, 12: 5: “Ssu ma Niu worrying, said, “All people have brothers but I have none.” Tzu-hisa said, “I have heard (from Confucius) this saying: “Life and death are the decree of Heaven (ming); wealth and honor depend on Heaven. If a superior man is reverential without fail, and is respectful in dealing with others and follows the rules of propriety, then all within the four seas (the world) are brothers. What does the superior man to have worry about having no brothers?” See also Thome H. Fang, *Chinese Philosophy: Its Spirit and Its Development* (Taipei: Linking, 1985), pp. 71-72.

<sup>33</sup>This idea was original in the Chinese mind, as seen in their cosmological view. To say after Taoism, and *I-king*, in Thome Fang’s words, the universe is the unified field of all existence, permeated with the spiritual meaning and value of life.

Thus, human life, like the cosmic life, creates and procreates continuously. In a word, life is perpetual creativity. See Thome H. Fang, *The Chinese View of Life*, pp. 27-52.

<sup>34</sup>See my other article: Tran Van Doan, “Confucianism: Survival or Revival” in *Korean Studies – Its Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Seoul: The Academy of Korean Studies, 1990), pp. 197-222; Chinese text in *Chung-hwa Wen-hwa Qwo-chuy he Wei-lai* (Taipei, Peking, Shanghai, 1991), pp. 243-255.

<sup>35</sup>The predominant importance of the concept of *jen* in the Confucian body of learning is the most evident showing this idea. In the *Analects* alone, there are at least 27 passages referring to *jen*. But more important, almost the whole content of the *Analects*, the *Doctrine of the Means* and the *Great Learning* and the *Mencius*, is concerning with *jen*.

<sup>36</sup>*The Analects*, 4: 2: “The man of humanity is naturally at ease with humanity. The man of wisdom cultivates humanity for its advantage”; 4: 3: “Confucius said, “Only the man of humanity knows how to love people and hate people”; 4: 4: “Confucius said, “If you set your mind on humanity, you will be free from evil.”

<sup>37</sup>In fact, *The Analects* is full with passages or quotations on humanism (6: 20; 10: 12; 11: 11; 12: 22; 15: 28; 18: 6); on humanity (*jen*) (1: 2, 3, 6; 3: 3; 4: 2-6; 6: 20, 21, 28; 7: 6, 29; 8: 7; 12: 1, 2, 22; 13: 19, 27; 14: 30; 15: 8, 32, 35; 17: 6, 8; 19: 6); on rectification of names (12: 11, 17; 13: 3, 6); on superior man (abundant passages), etc. See Chan, p. 18.

<sup>38</sup>*The Analects*, 6: 19: “To those who are above average, one may talk of higher things, but may not do so to those who are below average.”

<sup>39</sup>*The Analects*, 17: 2. Note that similar idea also found in the Taoist tradition. Taoists like Lao-tse and Chuang-tse do not regard the business of searching for an exact definition of human nature as important as we may think. In *Tao Te King*, we find three chapters dealing with humanity and righteousness (chaps. 18, 19, 38), but none of a definition. Lao-tse describes human nature in a genetic process of birth and death: “When the great Tao declines, the doctrines of humanity and righteousness arose.” Since I am not familiar with Buddhism, I would not venture in this unknown area. Just a point to be said, since Buddhism has been incorporated into Chinese culture, it is certainly no longer purely Indian. It reflects a part of the Chinese view of human nature. As seen in the Fa-tsang and Hua-yen School, only through moral exercise, practice that one can free oneself from the *karma*. Such a doctrine leads logically to the view that human nature is shaped by human own acts of moral purification.

<sup>40</sup>*The Analects*, 13:18.

<sup>41</sup>See Fu Pei-jung, “Chinese Thought and Christianity”, in *Collectanea Theologica* (Fujen University, 1978), pp. 215 ff. In this article Prof. Fu presents as much as 10 different doctrines between Christianity and Chinese culture, such as the controversy on the original sin, the absolute God, the concept of transcendence, the absolute difference between God and human beings, the salvation through Christ, etc.; also in A. B. Chang, *Dann sind Himmel und Mensch in Einheit. Bausteine*

*chinesischer Theologie* (Freiburg, 1984), pp. 70-74. Such ideas are developed further by Fu in his more comprehensive monograph: *Communication between Confucianism and Christianity* (Taipei: Ye-chang Pub. House, 1988). I have developed further the ideas of Chang and Fu in my study: Tran Van Doan, "Ueberlegungen zu einer asiatischen Theologie" in *Zeitschrift fuer Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* (75 Jubilaeumsausgabe, Muenster, 1985), pp. 172-79; and Tran Van Doan, *Toward a Viet-Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Vietnam University Press, 2002).

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Tran Van Doan, "Human Dignity in *Lumen gentium*." Paper presented at the *International Conference on Christian Philosophy and Human Dignity* (Fujen University, December 2002). This paper will be published in a special volume edited by George F. McLean (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003).

<sup>43</sup>Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, op. cit., pp. 306-7, 374-5.

<sup>44</sup>For a more detailed discussion of Gadamer's concept of horizons-fusion, see Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), part on Gadamer. See also my work: Tran Van Doan, "Pluralistic Culture versus Cultural Pluralism." Paper presented at *The XXth World Congress of Philosophy*, Istanbul, August 2003.

<sup>45</sup>*Truth and Method*, p. 302.

<sup>46</sup>Juergen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne: Zwölf Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1985). Eng. Translation by Frederick Lawrence: *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity – Twelve Lectures* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

<sup>47</sup>Cf. John-Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*. English translation in *The Origins* 29/23 (18 November 1999), pp. 358-384. *Ecclesia in Asia* (The Church in Asia) is an apostolic exhortation of Pope John-Paul II addressing to the Catholics in Asia during the Synod of Asian Bishops in New Delhi (India) (6 November 1999). For comments, see Peter Phan, composed and edited, *The Asian Synod: Text and Commentaries* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 2002).