CHAPTER 6

The Moral Vision

Moral Intuitionism

The differences in the practical philosophy of Kant and Tang Junyi go beyond the Kantian concepts of ideals and regulative ideas, on the one hand, and positive Confucian limit-concepts, on the other. Contrary to Kant’s deontological moral philosophy, Tang’s moral thought cannot be categorized as an ethics based on principles. Understanding his moral thought as “moral intuitionism,” however, offers a sufficient point of departure. Yet this should not belie the fact that Tang did not elaborate a full-fledged moral theory. After all, we do not find a comprehensive meta-ethical discussion about methodological issues in his writings on moral philosophy. Tang, though, dealt with practical ethics in more than just a pedestrian way. Notwithstanding these reservations, we may first relate his moral philosophy to theories of moral realism, and, in a following step, to moral intuitionism. This will shed some light on implicit assumptions in Tang’s moral thought which pertain to the issue of moral truth, its relation to reality, and the lingering question of moral subjectivism and irrationalism.

According to David McNaughton, moral realism is best understood in terms of several different assumptions, all of which can be found, with some modifications, in Tang’s moral thought. First of all, there is the claim that moral reality exists independently of human ideas, opinions, and perceptions. Moral values as elements of an independent moral reality can thus be detected or discovered, without the need to construct them philosophically. This assumption is indeed in line with Tang’s notion of the absolute moral reality of the “moral nature of Heaven” (daode de tian xing 道德的天性). In discussing “spiritual values,” Tang insinuated that even though values can be discovered, the role of the human being is not restricted to that of a passive recipient of pre-existing values. He hence transformed Lincoln’s famous formula by stat-

1 On the tripartition of moral philosophy in practical ethics, moral theory and meta-ethics, see McNaughton, Moral Vision, pp. 15–16. Tang sketched out central topics of his moral thought in Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, p. 515.
2 The following passages on moral realism draw on McNaughton, Moral Vision, pp. 4–5, 7–8, 17, 24, 39–40, 51–52, 96.
3 Tang, Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian, p. 62.
ing that “spiritual values” are characterized by their threefold relation to the (human) mind: they are “by the spirit,” “for the spirit” and “of the spirit.” This somewhat enigmatic statement may be interpreted in different ways, but it seems safe to say that the human spirit is understood here as taking a more active part than merely contemplating the realm of values. One interpretation may run as follows: Spiritual values are detected and enacted “by the spirit,” inure to the benefit of the human mind (“for the spirit”), and cannot exist without the participation of the human mind (“of the spirit”).4

According to Tang, human agency is essential in value-formation because even if values may originally belong to the realm of “Heaven”—a point which is not entirely clarified by Tang—the realization of values hinges on the participation of human agency.5 Inasmuch as liang zhi is not identical with mere contemplation but amounts to an intuition in actu, values are not just objects of contemplation, for they must be enacted in order to become real. Such enactment by liang zhi is not a matter of a human subject implementing some transcendent value-objects, because liang zhi takes place as an intuition that is not structured by a subject-object relation. The human mind cannot grasp the absolute moral reality of “Heaven” by objectifying it, but only by partaking in its realization as a sage.

Tang, however, is not in agreement with an important qualification of moral realism introduced by McNaughton. Even if we were to assume that moral reality exists independently of human ideas and perceptions, McNaughton points out that human beings’ apprehension of moral reality still cannot be separated from their respective world views. An immediate perception of moral reality is, in other words, unattainable. In contrast to such a view, modern Confucianism’s notion of liang zhi assumes that human beings have the capacity to attain a moral intuition which equals an immediate apprehension of an absolute moral reality (i.e. the “moral nature of Heaven”). It is on this premise

4 See Tang, “The Development of Ideas of Spiritual Value in Chinese Philosophy,” pp. 1–2.

5 It is this premise which must be taken into account when examining Tang’s concept of value according to which whole categories of values such as moral and aesthetical values are in fact attributes of “nature” (ziran 自然). Tang even claimed that this assumption about values is a crucial feature of Chinese culture in general, and a focal point of distinction between Chinese and early modern Western cultures (see Tang, Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi pp. 107–108). He characterized values (as well as virtues [de 德 or dexiong 德性]) as a capacity within “events and things” (shi wu 事物) to mutually affect each other to the effect of enabling development and growth. The partaking of the human spirit in the realization of the moral nature of Heaven is thus to be understood as the highest form of such interaction; see Tang, Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi pp. 106, 110–112.
that Tang labeled his brand of Confucian moral thought an “absolute idealism” (juedui weixin lun) or “moral idealism” (daode weixin lun). But he did so, as we have seen, in the context of his explicit intention to move from such idealism to a “transcendent realism” (chaoyue shizai lun), or some sort of synthesis of the two.

Based on the idea that moral reality exists independently of human ideas and perceptions, moral realists conclude that reality can function as the criterion of moral truth. Standards of moral truth are hence non-conventional, that is, independent of opinions, linguistic specifications etc. Propositions about moral right and wrong are thus seen as truth-apt in principle. Tang’s vision of Confucianism is basically in line with this tenet of moral realism. What is more, Tang’s moral thought shares similarities with the non-naturalistic type of moral realism represented by G.E. Moore, who held that moral properties cannot be described as natural properties. Moore characterized the identification of moral propositions with descriptions of natural properties as a naturalistic fallacy. Tang would have agreed with Moore that the meaning of “good” cannot be apprehended by a linguistic description, but only by an immediate perception, that is, an intuition. He therefore equated liang zhi with the “self of moral reason” (daode lixing zhi ziwo 道德理性之自我) calling the latter the “self which is able to judge the good and the non-good of our acts; [it is the self which] makes the good perfect and detests the non-good.” For Tang, as for Moore, the concept of moral good defies a language-based definition as much as the meaning of a color cannot be apprehended without a sensual perception.

In conclusion, Tang’s moral intuitionism holds a minor position within moral realism. This is mainly due to his assumption that absolute moral truth can be attained by an intuition which is in principle independent of world views and sensual perception. Significantly, Tang had no intention of accommodating Western strands of moral intuitionism, a moral theory which is also outside of the mainstream of moral philosophy. Even though Tang was familiar with G.E. Moore, Nicolai Hartmann, and Max Scheler, to name but a few exponents of moral intuitionism (some of whom had been discussed also by Zhang

6 Tang, Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, p. 368.
7 Ibid., p. 531.
8 On Moore see Ricken, Allgemeine Ethik, pp. 66–68, 70–71.
Junmai⁹), he explicitly stated his preference for Mencian moral thought when it came to moral intuitionism.¹⁰

In spite of this affinity for a non-Western tradition, Tang’s moral thought shares with Western moral realism and moral intuitionism not only the above-mentioned features, but also the precarious assumption about the justification of moral judgments. Specifically, if propositions about right and wrong have the status of propositions about an absolute moral truth gained by intuition, there is no need to deliberate about moral judgments in the first place. In terms of the justification of moral judgments, it would suffice that those who claim to pronounce or enact the truth assert that they obtained it by intuition. This has invited the criticism which blames moral intuitionism of being inherently irrational, subjectivist, and inaccessible to any moral philosophy that tries to justify its propositions in terms of inter-subjective reasoning. The reproof of subjectivism might be countered by the assertion that intuitionism does not in fact intend to establish the idea that moral truth is the result of subjective perceptions or opinions, but claims, on the contrary, that moral truth is absolute. Yet this offers no solution to the problem of justification. Even if one were to accept the assertion that Confucian sages are capable of intuitively apprehending moral truth and that an ascription of moral judgment to sages may therefore serve as a justification, such a solution would be fundamentally flawed. This is because there is no comprehensive description of a sage which might, in turn, qualify claims to sagehood. The elusiveness of the sage is, after all, beyond description and bears silent witness to the moral vision of the sages

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⁹ Zhang identified Chinese ethics in general, including Mencian “theory of liang-chih,” as a sort of virtue ethics. He explained that “Chinese ethical theory” was focusing on issues of moral obligation and stipulated that judgments on moral obligation were to accord to “one’s own conscience” (p. 176). Mencian theory of liang-chih included, according to Zhang, ideas on how to attain liang-chih and the ability to pass sound judgment on one’s moral obligations (p. 178). When discussing the controversy between G.E. Moore and H.A. Prichard, whom Zhang called “an extreme intuitionist,” Zhang claimed that their controversy was about the question of “whether good or right is to be the fundamental concept of ethics,” with Moore insisting on “good,” Prichard and David Ross on “right” (pp. 180–182). With respect to Chinese (Mencian) ethics, Zhang concluded that they posited that “right and good being identical in their meaning, all controversy on this issue has been avoided.” The “Chinese intuitionists,” Zhang continued, would agree with Moore that the good “cannot be expressed in words,” while upholding the idea that “[g]ood consequences are but the natural result of right action” (pp. 182–183); see Chang (Zhang Junmai), “Mencius’ Theory of Liang-Chih and the Intuitive School of Ethics in Contemporary Britain.”

¹⁰ Tang, Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, pp. 515–516.
who are solitary bearers of moral truth. If sages were to participate in an open moral discourse, they would be indistinguishable from imposters.

The sagely mastery of moral intuition remains so elusive that it rejects any reference to the moral heroism of virtuous role models. Tang was certainly aware that moral heroism was prone to authoritarianism. Referring to elusive “sages” in the context of moral judgment was thus not entirely without its benefits. All the same, his eschewal of the problem of moral justification is unsatisfying and seriously questions his concept of moral values, which plays an important role in his moral theory. If moral values are indeed to be seen as manifestations of intuition-based action, value-based activity would then appear to be ultimately grounded in a transrational (or irrational) realm of intuition free of deliberation. To be sure, as Hans Joas observes, there is now a broad consensus in philosophy that individuals do not acquire their personal value-orientation in a rational (deliberative) manner. To say that a person can deliberate about his or her choice of values and justify it in hindsight, is, after all, not the same as claiming that one’s value-orientation itself initially resulted from rational, deliberative choices. The illusion that an individual’s value-credo is the product of a rational selection and can therefore be “rationally” manipulated may be attractive to those who dream about cultural engineering in modern society. Indeed, many proponents of Confucianism since the 20th century seem to share such an aspiration, often prescribing allegedly superior Confucian values for individuals in a modernizing Chinese society. Tang’s moral thought, however, did not lend itself to such a prescriptive cultural objective (see below).

Tang’s moral intuitionism not only invites critical questions with regard to the justification of moral judgments. As a matter of fact, even the core concept of liang zhi is beset by ambiguity. When elaborating on the individual’s ability to autonomously pass moral judgment (“cognize out of itself” zi zhi), Tang introduced three ways to attain moral judgment, namely “utilitarianism,” “rationalism,” and the “principle of liang zhi” (liang zhi zhuyi). Yet he also claimed that these three modes of moral judgment actually form one single, tripartite position and that any autonomous moral judgment is to be called liang zhi. This seems to imply, first, that correct moral judgments are not an exclusive matter of liang zhi, and yet also, second, that any correct moral judgment can be made by liang zhi. In other words, while moral judgments of

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11 Joas, Die Entstehung der Werte, pp. 16, 22–23.
12 Tang, Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, pp. 532–533. Tang related moral autonomy to the ability of the individual to consciously develop moral ideals that take effect as orders issued from and addressed to the self; see ibid., p. 520. Here, Tang insinuated that “moral ideals” may emerge in liang zhi.
utilitarian or rationalist provenance may be confirmed or rejected by liang zhi, the opposite is not necessarily possible. There are thus moral judgments made by liang zhi that remain outside of the scope of utilitarianism or rationalism.

What is more, the scope of liang zhi cannot be defined. In Tang's understanding, liang zhi is not restricted to moral intuition, but can also cover the intuitive apprehension of a hierarchy of values that are not moral in the narrow sense. Tang equated liang zhi with an immediate “awareness of values” that enables the individual to “acknowledge,” “confirm,” and “judge” the hierarchy of values with respect to “scientific, aesthetic, religious, political and economic acts”—or even more generally “acts of human life and culture.” He claimed in this context that in an “initial step,” the “cognizing” (renshi 認識) and “realizing” (tiyan 體驗) of values is not a matter of reflection. There is, according to Tang, the example of the scientist who intuitively knows that in science the values of fame and wealth rank lower than the value of truth, and that the value of truth-seeking, in turn, ranks below the value of “stimulating” liang zhi in other people. This hierarchy of values is clearly in line with his taxonomy of knowledge and cognition. Still, the identification of liang zhi with an awareness of objectified values and hierarchies is problematic even from the point of view of Tang’s own intuitionism. The intuition in actu cannot, it would seem, yield objectified ideational units such as values, because the intuition itself operates without subject-object relations.

More problems arise here, none of which Tang addressed. It is doubtful, to say the least, whether the example of the scientist’s intuition may indeed be considered a matter of intuition. After all, there are explicit rules of conduct and ethics in the scientific profession which mandate the highest regard for the search for truth. Intuition, then, is not only unnecessary, but perhaps even precluded by such conventional ethics. Furthermore, the search for truth

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13 In fact, even with regard to moral intuition in the narrow sense, Tang did not offer a clear definition of the scope and contents of liang zhi. On the one hand, as we have seen, he equated moral intuition with an immediate apprehension of particular “original moral principles” and moral “orders,” on the other, he referred in the same context to “the entirety” of all moral values, which is apprehended “instantly” (by “self-consciousness” [zijue]): Tang, Daode ziw o zh i jianli, p. 92. For a discussion of Tang's concept of “zijue” in this context, see Ng, “Tang Junyi’s Spirituality: Reflections on Its Foundation and Possible Contemporary Relevance,” pp. 386–387.

14 Tang, Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian, p. 585.

15 Ibid., p. 380.

16 Ibid., p. 585.

17 This problem becomes even more obvious in a manuscript from 1972 which Tang marked—possibly for this reason—as “unfinished;” see Tang, Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian, Vol. 10, pp. 458–468.
as the highest value of science may not be taken out of its historical context. Depending on the situation, science might consider values pertaining to the good—such as producing acceptable living conditions or the preservation of life—to be more important than the quest for truth.

These ambiguities notwithstanding, Tang’s moral thought points to what we may call, with some qualification, ethical pluralism. According to such pluralism, correct moral judgments are not an exclusive matter of moral intuitionism, but can be attained by other forms of morality, too. Since moral intuition, after all, is not available to the individual as he or she may wish, non-intuitive moral theories are, in the meantime, virtually indispensable. They fulfill the interim double-function of providing moral judgment while at the same time increasing the individuals’ moral sensitivity, which consequently enhances his or her ability to attain moral intuition. Given such a pluralistic outlook, any dogmatic claim to moral truth and to an ultimate justification of moral judgment is suspended by the ever-pending confirmation through moral intuition. Moral theories and teachings that rely on discursive forms of moral justification all rest on an equal footing insofar as none of them may claim that they amount to an intuitive apprehension of an absolute moral truth. Based on Tang’s moral thought, then, discursively interacting individuals, who know their interlocutors currently have no moral intuition, should acknowledge that there may be multiple acceptable moral theories on the mediate discursive level.

Here, ethical pluralism rests on a notion of contingency that is derived from Confucian civil theology: The moral judgments which are gained by intuition are contingent insofar as they cannot be summoned at will, neither with regard to time or a given situation. The unpredictability inherent in intuition thus necessitates recourse to alternative forms of moral judgment in an individual’s actual moral life, even though none of the judgments that are derived without intuition can assume ultimate authority, either in content or form. It suggests by itself that this civil-theological qualification of ethical pluralism has far-reaching theoretical consequences. First and foremost, those moral theories that reject the claim that moral propositions are truth-apt and that an ultimate justification of moral judgment is feasible or even desirable would certainly find it hard to agree to the civil-theological underpinnings of such an ethical pluralism.

Struggling with “Self-Cultivation”

In Tang’s modern Confucianism, ethical pluralism is closely related to the issue of the individual’s striving for self-fulfillment as a sage. Because such
self-fulfillment culminates in an immediate apprehension of the absolute, no ethical teaching, fixed catalogue of virtues, values or practices is given preference as the exclusive trajectory for sagehood. Such openness is obviously in accord with Tang’s taxonomical arrangement of spheres, forms, and applications of knowledge, which suggests that there are many different ways to realize sagehood. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that moral reflection and moral practice play a particularly important role, even if the reasons for their accentuation are not always explicitly stated by Tang. He, indeed, refrained from providing his readers with a comprehensive explanation for why they should center on their development as moral persons when striving for sagely intuition. Even so, we still find scattered across Tang’s works traces of an explanation, which points to fundamental assumptions about self-cultivation in the framework of Confucian civil theology.

In research on Confucianism, the term “self-cultivation” has become common currency when referring to ideas about the individual’s quest to realize self-fulfillment in sagehood. Yet there is no term in Chinese that exactly matches the English word “self-cultivation.” This is not to say that there were no notions of self-cultivation in Confucian thought. Still, when using the term “self-cultivation” in the analysis of Tang’s thought, it is important to note that for Tang self-cultivation neither implies that becoming a sage is a cultural achievement resulting from self-improvement, nor that sagehood itself a state of culture. For those Confucian thinkers like Tang Junyi who conceived of sagehood as an intuitive communion with the absolute or the sublime, the ephemeral state of the sage is a result of the human being’s de-individualization and self-transcendence. As such, it is detached from “culture.” Self-cultivation—if one chooses to use this term—hence comprises the idea of a “cultural” practice that aims at overcoming or transcending itself. The limit-concept of the sage marks precisely this cleavage between the “cultural” practice of an individual striving for self-fulfillment, on the one hand, and the non-individualistic spiritual reunion with “Heaven,” on the other.

With respect to this cleavage, it is significant that Tang and other proponents of modern Confucianism neither envisioned this reunion, nor its actual enactment as a collective experience related to a cult, ceremony, or ritual. Although they agreed with the mainstream of neo-Confucian philosophers that “learning” to become a sage is not a mere intellectual task, but also includes, apart from ethical and aesthetical concerns, ritualistic and ceremonial knowledge and practice, they did not maintain that the culmination of such learning is to be achieved in a ritualistic or ceremonial context. Tang did not highlight the idea of ritualized, regular conduct with respect to liang zhi, but instead elaborated on the notion of one-way crossings leading to the realm of intuition.
There are, then, no overland roads that can be traversed back and forth. The self-cultivating practice, in other words, is certainly not technical in the narrow sense, because whatever measures may be applied toward this end, they will be dissolved in the sought-after realm (i.e. sagehood).

Sagehood is thus characterized by a transcendence of technical mastery and a suspension of the techniques of self-cultivation. The status of cultural activities in general is therefore precarious vis-à-vis sagehood, including the sphere of humanistic culture and the so-called “main current” of Chinese culture itself. As a consequence, Tang avoids any hypostasis of particular historical cultures or cultural practices. He rather deems the human being to be culturally polymorphic, thus arguing in favor of cultural plurality. Against this backdrop, there is a strong tendency to relate the individual’s quest for self-fulfillment to a holistic notion of culture which encompasses not only ethics, education, religion, and the arts, but also individual dimensions such as a person’s moral preferences, spiritual outlook, and the molding of his or her character. In addition, “culture” pertains here to the realm of science, politics, economics, and law. Tang’s understanding of culture, as it is manifest in self-cultivation, thus appears to have an explicit normative meaning: In order to realize their individual selfhood and mold their personality, human beings need to consciously refer to and apply cultural standards and practices. Yet culture as a normative resource remains in a suspended state, because, as we have seen, the cultivated selfhood of the individual marks a mere interim state. Eventually, the realization of sagehood in liang zhi will elevate the human mind above and beyond any adhesion to the cultural existence of the empirical self. Culture, in the end, becomes a self-suspending means of the individual’s spiritual self-transcendence.

Individual acts of self-cultivation serve, first of all, to mediate between a human being’s animalistic traits and his or her moral “nature”. Tang believes that as long as human beings are driven by baser instincts (lust, passion, etc.) their ability to enact moral intuition cannot be fully developed. Cultural acts are therefore concordant with moral acts insofar as they both require some measure of self-control:

We therefore say that amidst all cultural acts there are, unconsciously, moral acts involved and the moral good is being realized. However, by saying that these cultural acts involve moral acts and entail the realization of the moral good, [we] also [refer to instances in which] the formation of these cultural acts is restrained. The moral acts and the realization of the moral good stem from our personality, and our personality...
commands these cultural acts. We have to discuss this [from the perspective of] the self which controls and dominates itself.\textsuperscript{18}

The moral potential of cultural acts lies, as Tang suggests, in the self-control that individuals effectuate. Morality is thus “immanent” (neizai 内在) in cultural activities, albeit in a “latent” (qianzai 潛在) manner and “without [moral] self-consciousness” (bu zijue 不自覺).\textsuperscript{19} In this sense, the individual’s quest to “complete his personality” (wancheng qi renge 完成其人格) by “creating culture”—in “literature, the arts, philosophy, science, religion, politics, economy, law, etc.”—is morally relevant.\textsuperscript{20} In the second preface to his Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason, Tang stated somewhat cryptically that the realization of cultural ideals requires individuals to “transcend” their “concrete natural psychic disposition and natural instincts” and thus amounts to a manifestation of moral reason.\textsuperscript{21}

Tang, however, holds that “cultural manifestations” cannot fully express the moral consciousness of the individual, as they do not completely accord with the “criteria of morality.”\textsuperscript{22} For one, the main values in morality differ from those in other cultural spheres. With respect to morality, Tang highlighted “the good,” while allocating “justice” (in the distribution of rights and duties) to the sphere of politics, “wealth” to economy, “truth” to science, “beauty” to the arts, and “deification” to religion. Whereas cultural values require an objective manifestation (in “practice” and “things”), Tang claims that moral values exist inside the personality of the individual.\textsuperscript{23} The moral value of diligence, for example, is not to be mistaken for the external results achieved by diligent efforts, because the moral value applies exclusively to the individual’s “transcending” of the “empirical self.” The same holds true for the moral value of (secondary) virtues such as orderliness, bravery, forbearance, and circumspection. The moral value, according to Tang, pertains here to the willingness of the individual to endure discomfort caused by the attempt to overcome the natural inertia of the empirical self. Consequently, happiness is to be discounted as a moral value. Tang indeed argued that disregarding one’s personal happiness

\textsuperscript{18} Tang, Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, p. 519.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 516–517, 528.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 304.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., (author’s second preface), p. 15.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 374.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., pp. 516–518.
is a moral value insofar as it attests to the transgression of limitations imposed by the empirical self.²⁴

Tang’s notion of a latent presence of morality within the sphere of culture is “modern” insofar as it provides the basis for a functional differentiation of spheres of values and institutions without subordinating cultural plurality to the moral dictates of world views, ideologies, or ethical convictions. According to this view, however, cultural acts are not morally neutral since they share with moral acts an essential requirement, namely, a certain degree of self-restriction imposed by the individual. It is this idea of conquering the empirical self that served Tang as a point of reference for identifying the latent moral potential of cultural activities, artifacts, or institutions. Given this assumption of a proto-moral surplus of cultural acts, Tang’s notion of self-cultivation captures the coherence of morality and culture, albeit without merging them into one. Significantly, Tang maintained that the realization of moral values depends much more on the individual’s willingness to initiate an “effort” in moral “refinement and cultivation” (xiu yang 修養) than on being inspired by culturally creative “men of genius” (tiancai 天才). He hence concluded that the realization of values in moral and other cultural activities entails different “forms of consciousness” (yishi xingtai 意識形態).²⁵

According to Tang’s notion of self-cultivation, individual “efforts” may vary greatly in form, contents, and mode, and are by no means simply a matter of repressing natural instincts. Tang discussed in this context, for example, artistic creation: Whereas a piece of art in its material form has no moral value as such, the process of artistic creation has moral value insofar as the artist does not selfishly keep his notion of beauty to himself. By expressing his vision of art, he or she shows a willingness to transcend an egotistic, subjective inwardness.²⁶ It is significant that Tang refrained from considering the artist’s motivation to produce an object of art. The focus lies solely on the artist’s willingness to “transcend” restrictions imposed by the empirical self, such as his inclination to withdraw into an isolated inwardness. In a similar way, Tang introduced the traditional notion of “music” as expressed in the “spirit of rites and music” (li yue zhi jingshen 禮樂之精神). He interpreted “music” in a very broad sense as an equivalent to the arts in general and related it to an “artistic conduct

²⁴ Tang, Daode ziwo zhi jianli, pp. 55–57. This line of thought is at once incompatible with Utilitarian ethics and Kant’s categorical imperative (see also Tang’s reflection on the moral value of altruistic acts where he again highlighted the overcoming of the empirical self as the criterion for moral value); see ibid.

²⁵ Tang, Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, pp. 519–522.

²⁶ Tang, Daode ziwo zhi jianli, p. 59.
of life." The subjective consciousness temporarily “forgets” the empirical self when appreciating the beauty of art or creating a piece of art. The moments of artistic self-oblivion occur in the immediacy of producing and contemplating art and entail, as Tang believed, the type of self-oblivion that a scientist may experience when conducting research in a highly concentrated manner. Here, the containment of the instinct-driven self happens, as it were, as a side-effect. Tang thus deemed these experiences to be spontaneous ways of restraining the “selfish spirit,” and thereby of unfolding the individual’s “social nature” (shehui-xing 社會性).27

Contrary to what one may expect from Confucian ethics, Tang had no intention of establishing rigid moral standards for self-cultivation. In fact, his approach rather implies the opposite, namely, an attenuation of morality in the narrow sense within a very broad range of (self-) cultivating practices. The latter comprises a variety of moral, intellectual, spiritual, aesthetic, and bodily practices, as well as ritual acts performed, for example, in the “three forms of ritual sacrifice.” There is hence no notion of a moral dictate, nor is there an avowal of a thorough moralization of all spheres of culture. The various self-cultivating efforts, including ethical practice, are all inevitably separated from the realm of sagehood. Consequently, when identifying the moral consciousness as the highest form of cultural consciousness, Tang referred merely to its function of “harmonizing,” instead of subordinating, cultural activities. The ensuing transformation of the “spontaneous” self is said to enhance further cultural activities.28

The tendency to attenuate morality within self-cultivation becomes particularly evident in Tang’s thoughts about the individual’s “moralization of [his or her] conduct of life” (shenghuo zhi daodehua 生活道德化). His discussion of “ten prescriptions” is the closest that he ever came to providing prescriptions for self-cultivation. The overarching focus here is the domination of “instincts, impulses and desires” that afflict the individual. One of Tang's fundamental, albeit implicit, assumptions is that any attempt to directly resist human instincts and passions is doomed to fail. What the practitioners of self-cultivation should learn instead is how to avoid being severely afflicted by the baser instincts in order to circumvent a clash with moral duties. Overall, the ten prescriptions are aimed at a preparatory state of the individual’s mind which facilitates his or her immersion in moral reflection and practice. The prescriptions therefore contain neither an explication of moral theories, principles, values or virtues, nor an elaboration of ethical conventions. Tang’s own extensive use

27 Tang, Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian, pp. 64–66.
28 Tang, Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, pp. 525–526.
of the word “morality” in this context should neither be understood in terms of a Kantian or post-Kantian concept of morality, nor virtue ethics.

The main thrust of the ten prescriptions consists in a reflection on the transcendent self, and on the limitations, narrowness, and ignorance of the empirical self. The Buddhist inspiration is explicit. Tang wanted the practitioners to read into “philosophy and Buddhism”—to contemplate the impermanence and the “principal and secondary causes” of reality (prescription 5), and to refrain from striving for happiness for the sake of happiness (prescription 8). Meditation and bodily exercises are not mentioned, however. The only instances where the effort of self-cultivation is directly tied to physical activity is the advice to go into nature (as a way to contemplate it) and to submit oneself to strict physical discipline (prescriptions 4 and 9). With respect to the ten prescriptions, we may state that Tang apparently deemed “moral” any effort to restrain natural instincts, impulses, and desires, no matter whether it actually involves moral reflection or even a moral struggle against an insufficiently moral world. As a result, the “moral” effort might also comprise the individual’s decision to not resist an adverse environment at any cost, but rather to adjust to unchangeable circumstances in order to minimize or bring to an end the continuing affliction by overwhelming impulses and desires (prescription 7).

To conclude, the ultimate goal of such self-cultivation is not the formation of a moral individual or a moral world for the sake of morality. Rather, the aim of self-cultivation is to prepare the subject’s mind to overcome the pull of natural instincts, passions and desires, but also to transcend reflective activities altogether, thereby generating a “transcendental spirituality” or “void potency” (xu ling) of the mind. Here, the void potency is conceptualized as a dynamic spiritual condition in which the ultimate spiritual reality permeates the subjective mind. Moral reflection and practice are instrumental to this effort inasmuch as they serve to restrain any digressions of the practitioners’ mind. Still, as important as they may be, they are not the sole pathway to the spiritual state of void potency.

Tang’s notion of self-cultivation may indeed warrant questioning a common assumption in research on Confucianism which posits that self-cultivation is quintessentially guided by moral concerns (in the above-mentioned sense). If

29 Tang, Daode ziwo zhi jianli, pp. 80–83. Tang’s approach to self-cultivation which aims to eliminate obstacles to realizing liang zhi in everyday life is reminiscent of post-Wang Yangming thinkers like Qian Dehong 錢德洪 (1497–1574), Zou Shouyi 鄒守益 (1491–1562), Nie Bao 聶豹 (1487–1563), Luo Hongxian 羅洪先 (1504–1563); cf. Lin, “Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan de yangming houxue yanjiu,” p. 28.
interpreted strictly in terms of deontological ethics and virtue ethics, Confucian teachings of self-cultivation often seem to fall short. Indeed, it might appear as if they merely offer the moralistic promise that “the more diligent you practice self-cultivation, the more virtuous (or moral) a person you will become.”

Moreover, self-cultivation does not denote a practice which simply prescribes the individual’s immersion in the cultural realm for the sake of character-building and moral sensitizing. Tang was aware, much more than many of his fellow Confucians, of imminent, potential dangers arising from the individual’s commitment to self-cultivation. The cultural inventory of self-cultivation could be distorted, or even manipulated, and thus lead to the deception, and possibly even the self-deception, of individuals under the dulcet label of self-cultivation. As a matter of fact, various forms of oppression loom in the effort towards self-cultivation exactly because it entails the strenuous attempt to rein in the empirical self. Though Tang did not explicitly discuss the possibility that the label of self-cultivation serves to conceal authoritarianism, it seems safe to say that he recognized such a danger all the same. Indeed, he left no doubt that culture and cultural activities may serve evil ends and even warned of a “higher ranking” evil that emerges when the values of the true, good, and beautiful are subjected to an “inversion” and all value-standards become distorted.30

Perhaps even more unsettling is the danger that self-cultivation may have repressive psychic effects on the individual practitioners which are self-inflicted and difficult to discern. This problem concerns the inherent claim of self-cultivation that practitioners bolster the formation of their individual selfhood by internalizing social and ethical standards. It is due to this supposedly reassuring promise that the practitioners are prone to submit themselves to an internalization of practices, norms and values that may have a detrimental effect on them. This particular problem concerns the question of how individuals might grasp the psychic impact of their effort to “cultivate” the empirical self. In more blunt terms: “Who is actually ‘cultivating’ whom?”; or, in more explicitly Freudian terms: “How can the ego authenticate his or her self-cultivating practices and distinguish them from the super-ego’s oppressive rule?” Tang largely disregarded the dangers to the individual’s psychic health that may accompany the implementation of “self-cultivation. These dangers entail an internalization of repressive images, values, conventions, and practices of the self that are disguised by the ideal of moral self-improvement, but in fact produce pathological forms of selfhood. Yet, for Tang “culture”

30  Tang, Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian, Vol. 10, pp. 107–108.
and “self-cultivation” are civil-theological, not psychoanalytical, concepts. Modern Confucian thought in general shows very little interest in Freudian psychoanalysis and related social philosophies and theories, in spite of its considerable interest in the formation and development of individuality and subjectivity. Tang’s thought is no exception here, as one finds only scattered, predominantly negative comments on Freud in his writings. Among them, there is his blanket repudiation of theories that liken the human being to any other living being, such as Freud’s view of the sexual drive, Nietzsche’s and Adler’s views about the will to power, Pavlov’s behavioral psychology, and also Marxism. Tang concluded that even though these theories arrived at “discovering something about human nature,” they still fell short of genuinely “seeing the essence of human nature.”

Tang’s hesitancy toward psychoanalysis in general is particularly evident in the above-mentioned ten prescriptions for the individual’s conduct of life. In his discussion of the human being’s animalistic traits, impulses, and desires, he did not conceptualize them in terms of a libido, which can never be fully restrained by “cultivation.” On the contrary, he called on the practitioners of self-cultivation to acknowledge that their mind is not bound to their physical body, since the latter is merely something inside the mind. Hence, the “importance” of the physical body could and should be “forgotten” as often as possible. We may assume, then, that this call to disregard the physical body implies that the practitioners should not conceive of themselves as subjected to the libido and its ties to the unconscious.

It is not difficult to see why specific elements of Freud’s psychoanalysis were rejected by Confucian thinkers of the 20th century. The Freudian theory on the formation of self-identity in childhood (involving the Oedipus complex) is obviously difficult to reconcile, in an affirmative manner, with Confucian notions of filial piety. Freud’s discussion of the “oceanic feeling” in Das Unbehagen in der Kultur (Civilization and Its Discontents) is particularly challenging to Confucian thought.

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31 Tang, Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian, p. 565.
32 Tang, Daode ziwo zhi jianli, p. 81. In an interview in the monthly magazine Mingbao from April 1974, Tang took this expectation to the extreme when musing over the sexual “indulgence” he believed to be rampant in Europe and North America. He explained this as a reaction of the individuals to the overwhelming pressure of life in times of industrialization and commercialization, and accompanying feelings of meaninglessness. Tang assumed that if one’s life were truly “enriched, substantial and complete,” like it was for “some religious believers,” one could get by without having a sexual life at all. In this context, Tang also referred to the notion of marriage life according to “the tradition of Chinese culture,” where the sexual life makes up an “extremely small part;” see Tang, pp. 325ff.
33 See Freud, Das Unbehagen in der Kultur, p. 197.
concluded that the notion of sagehood as a state of mind where “there is no borderline of differentiation between the fully developed mind and the universe” is an expression of a (regressive) “oceanic feeling,” of something “boundless, limitless” (“wie von etwas Unbegrenztem, Schrankenlosem”). Freud was convinced that such an oceanic feeling or yearning could be retraced to a “regression” to an infantile, “early phase of self-awareness” (“frühe Phase des Ichgefühls”) that predates the ontogenetic formation of a clear demarcation between the “I” and the social and material environment. As Freud believed, the human being’s regressive longing for the return to such a state of undifferentiated self-awareness may trigger “an initial effort of religious consolation” (“erster Versuch einer religiösen Tröstung”).

Nonetheless, Tang’s disinterest in, and perhaps even aversion to, a psycho-analytical theory of culture should not be mistaken for a blind defense of an optimistic concept of the human mind and psyche. Tang himself remained deeply skeptical when it came to the possibility of eradicating human evil through spiritual, self-cultivating efforts. He stated matter-of-factly: “But whether everything which is needed to eliminate the evil in the human mind is indeed merely related to engaging in a spiritual effort (xin shang yong gongfu 心上用工夫) is yet another question.” As we have seen, Tang remained skeptical about self-cultivation and admonished individuals to not ignore the peril of being immersed in a false, distorted “culture” marked by an inversion of values. They also should not expect that they will be capable of eliminating their own malice once and for all. The question still looms large here of whether, and if so how, individuals can be certain when practicing self-cultivation that they do not in fact indulge in a harmful, possibly even deviant practice. The answer that may be gleaned from Tang’s work is as paradoxical as it is complex: Individuals have no way of knowing with absolute certainty whether they are going astray, unless they attain moral intuition.

34 Ibid., pp. 201, 204.
35 Tang, Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian, Vol. 10, p. 105.
36 Tang cautioned his readers with the warning that if “human nature” “degenerated” only for a single moment, “satan” would immediately appear; see Tang, Zhonghua renwen yu dangjin shijie bubian, Vol. 10, p. 113. On the terminology and Tang’s concept of evil, see below Chap. 7 “The Political and Its Demonic Aspects.”
Outlines of a Confucian Ethos

The reader of Tang’s work learns much less about how to live a life devoted to becoming a sage than the reader of many neo-Confucian texts. Tang’s reluctance to provide detailed directions on how to practice self-cultivation is consistent with his concept of modernization. He recognized that binding prescriptions of a catalogue of virtues and values to be followed by self-cultivating individuals in all spheres of life might curb the emancipative effects of the ongoing process of modernization. His awareness of the potential downside of self-cultivation and the janiform of culture certainly further contributed to his reluctance.

It is hardly surprising, then, that Tang only loosely related his ideas about self-cultivation to Confucian texts and thinkers from pre-20th century periods. In a sketch of traditional Confucian self-cultivation in his book *The Spiritual Values of Chinese Culture*, he summarily referred to, among others, *The Analects, The Book of Rites, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Great Learning*, the *Book of Changes*, and to Cheng Hao, Lu Xiangshan, Wang Yangming, and Wang Ji (1498–1583). Although lacking a thorough analysis of these different notions of self-cultivation, Tang’s sketch is instructive as it reveals what he himself considered to be important elements of self-cultivation in the Confucian tradition. There was, first of all, the idea that self-cultivation requires the willingness of the practitioners to constantly examine whether they are behaving morally; this, in turn, would eventually enable them to instantly detect immoral intentions. Practitioners were furthermore obliged to lead disciplined lives. The quintessence of self-cultivation was to effectuate a disposition and an attitude which allowed the individual to “naturally” conform to the requirements of moral conduct. Tang quoted (incorrectly) in this context from *The Doctrine of the Mean* 20.18 to illustrate what it means to reach the highest sphere of morality: “[He who], without the exercise of thought, hits upon what is right, and without effort apprehends” (*bu si er zhong, bu mian er de* 不思而中, 不勉而得). In order to

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37 For a concise discussion of neo-Confucian practices of self-cultivation (including spiritual exercises, ritual acts, reading of classics, practicing “attentiveness;” “reverence” and “quiet sitting”), see Angle, *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, pp. 144–160.

38 On this and the following sketch, see Tang, *Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi*, pp. 224–226.

39 In Legge’s translation, the passage reads: “Sincerity is the way of Heaven. The attainment of sincerity is the way of men. He who possesses sincerity, is he who, without effort, hits what is right, and apprehends, without the exercise of thought;—he is the sage who naturally and easily embodies the right way. He who attains sincerity, is he who chooses
acquire the correct disposition and attitude, Confucian thinkers proposed that the practitioners should build their character by observing a broad range of cultural and ethical conventions, many of which affected their daily life, such as family relations and various customs related to food and clothing. Other practices pertained to the rite de passage and to the arts. This “moral education,” to use Tang’s term, was to begin in one’s youth and thus entailed the idea that achieving an individual disposition to act morally was gradual. As we have seen, however, Tang did not have a traditionalist intention to reestablish the observance of pre-modern conventions, ceremonies, and rituals in the 20th century.

Tang’s reluctance to equate his own position with specific notions of self-cultivation from Confucian traditions is consistent with his reservations about referring to specific moral theories—Western or Eastern—in order to identify prescriptions for individual self-fulfillment. He actually cautioned practitioners about the adverse effect of confining their mind to a systematic reflection of moral theories. Tellingly, he gave preference to those (non-systematic) “teachings that go along with a [particular] person or a [particular] situation” and stated:

This is the reason why the highest ranking works of moral philosophy in the East and the West, such as The Analects, The New Testament, and The Nikāyas are all devoid of systematic exposition. Moral practices must involve a multitude of practical things, and with respect to a specific practical thing, they all hold a specific normative principle to be realized.40

Narrative forms of moral thought are thus particularly well-suited to self-cultivation, and this includes anecdotes about the moral conduct of virtuous persons. The focus here is not on analyzing principles of moral conduct, but on familiarizing oneself with the exemplary moral acts of virtuous persons and thereby retracing, in effect, their particular moral judgments. This entails—to refer to Max Scheler—a type of interpretation which is distinct from attempts to objectify virtuous models or imitate certain moral acts. Instead, it requires

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40 Tang, Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, p. 373.

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what is good, and firmly holds it fast.” Legge, Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Works of Mencius, p. 413. The underlined passage reads in The Doctrine of the Mean 20.8: bu mian er zhong, bu si er de 不勉而中, 不思而得. Perhaps, Tang, who quoted the passage correctly in Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian (see above) put here “without the exercise of thought” in front to underscore the fact that the intuition of the sage unfolds without reflection.
identification with the virtuous persons’ volition.\textsuperscript{41} In this way, it is the personal determination to attain sagehood as it becomes manifest in Confucius, which is to be emulated. In terms of volition, Tang highlighted the quality of “moral sincerity” (\textit{daode shang de zhen cheng} 道德上的真誠).\textsuperscript{42} It is said to be crucial for the human being’s “partaking [in] and awakening [to] (\textit{can wu} 參悟)” the “origin of the universe and human life.” Moral sincerity is not an exclusively Confucian virtue, but rather, as Tang believed, a common topic of “the path of Eastern philosophy,” including Buddhism and Daoism.\textsuperscript{43} There is, then, neither a need to establish a personality cult and sectarian idolization of Confucius, nor to strictly follow ideas about virtues from earlier Confucian texts.\textsuperscript{44} Tang remarked, however, that Confucius was better suited to serve as a model figure than Buddha or Jesus, because of his secular orientation and his recognition of the immanent and transcendent aspects of the “mind of humaneness.”\textsuperscript{45}

Even though a detailed ethos of self-cultivation is not what Tang had in mind, the outlines of a modern Confucian ethos emerge nonetheless:

First, the commitment of individuals to an ethos of self-cultivation is not enforceable by legal, political, or social sanctions. With respect to inducing the individual’s willingness to engage in self-cultivation, Tang remained skeptical about whether virtue models from religious or other traditions could actually produce a sufficiently persuasive effect. He concluded that it would indeed be difficult to teach someone to instantly engage in self-cultivation.\textsuperscript{46}

Second, Tang’s discussion of individual self-fulfillment strongly insinuates that practitioners should acknowledge that self-cultivation is the pathway for attaining the intuitive realization of sagehood. Practitioners were furthermore called to believe that the “mind” (or “pattern”) of Heaven is the

\textsuperscript{41} Scheler, \textit{Schriften zur Anthropologie}, p. 169; on Scheler see also Joas, \textit{Die Entstehung der Werte}, p. 154.

\textsuperscript{42} Tang explicitly stated that the “effort of refinement and cultivation” (\textit{xiu yang zhi gongfu}) must entail an “effort to consider sincerity” which in turn consists of an “effort to attain liang zhi;” see Tang, \textit{Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing}, p. 567.

\textsuperscript{43} Tang, \textit{Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian}, p. 577.

\textsuperscript{44} Tang departed for example from the scheme of four cardinal virtues in the \textit{Mencius} (VIA.16) by considering the “spirit of humaneness” to be fundamental to the unfolding of other virtues; see Tang, \textit{Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian}, pp. 391–392, 416–418.

\textsuperscript{45} Tang, \textit{Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian}, pp. 368, 383; on Tang’s statement in favor of the need to identify role models, see ibid., p. 63.

\textsuperscript{46} Tang, \textit{Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing}, p. 567.
“ceaselessly self-generating” (sheng sheng 生生) “source” of our “moral nature” (de xing 德性).47

Third, the practitioners’ constant efforts to “transcend” the empirical self are expected to generate a personal disposition that facilitates the individual’s domination over his or her animalistic and selfish traits. These efforts not only comprise moral reflection and moral conduct in the narrow sense, but also various cultural, spiritual, and bodily practices aiming to rein in one’s baser instincts. Inasmuch as the practitioners develop and reinforce their ability to dominate their baser instincts, they enhance their capacity to attain moral intuition. Self-cultivation thus seems to propel moral progress towards moral intuition, even though it remains ontologically separated from intuition itself.

Nonetheless, the relation between the empirical self of self-cultivation and the transcendent self of moral intuition remains unsettled in Tang’s thought. Its vagueness resembles the ambiguity in Wang Yangming’s model of self-cultivation, which is based on the assumption that individuals have an inborn capacity to intuitively “discover” moral truth. It differs therefore from those development-models of self-cultivation that claim moral growth and continuous moral progress gradually lead to the individual’s moral perfection. With respect to these two models, which are analyzed by Ivanhoe, Angle concludes that although Wang Yangming would not have subscribed to the idea that there is a “development of our moral sense(s),” he would have admitted that one’s commitment to strive for liang zhi may actually grow and deepen.48 Tang’s notion of self-cultivation conforms in this regard to Wang Yangming’s ideas.

Fourth, the practitioners’ “moral conduct of life” (daode shenghuo 道德生活) is to entail, albeit not exclusively, moral reflection and the orientation toward moral “ideals,” both of which are said to contribute to a constant embrace of the good. The “essence” of moral life is reflection,49 and not the submission of moral subjectivity to extant moral codes, mores, or traditions.

47 Zhang, Zhongguo wenhua yu shijie, pp. 28–29. “Sheng sheng” refers, according to Tang, to a specifically Confucian notion: It posits that everything which is generated by human beings, as well as the capacity (the “virtue” [de]) that enables them to generate their world, is a manifestation of Heaven; see Tang, Zhongguo wenhua zhi jingshen jiazhi, p. 116.

48 Angle, Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy, pp. 115–117. Angle draws here from Ivanhoe’s examination of Confucian ethics, which depicts ideas ascribed to Confucius and Mencius as representative for the development-model of self-cultivation; see Ivanhoe, Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yangming, pp. 48–50, 103–104.

49 Tang, Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing, p. 521.
Fifth, the practitioners must establish a personal attitude or habitus that grants leeway to ethical pluralism. An unyielding insistence on certain theories, principles, world views or ideologies would contradict the fundamental civil-theological assumption of this ethos, namely, the relativity of all discursive truth-claims in relation to the immediate apprehension of the absolute in liang zhi. Tang’s Confucian civil theology consequently does not lend itself to the idea of a universal criterion which allows the practitioners to objectively assess whether they are making moral progress en route to self-fulfillment. After all, “the final realm,” as quoted above, will be reached without measurable effort and without “thinking.”

Sixth, the individuals who strive for self-fulfillment must act as social beings and not isolate themselves from their social environment. The “moral conduct of life” does not call on the practitioners to withdraw into a spiritual inwardness, but to engage in mundane matters and practical affairs. In the words of Tang: the “deep comprehension in immediate awareness” results from “practice” (shijian 實踐). Yet, the status of self-cultivation remains circumscribed with respect to the attainment of sagehood-as-intuition. Self-cultivation is characterized here by a self-suspension of its techniques vis-à-vis inner sagehood. It is this unbridgeable gap which delineates the conceptual space for reconciling the universal foundation of self-cultivation in human nature as endowed by Heaven with the assertion that the practice of self-cultivation is subject to cultural and historical particularities.

Seventh, the self-cultivating individuals are not compelled to accept the world as an unchangeable reality which demands compliance and conformity as the only course of action. The modern Confucian ethos stands in contrast to Max Weber’s dictum on Confucian ethics. Weber assumed that Confucian ethics was “a rational ethic which reduced tension with the world to an absolute minimum,” adding that “[t]his was true of its religious depreciation as well as its practical rejection.” He concluded that Confucianism entails an “ethic

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50 See for example Tang, Renwen jingshen zhi chongjian, p. 62. This aspect of Tang’s notion of self-cultivation is highlighted by Roger Ames who presents Tang as a representative of a type of role ethics which, according to Ames, does not entail the idea of an ontological dualism. Given the crucial importance of such a dualism in Tang’s speculation about liang zhi, the interpretation of Ames seems to be questionable; see Ames, Confucian Role Ethics: a Vocabulary, pp. 128–134.

51 Tang, Daode ziwo zhi jianli, p. 92; on this see Ng, “Tang Junyi’s Spirituality: Reflections on Its Foundation and Possible Contemporary Relevance,” pp. 386ff.
of unconditional affirmation of and adjustment to the world." Even though modern Confucianism does not contain a notion of "afterlife" that might serve as the spiritual foundation of a radical denial of the mundane world, a "tension" in the sense of Weber's analysis is indeed present in Tang's civil theology. The latter, in fact, does not exclude a radical denial of the world, at least not in principle. Among the many passages that bear testimony to such a tension between a transcendent realm and the mundane world, we find the following: "The perfection, realness, and goodness in my yearning cannot be found in the world of reality... Therefore, I understand that my yearning has a...source that transcends the world of reality..." The sort of historical optimism which permeates modern Confucianism (see Chap. 11) is thus different from the "radical worldoptimism" which Weber ascribed to Confucianism and which was allegedly responsible for the Confucians' inclination to merely muddle through mundane reality, unable to truly express their subjectivity by resisting the world altogether.

Eighth, Tang suggested that ideas about the individual's withdrawal from the world stem from Indian philosophy and referred to allegedly "Indian" notions of a "release" (jietuo 解脫) and "unpinning" (chaoba) from the "real world." Without further clarification, he proposed that Chinese thought, in contrast, "confirmed" things and events of the real world, along with the practical

52 Quoted from: Weber, The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism, pp. 227, 229 (see also Weber's Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I, pp. 514–515). The international discussion of Weber's analysis is very extensive. Thomas Metzger's approach is particularly convincing as he not only points to methodological problems in Weber's research on Confucianism and to Weber's limited knowledge of Chinese history and thought, but also discusses neo-Confucian philosophical ideas as well as attitudes and mentalities of neo-Confucian thinkers. In his response to Weber, Metzger highlights the "sense of predicament" (i.e. a sense of a tension to the world) of neo-Confucian thinkers who were keenly aware of the rift that existed between their own goals and ideals and the realities of the historical world (on this, see also Metzger's seminal work Escape From Predicament. Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture.). But Metzger overstates his case, when he assumes that the apperception of a tension between ideals and historical reality triggered a general tendency in all "modern Chinese thought" to develop utopian and moralistic schemes in order to overturn mundane situations; see Metzger, "Max Webers Analyse der konfuzianischen Tradition. Eine Kritik," pp. 235–236, 244, 251, 254–255.

53 Translated from Tang's The Establishment of the Moral Self (Daode ziwo zhi jianli) in: Cheng, Karl Barth and Tang Junyi on the Nature of Ethics and the Realization of Moral Life: A Comparative Study, p. 293.

54 Quoted from: Weber, The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism, p. 235 (see also Weber's Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I, p. 522).
engagement of the human being. This confirmation, it seems, is crucial for Tang's exilic philosophy which claims that the formation of individual selfhood is inseparable from the notion of the individual as an embedded social being. Here, the ethos of self-cultivation indeed echoes the concern about the ever-loominge threat of social, intellectual, and emotional isolation of the individual in exile. The assumption that self-cultivation requires individuals to engage in the transformation of their life-world is certainly in accordance with the conception that exiles need to transform the non-place of emigration.

55 Tang, Zhexue gailun, Vol. 22, p. 362. “Chinese thought” includes, according to Tang, Confucianism, Daoism and (Chinese) Buddhism. The distinction between Buddhism in China and India remains unclear.