
An Outline of a Concrete Metaphysics *

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Background and Horizon

The Forgetting of Wisdom and the Return to Wisdom

Since modern times, and in particular since the dawn of the twentieth century, widespread skepticism regarding metaphysics, as well as widespread rejection of metaphysics as the theory of being, has led philosophy in a tendency toward specialization and professionalization, and philosophers themselves have correspondingly become “specialists” and “professionals”. Moreover, between the various realms of philosophy, boundaries have become strictly clarified and even fortified, and to a great extent, philosophy itself has degenerated from the study of *Dao*, which concerns wisdom, to a study of “art” or skill, which concerns merely a particular field of knowledge; in this way, philosophy has become a self-sufficient field of knowledge and wisdom has been forgotten. Thus, refreshing our concern for metaphysics implies in the first place a return to wisdom.

Grasping the “Being” of the World Within the “Being” of Humans

As the theory of being, metaphysics aims at grasping being. Being, however, cannot be grasped through the construction of a speculative world picture, since such speculative pictures of the world are isolated from the “being” of humans. In spite of his insights in this respect, Heidegger’s understanding of the “being” of humans was

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unfortunately too narrow, confined mainly to *Dasein*, that is, an individual being-there. Although he affirmed being-with, at the same time, he saw being-with as the characteristic of humans in a fallen state, and argued that only within the anxiety in the face of death, or “being-toward-death” (*Sein-zum-Tod*), can humans return to their authentic selves. On this point, Heidegger’s perspective obviously harbors some partiality. The “being” of humans, unfolding in a process of knowing and practicing, ought to be understood in the broad sense as a combination of an individual being and “being-with” in the sociohistorical realm. Such a “being-with” is not really man’s fallen state, but is rather the real form of being human.

The Pursuit of Thoroughgoingness: The Nature of Philosophy

Metaphysics is relative to the nature of philosophy, that is, the pursuit of thoroughgoingness. In the pursuit of thoroughgoingness, philosophy attempts to realize the unity of being and the concrete whole of being by overcoming the fragmentation and isolation of being within fields of knowledge on the one hand, and grasping the unity between horizons of being and particular approaches to grasping being on the other. Metaphysics thus fully embodies the nature of philosophy, especially in its return to the unity of being and its integration of the different dimensions of wisdom.

In the history of philosophy, Kant entirely dedicated his labor to drawing dichotomies: phenomenon and thing-in-itself; sensibility, understanding, and reason; theoretical reason (or pure reason) and practical reason; even truth, beauty, and goodness; and so forth. Despite Kant’s efforts to make these different realms communicate, dichotomies without a doubt play the leading role in his philosophy. As philosophy differentiated into the separate fields of epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, logic, methodology, axiology, and so on in modern times, being itself, horizons of being, and approaches to grasping being have split up into the different parts corresponding to these various philosophical branches.

For contemporary philosophy, how to represent the unity of being itself and how to make the different branches of philosophy communicate has become an unavoidable problem. The problem of being is original in philosophy: from truth, beauty, and goodness to the different branches of philosophy, including epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, logic, methodology, axiology, and the like — all touch upon and indeed must take up the problem of being. By means of elucidating the original nature of the problem of being and its diverse manifestations throughout the various philosophical enquiries — from truth, beauty, and goodness, to cognition and values — metaphysics

not only fuses together different philosophical horizons, but also points toward authentic being in its pursuit of wisdom. This is one of the reasons metaphysics is necessary.

The Concreteness of Being: Concrete Being as Authentic Being

Both the unity of being and the horizons that open up and grasp being all demonstrate the concreteness of being. As opposed to Kant's fervor for drawing dichotomies, Hegel's affirmation of concreteness is worthy of more attention. Of course, Hegel's understanding of concreteness has its speculative characteristics. What has more substantial significance is understanding concreteness in reality, that is, in the historical process of knowing and practicing.

Problems and Outlooks

Metaphysics: Concrete Versus Abstract

As the general understanding of being, metaphysics could be abstract or concrete. An abstract metaphysics is ready to reduce being either to some origin (for instance, some material like atoms or *qi*; 气) or to some idea; it either speculates upon the ultimate whole or dedicates its efforts to constructing a world picture on the linguistic level (for instance, in analytic philosophy). An abstract metaphysics is characterized by its abstraction from real being. A worldview will turn into a thinking method once it is applied to investigating the world. Hence, we can easily see the relationship between metaphysics as a theory of being and metaphysics as a method of thought. In either taking some kind or some type of particular being as an origin or in holding onto the ultimate whole, metaphysics as a theory of being does indeed imply a static, one-sided, and isolated view of the world, which functions as a metaphysical way of thinking as opposed to a dialectical one. A critical investigation of the abstract form of metaphysics can elucidate not only the logical presuppositions of concrete metaphysics, but also the historical relationship between metaphysics as a theory of being and metaphysics as a methodology.

To overcome abstract forms of metaphysics is to turn from speculative constructions to the real world. In fact, the world itself is concrete: real being is always concrete being. To open up and illuminate such concreteness is the primary task of metaphysics as a theory of being. In an incessant process of reaching concrete

being and returning to concrete being, the splitting apart of being is overcome and the obstruction to real, concrete being due to speculation is removed. Such concreteness in some sense constitutes the nature of philosophy. The concrete nature of metaphysics encompasses many dimensions. It takes the communication of the metaphysical and the physical as its content, demands an affirmation of the connection between the being of the world and the process of being human, takes the integrated whole of the diverse as such to deny abstract identification, demands being as a whole to be understood as a fusion of things and principles, origins and consequences, substances and functions, and pays equal attention to the unity of the world on the one hand and the temporality and process aspects of being on the other. As opposed to the speculative constructions of transcendent being, a concrete metaphysics is concerned more with the world of meaning. Here, to reach the concrete form of metaphysics is simultaneously to return to the concreteness of being.

The Unity of Being and Values

The concreteness of being primarily involves the relation between being and values. The investigation of being from the horizon of being human not only involves the question “What is it?” but also “What does it mean?” and “What ought it to become?” Generally speaking, “What is it?” concerns primarily the determinations intrinsic to things; “What does it mean?” inquires after the significance of things for being human; “What ought it to become?” asks whether or not something significant for being human should be realized and then how it should be realized. These three related questions are all questioning being itself, while the latter two questions are more closely allied to the realm of values on different levels. Here, the connection between being and values is revealed.

In some sense, Dewey and other pragmatists emphasized the connection between being and values. The ontological importance of pragmatism comes primarily from its intense way of giving prominence to the value determinations contained in concrete things. While affirming the determinant values that things themselves contain, however, pragmatism also diminishes if not entirely overlooks the independence of things, how things exist by themselves, due precisely to pragmatism’s overemphasis on the relative nature of the values that humans impart to things, that is, the humanized dimension of things. In pragmatism, it seems that the humanized dimension of things, which contains value determinations, and the independence of things are mutually exclusive. This viewpoint obviously conceals the real form of

being, and thereby must be overcome (*aufheben*, a term borrowed from Hegel) so as to affirm the unity between the value determinations of being and the being-in-itself of things.

Hence, Hume's perspective on the relationship between facts and values is not entirely acceptable. Hume doubted the possibility of deducing "ought to be" from "what is," which moves from description to prescription. In terms of pure logical form, the relationship between "what is" and "what ought to be" lacks intrinsic implication. As Hume said, one cannot deduce "what ought to be" from "what is." However, if we surpass pure logical form and enter the unified horizon of ontology and axiology, the situation is then somewhat different. Within the horizon of axiology, whatever truly has value ought to become actual; once we judge that some form of being has value, the said judgment simultaneously contains the following presupposition: the form of being or value concerned "ought" to become actual. Furthermore, only that which leads to positive values "ought to be" done. Here, evaluation obviously plays the role of medium: only after completing a judgment concerning facts and then taking another step to evaluate the thing or action under consideration can demands be drawn out concerning whether or not something "ought to be" or "ought to be done."

To affirm the relativity between being and values is to overcome Kant's approach. Kant pursued metaphysics with a "pure" form. So-called pure implies not only a priori and transcendental, but also the formal; in fact, for Kant, pure, a priori, and formal are all terms with similar meaning. As a pure, formal system, metaphysics does not touch upon value contents, nor does it have any real value or significance as a practical guide. It isn't hard to see that the form of this kind of pure or formal metaphysics embodies an abstract understanding of being, and also implies some sort of disconnection between this world and being human¹: the real relationship between the world and being human as it unfolds in the historical practice of being human creating values is more or less concealed. Modern analytic philosophers such as Strawson and Quine share some similarities with Kant in this respect.²

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1. Here we can see a duality in Kant: On the one hand, Kant emphasizes the construction of the subject in the process of knowing; on the other hand, he ignores human participation in the formation of the real world.
 2. The metaphysics of morals, in the Kantian sense, is, of course, relative to being human. However, the metaphysics of morals should be concerned with values as its very topic. Yet as M. Scheler critiqued, the metaphysics of morals in Kant's philosophy is basically a kind of formal system. Moreover, although the metaphysics of morals is relative to the concept of "practice," it mainly discusses the formal conditions of moral judgments and actions, rather than practice based on sensibility. This isolation from sensibility makes practice in Kant's philosophy lack actual stipulations.

Metaphysics not only asks the question “What is it?” but also “What does it mean?” and “What ought it to become?” Since the unity of being and value is the real form of this world, the question after “what is” invariably leads to a deep concern for “what ought to be” on both conceptual and practical levels; the latter always implies a transformation from explaining the world to reforming the world. Here, metaphysics, serving as a theory of being, reveals philosophy’s normative significance and practical importance in an original way through affirming the unity of being and values. Philosophies of the past satisfied themselves with explaining the world, precisely because they were mainly concerned with abstract speculations concerning “what is,” and sought to reach a priori investigation of “being” as “what is”³, thereby neglecting the richness of metaphysics as a theory of being.

Being, Knowing, and Wisdom

The mutual implication of being and values in the relation between “What is it?”, “What does it mean?”, and “What ought it to become?” reveals the humanized dimension of being. However, the question “What is it?” seems to touch upon epistemology much more.

The Ontological Nature of the Known: The Unity of Being-in-Itself and Being-for-Human

The process of knowing logically implies the distinction between the known and the knower as a precondition. What is known is not only the thing as it is for being human, but also as it is in-itself; the former (the for-human dimension) reveals the connection between the known and the knower, and shows that the known really isn’t a thing as it originally exists outside of the process of human cognition and behavior; the latter (the in-itself dimension) confirms the thing’s reality, and shows that the known cannot be reduced to a mere construction on behalf of the knower. As the unity of being-in-itself and being-for-human, the known contains some intrinsic order, which enables the thing and its relationship to the knower to be grasped through the faculty of reason. The confirmation of reality and order doubtless bears a metaphysical character, and this kind of confirmation constitutes the logical starting point of the process of cognition.

3. As mentioned above, the dichotomy between phenomenon and thing-in-itself in Kant’s philosophy is relative to being in the form of “what is,” which are objects of sensibility, understanding, and reason. The capacity to draw dichotomies for reason is premised on the demarcation of “what is.”

Contemporary epistemology, as well as the philosophy of science, seldom discusses the ontological role of the known, and thereby has no way to endow epistemology with a concrete and comprehensive explanation.

The Ontological Nature of the Knower

The knower, as it is with the known, also has his ontological dimension. As regards his mode, the knower is not simply a logical form; in the first place, the knower is embodied as a concrete, real being. Zhuang Zi stated, “only an authentically existing person can have true knowledge.” This statement already pointed out the priority of the human being in the process of knowing. As an authentic being, the knower is characterized by integrity, and isn’t merely the representative of an intelligence, as Jin Yuelin thinks. This kind of integrity unfolds itself as an interrelation between a set of cognitive capacities including sensibility, rationality, intuition, and imagination, and is embodied as an interaction between the faculties of cognition and evaluation, intelligence, and emotive passions. In the process of knowing, the ontological determination of the knower takes another step forward to acquire the unified form of “knowing” and “being” through the connection between knowledge and knowing. The knower absorbs objective knowledge, and objective knowledge thereby transforms as it becomes identical to the knower.

The interior and exterior are unified in all the relationships that knowing touches upon, including the relationship between the knower and the known, knowledge, and being human. This unity of exteriority and interiority not only makes possible the communication between the knower and the known, but also provides the objective validity of knowledge with an original foundation. While the unity of mind, thing, and principle provide the ontological ground for the objective validity of knowledge, the unity of interiority and exteriority within the knower — known, knowledge — human relationships provide a much more concrete guarantee of this kind of objective validity through a reciprocal engagement of ontology and epistemology.

As a starting point, the immediate data of cognition is the unity between “the given” and “the taken.” As regards vision, that which the known gives are light waves in the scientific sense in the field of physics, but within the knower, the given is transformed into some “color.” (“The eye encounters it and then colors are generated.”) In the same way, in terms of hearing, sound waves are the given, but within the knower, the given is transformed into some sounds, no matter whether they are meaningful sounds such as speech or music or meaningless sounds such as

noises. (“The ear takes it and sounds are generated.”⁴) Here, without a doubt there exists an interaction between knower and the known: without the light waves or sound waves given by the known, “colors” and “sounds” equally have nothing from which they can take form; yet without the knower’s “encountering” or “receiving,” the light waves and sound waves are merely physical phenomena and cannot become “colors,” “sounds,” or other such cognitive data. If we understand appearance as the immediate data of cognition, then within this kind of appearance, the given and the taken have an intrinsic unity. In this sense, traditional empiricists along with Dewey (as well as other modern philosophers) are all one sided: the former consider the immediate data of cognition to be the given, while the latter considers it to be the taken.

After Kant’s Copernican revolution, the subjective dimension was emphasized once again in epistemology, and the principle of objectivity was correspondingly diminished. In modern philosophy, this trend seems to have continued, developing at different levels. In spite of raising the slogan “return to things themselves,” phenomenology grasps things in their connection to intentional processes, which amounts to suspending being and emphasizing pure self and pure consciousness. Then, existentialists elevated the individual or the self to the level of first principle. Habermas’s investigation of intersubjectivity seems to have gone beyond subjectivity, but at the same time, he more or less saw the object relation as a “tool-purpose” relation in the negative sense. In addition, there are also various kinds of internal theories of relation already mentioned above. In some sense, subjectivity and intersubjectivity gradually crushed the principle of objectivity since modern times. Although an affirmation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity has played a significant role in helping epistemology overcome naive realism and mechanistic theories, it is of the utmost importance not to discard the principle of objectivity. Subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and objectivity are neither mutually incompatible nor mutually exclusive. As regards the relationship between cognition and being, the true form lies in the unity of the three.

The Fusion of Knowledge into Being Human

Taking the transformation of knowledge into the knower as a form, “knowledge”

4. “The eye encounters it and then colors are generated.” “The ear takes it and then sounds are generated.” These two sentences, which originally appear in *Qian chi Bi fu* (The First Song of Chi Bi), written by Su Shi, a great poet in the Song dynasty in ancient China, are drawn out by Jin Yuelin to argue that the given is objective appearance. See Jin Yuelin, *Zhishi lun* (A Theory of Knowledge) (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983), p. 130.

fuses into being human, and consequently alters being human at different levels. In this sense, the relationship between cognition and being human isn't merely explicated by the statement "only an authentically existing human can have true knowledge," but implies further that "only genuine knowledge can generate an authentically existing human." Knowledge opens up the objective world from different angles, and makes things appear through "analytic" rather than "synthetic" ways. Yet just as the formation and development of wisdom isn't really isolated from knowledge, knowledge's way of opening up the world through separate, divided cases certainly provides the preconditions for grasping being as a whole in a synthetic way. Knowledge, which takes the known as its object, reciprocally interacts with the wisdom of metaphysics; one's understanding of the world of experience on the one hand and one's intuitive realization of *xing* (human nature) and *tiandao* (the way of nature) on the other hand are complementary. Therefore, humans continuously open up authentic being (concrete being) and also gradually improve their own existential realm. The unity of knowledge and being mentioned above also reveals the intrinsic unity of epistemology and ontology.

Being and Method

Knowing in the broad sense not only investigates "what" (what is real being), but is also linked to "how" (how to reach real being), and consequently touches upon the problem of methodology. Here it is necessary to take a closer look at the following viewpoint developed by the contemporary Chinese philosopher Feng Qi: serving as a principle of what ought to be followed, method is at once based upon the *Dao* (Way) of reality, and also has a normative effect on reality itself. Hence, method at different levels — from rules of logic to imagination and intuition, all the way to concepts, which have normative significance, and theories constituted by systems of concepts — contains an ontological ground. Serving as a means to reach truth, method really isn't just the self-legislation of being human; on the contrary, it is essentially rooted in the being of the world. In the process of opening up the world, method and being, as well as what ought to be followed and what really is, all display their immanent unity.

The formation of method is linked to the order-of-being transforming into the order-of-thought, which intrinsically hinges upon practice and action. Such a fact reveals the interconnection between the order-of-thought, the order-of-action, and the order-of-being. The real ground and historical origins of logic and method demonstrate

the ontological connection between method, thought, and being. We could integrate Hegel's viewpoint, which affirms the connection between logic and practice, Piaget's viewpoint concerning the logic of action becoming internalized as the logic of thought, and the horizon opened up by the *Book of Changes* (Yijing) concerning the connection between hexagrams and historical practice in order to grasp the unity of method, practice, and being from different angles. At the same time, taking practice as a medium, the process of correcting and transforming the object demonstrates the unity of method, practice, and being in the sense of "managing things through speech" and "opening the wisdom of being human so as to mature things in the world," that is, take the principle of *what ought to be followed* to regulate being.

In terms of "being" human, method involves understanding and interpreting. On the one hand, the form of being human constitutes the background against which the process of understanding unfolds; on the other hand, as the way of being human, understanding in turn influences and constrains the process of being human. Gadamer and Heidegger mainly pointed out the hermeneutic circle between an explanation and its presuppositions. However, we need to go further and deal with the circle between understanding and being. Similar to the hermeneutic circle, this circle also has ontological significance. Here, understanding is at once the way humans grasp the world and also its concrete application. Hence, the way of thinking, the way of doing, and the way of being blend together. With these ontological presuppositions, opening up the world, transforming the world, and promoting the existential realm of humans themselves in essence all unfold as a unified process.

Being and Language

Opening up the world and understanding being is inseparable from language. Language is not only a mode of being in the broad sense, but is also the form in which being is grasped; this dual quality makes language and being form a primordial connection at the very beginning. Analytic philosophy without a doubt has its limitations by virtue of suspending the relationship between language and reality. By contrast, Chinese philosophy, and in particular, the ideas of Xun Zi with regard to "using language to point out things" and "using language to illuminate *Dao*" are obviously much more significant when it comes to analyzing the relationship between reality and language. "Using language to point things out" regards the relationship between language and the experience of objects; "using language to illuminate *Dao*" touches upon the relationship between language and metaphysical principles. Serving

as the way to bring objects of experience to light, “pointing things out” takes designating and describing “reality” as its content; grasping *Dao* is based on the law of identity, that is, there is no difference between name and actual thing, and adopts the form of “illuminating.” In contrast to the descriptive nature of “pointing out,” “illuminating” seems to be much more of a clarifying or showing. “Illuminating” entails both the opening up of objects as well as the enlightening of the subject. In the process of “using language to illuminate *Dao*,” reality, necessity, and oughtness are presented much more as mutually interwoven. The *Dao* that humans illuminate (*Dao* as it is grasped by language) is at once different from a formalized mathematical language and isn’t pure logical description. On the contrary, *Dao* is always permeating human intentions, emotions, and ideas of how the world ought to be. It is easy to see here the two ways that language connects to being, that is, using words to point things out and using words to illuminate *Dao* show their respective features: expressing objects of experience and illuminating the metaphysical realm. This doctrine is obviously quite different from the position of analytic philosophy, which suspends the relationship between language and reality.

In pointing out things and illuminating *Dao*, language without a doubt reveals its function in understanding and explaining the world. At the same time, however, language plays a normative role. Language constrains the process of human “being” in the world through “speech,” and also influences reality through “acting.” As regards the former, speaking is a way to be in the world; as regards the latter, language also unfolds as a force that changes the world. In other words, language not only touches upon intersubjective understanding and communication, but also intrinsically participates in the transformation of reality. It’s not hard to see here that “speaking” and “being”— explaining the world and transforming the world — in essence are intrinsically unified.

Taking the doctrine of the maturation of human beings (the cultivation of personality) in Chinese philosophy as a background, we need to pay more attention to the relationship between language and the ultimate refinement of human beings. Serving as the way human beings grasp the world and the way of “being” human in the world, language is at once grounded in being human itself and is also immanent to the process of being human. Taking monologue and dialogue as a form, language not only influences the being of the self and its formation of the spiritual world, but also constitutes the conditions for intersubjective “being-with,” intersubjective social life, the process of practice, and the construction of the living world. If language’s original relation to being human reveals the ontological dimension of language from

the horizon of language's real form, then the constraint that language exercises upon the way of being human shows the more intrinsic ontological significance that language has in the maturation of human beings. This connection between being human and language at once unfolds and more profoundly explicates the distinct relation between language and humans.

Beauty and Being

The relation between cognition, method, language, and being touches upon authentic being in different respects. As stated above, the real form of being simultaneously contains the dimension of value, and in a broad sense, the search for "truth" without a doubt also has significance in terms of value, which has been demonstrated in the connection between cognition, understanding, and being human. However, a determination of value is not only embodied in a pursuit of "truth", but also unfolds in the dimensions of beauty and goodness.

From the perspective of metaphysics, aesthetic activity not only demonstrates the essential forces of the subject, but also shows an aesthetic picture of being, wherein we find the aesthetic order of being, or, in other words, the order of being in the aesthetic realm. Zhuang Zi touched upon the relationship between the aesthetic order and being when he opposed "breaking up the beauty of nature (Heaven and Earth)." The aesthetic order shows the wholeness and unity of being not only through integrating the various parts of the aesthetic object into a whole, but also through the interaction and the melding together of the aesthetic object and the subject. At the same time, corresponding to the figurative and sensible method of observation is individuality, variability, and diversity winning their legitimacy in the aesthetic order. The unity of abstract ideas and concrete images also makes the aesthetic order differ from the formalized logical order and the scientific image of the world, which are ultimately reducible to mathematical models. Since the aesthetic order transforms things-in-themselves into aesthetic objects and also "makes the object exist freely and independently" (Hegel), the aesthetic order encompasses both the dimensions of being-for-humans and being-in-itself.

As a determination of being in the aesthetic relationship, beauty doesn't merely express itself as the attribute of the object as it is in-itself, but also embodies human ideals of value, which intrinsically implies the pursuit of the aesthetic perfection of being. Serving as the blueprint of the not-yet-realized hope to be realized, ideals are not only grounded in reality but also demand the transcendence of already existing

reality toward a more perfect being. A connection to the primordial nature of ideals also makes aesthetic activity point toward the beautiful perfection of being. While taking the determination and the essence of the object itself as ground, aesthetic perfection also accords with the subject's moral ideals, and in this sense, the perfection of the beautiful and the perfection of the good are intrinsically unified. As regards the being of humans themselves, the very core of an aesthetic ideal is to reach a perfect existential realm through integrating the multiple sides of human being into a whole. Historically speaking, with the formation and development of the division of labor, the unity of being has been gradually replaced by the division of being. Since modern times, the accelerated development of the division of labor has continued to threaten the wholeness of being human. Taking the unity of sensibility and rationality, being and essence, individual and universal, rational and nonrational as a form, aesthetic activity ensures in some sense that being human has the possibility of overcoming the separation and isolation of being human from itself so as to realize perfect being, which is "complete and well refined" (*Xun Zi*). In this case, Marx's opposition to the alienation of man and the pursuit of the true, good, and beautiful human being in Chinese philosophy are worth more attention. As a search for human values, beauty is ultimately relative to the "being" of humans, and the link between the development of the multiple sides of being human and aesthetic activity further demonstrates the ontological significance of beauty.

Being and Morality

The Metaphysical Significance of Morality

As an aesthetic ideal, the aesthetic perfection of being human is relative to "the good" or moral perfection. The ideal of the good is not only embodied in universal ethical norms or a system of ethical norms, but also transforms through the practice of being human itself into the good in reality, which includes moral activities that accord with definite moral norms and the perfected virtues of particular persons. As the concrete content of morals, ideals of the good and the good in reality are always relative to being human itself and actually participate in the construction of a real world in the social realm through constraining internal personality, modes of behavior, and the moral order. Being relative to being human, morals also change and influence being itself. Such a connection between morals and the "being" of humans shows us the metaphysical significance of morality.

Ethical Relationships and Moral Situations

While Kant considered moral duties and moral principles to be stipulated a priori, Confucianism is much more concerned with the connection between ethical relations and ethical duties. Historically speaking, what we primarily find in the moral realm are real ethical relationships, which prescribe corresponding duties. With their combination with value ideals in the broad sense, ethical duties are continuously abstracted and promoted in the process of social evolution, and gradually take form as moral principles or moral laws. As a concrete way of being, ethical relations have universal contents and a historical form. In contrast to general ethical relations, moral situations express the individuality and particularity of the process of a human “being” in the world. While ethical relationships show the connection between morality and social being on a universal level, moral situations embody the connection between morality and social being on the level of specific circumstances of being. This constraint exerted upon morals by the social realm also reveals the ontological ground of morality.

Overcoming the Division of Being

The ontological significance of morality lies primarily in grounding the possibility of overcoming the division of being and guaranteeing a return to unified being. In the historical evolution of society, morals take form as internal forces that cause the members of a society to bond together through providing common ethical ideals, value principles, behavioral norms, and evaluation standards. The members of a society are divided up into various roles and positions, each with a different interest and social status, and it is often under the influence and constraint of common moral ideals and principles that they take up a way distinct from exclusion, opposition, and confrontation in order to move together and live together. In addition, as regards the individual, living “ethically” enables a person to go beyond the one-sided, biological nature of wanting food and sex and overcome the one-dimensional and one-sided nature vested to the individual by specific social roles. In this way, morals constitute one of the preconditions for individuals to transcend an abstract form of being. Through participating in society’s processual movement, morals also plant their feet in historical processes and bestow the being of the social realm with a real, concrete form. Here, the original relation between morals and being gains further verification.

Everyday Life and Ultimate Concern

The realization of value ideals (including truth, beauty, and goodness) is inseparable

from the practice of everyday life. Broadly speaking, the “being” of humans is primarily in an intimate relation with everyday life: separated from everyday life, all the other activities of a human being have no place from which they can unfold.

As far as the being of humans is concerned, everyday life reveals the original nature of being initially in its confirmation and protection of the value of life. Serving as the primordial form of human “being” in the world, everyday life not only confirms the essential determination of a human being as a human being, but also overcomes the determination of humans as tools through intersubjective socializing. In accepting traditions, customs, and common sense, everyday life also participates in culture and guarantees its continuation. With immediacy and primordially as a form of being, everyday life makes the individual incessantly meld into this world, achieve a sense of recognition in this world, and provides a ground for the formation of an individual’s sense of reality and sense of truth regarding this world. As a whole, compared to the scientific picture of being, everyday life manifests much more of an undifferentiated or primordial unity. As the form of a human “being” in the world, the singularity of everyday life mentioned above without a doubt reveals its positive signification.

Modern philosophers like Habermas give some concern to everyday life, but they tend to idealize it. In fact, everyday life also has its negative side. As the conditions for the possibility of the regeneration of the individual, everyday life has the nature of being-in-itself or being ready-made; this being-in-itself or ready-made nature causes accepting already existing forms and following the behavioral patterns of common people to become predominant in the individual, which leads to a tendency toward nonreflection and the tendency to follow the masses. While dissolving individuality, this tendency also renders questioning the self of existential significance logically impossible. Serving as the unfolding of being-in-itself and being-ready-made, both the fixing of set roles in social relations on the level of practice and the inconsideration of anything outside one’s position on the level of thought forms the manifold limitations of being an individual in everyday life. These limitations lead to the suspension of all reflection upon the meaning of being, which seems to inhibit the free development of the human being.

Aside from being the real circumstances of the individual, everyday life also functions as the individual’s way of being. In this sense, everyday life or everyday being is opposed to the ultimate concern. If “ultimate” is only understood as the termination of life in the biological sense, then “ultimate” points to being beyond the limits of life. In terms of the real process of a human “being” in the world, however,

“ultimate” must be understood in contradistinction to the ready-made form of being, while “concern” must be distinguished in contrast to that unconscious state of “going through everyday life unknowingly.” In this context, so-called ultimate concern could be seen as questioning after the original meaning of being.

In contrast to the in-itself nature of everyday life, ultimate concern primarily expresses the self-awareness of being and the change from in-itself to for-itself being through a concern for the meaning of being. Consequently, there is a looking toward the future or the pursuit of an ideal that surpasses the being of the ready-made and limited. Taking the tension between the limited and the unlimited as an ontological precondition, ultimate concern reveals the existential realm of *having limits and going beyond them*. In the ontological sense, the ultimate nature of being lies neither outside this world nor beyond this world. Ultimate being is concrete being as a whole or this world that takes itself as cause. In overcoming the division of the world picture as well as the spontaneous unity of being-in-itself, ultimate concern endows the reconstitution of unified being with the significance of returning to this world.

As the dual mode of a human “being” in the world, everyday life and ultimate concern reveals the different dimensions of being. Their relation cannot be grasped correctly if we are limited to everyday being and thus reject ultimate concern or if we are attached to the ultimate concern and are thus alienated from everyday being. Without the concern for the meaning of being, everyday life has no way to overcome the state of being-in-itself. With its suspension of everyday life, ultimate concern degenerates into mere abstract speculation. Human-being itself unfolds as a unified process. As the dual dimension of this process, everyday life and ultimate concern in essence are intrinsically related. The relation between the two at the same time shows the possibility of reaching the unlimited from within the limited and being in-itself moving toward being for-itself.

Human Freedom

The relation between everyday being and ultimate concern shows that metaphysics is in essence the horizon of being human. With its concern for being, metaphysics always points to the “being” of humans, which takes freedom as an ideal realm on the individual level as well as on the level of the species. Historically speaking, regardless of whether it is on the level of the individual or in the horizon of the species, being human always unfolds as a process of pursuing and moving toward freedom. As the human way of being, freedom itself also has its ontological or

metaphysical sense. With freedom's metaphysical dimension in view, we can deepen our grasp of the nature of freedom and more thoroughly understand the multiple implications in being itself.

On the ontological level, freedom touches upon multiple relationships such as the relation between Nature and humans (including the being-in-itself of objects and the fact that human beings have purpose), negation (saying "no" to the world), and affirmation (saying "yes" to the world), "what can be hoped for" and "what we ought to do," necessity and contingency, and similar relations. The movement toward freedom implies incessantly overcoming the tensions between the related terms and realizing and reaching the associated unity; it is here that freedom reveals its intrinsic relation to the "being" of the world and the "being" of humans. In the ontological or metaphysical aspect, the deepest sense of freedom lies in overcoming the division of being, then reaching and verifying the unity of being.

Freedom in essence is the existential realm of human beings. A further examination of the problem of freedom logically points us in the direction of being human. In the dimension of being human or the subject, the metaphysical significance of freedom reveals itself in the wholeness and concreteness of the "I" (the agent), the melding together of the individual and society, and also the unity of the spiritual world and activity. Based on the concreteness of the subject's being, freedom is no longer merely manifested as the character of the will, but rather takes the whole "I" as its moving cause. The unity of freedom and self-causing reveals the intrinsic unity of freedom and causality in activity.

In the sense of freedom's value, Marx's thought is worth closer attention. Taking the overcoming of "necessity" and "external purposes" as a precondition, the liberation of humans, the realization of the self, being human returning to itself, and the improvement of personality endows the process of freedom with value contents. In this way, metaphysics reveals its deepest implications in the process of deepening and unfolding the existential realm of being human.

To sum up, in the process of the maturation of things (knowing and transforming the world) and the maturation of self (knowing and cultivating the self), being itself reveals its multiple dimensions and implications. Opening up the ontological dimensions of knowledge, aesthetics, and ethics provides the metaphysical ground for the unity of truth, beauty, and goodness on the one hand and affirms the concreteness and reality of being qua being on the other. Furthermore, in approaching real being, various disciplines in philosophy walk out of their limits and boundaries: serving as different horizons and methods to grasp the world, ontology, axiology, epistemology,

ethics, and methodology all mutually permeate. Here we can see the unity of being itself as well as the unity of methods to grasp being. In showing the concreteness and reality of being and the intrinsic connection between the “being” of the world and the “being” of humans, metaphysics demonstrates the great significance of philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom.