Warren G. Frisina, *The Unity of Knowledge and Action: Toward a Nonrepresentational Theory of Knowledge*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002, xiii + 262 pages. ISBN 0-7914-5362-6 (pbk)

Reviewed by Han-liang Chang (National Taiwan University)

In general, philosophical traditions are confined to their own linguistic and cultural boundaries. If they do cross the borders, they become the object of influence studies, such as the reception of Immanuel Kant among the English Romantics, Hegel's influence on post-structural French thinkers, notably Jacques Derrida, through the mediation of Alexandre Kojève, or the belated arrival of Charles Sanders Peirce in France. Thus, philosophical trends do travel, and as they do, they often change shapes, because of appropriation and application. Those who appropriate them bring them into rapport with other traditions, which the mediators find compatible. In this sense, cultural analogues and influences sometimes overlap and become hardly distinguishable.

The title of this book may seem banal, given the well-known debate involving episteme and phronesis, theoria and praxis, since classical antiquity. The debate has accelerated tremendously since the representational crisis in the mid nineteenth century and well into our times. However, put in a larger cross-cultural context, the title displays a wording that is at once familiar and strange, explicit and obscure. The familiar title is made strange through an alienation effect because of its verbatim translation of the theory of practice of the Chinese philosopher Wang Yang-ming (1472–1528), *chih-hsing ho-I*, which serves as the basis and constitutes part of the main body of this comparative study. The paradox lies in this. Whereas Wang's theory is quite popular in the Chinese-speaking world, ironically through the popularization undertaken by the late Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, who assigned one of the philosopher's writings as obligatory reading to all his political cadres, it is not too well known among Western readers. Its reception in the West has been limited to the followers of the so-called Neo-Confucianists, mainly, in the United States.

On top of his survey of post-Kantian Western philosophy under the brand name of "non-representational", "process", and "unity of action and knowledge", the author relies heavily on the life philosophy of the Chinese philosopher Wang Yang-ming's doctrine of *chih-hsing ho-i*. But the problem lies exactly here. Wang's high-sounding doctrine, in English translation especially, is not philosophy in any disciplinary and systemic sense; it is at most an axiom or moral adage aimed at personal moral cultivation. In Part III of *Ch'uan-his*

lu (p. 126), Disciple Huang Chih asks about the concept of *chih-hsing ho-i*, and Wang replies that the separation of *chih* and *hsing* has an undesirable moral effect in that people can take the excuse that crime uncommitted is no crime. To counter this notion of crime, one needs to exercise one's moral conscience in order to overcome that notion and to dispel it out of one's mind. This concept of uncommitted crime can only be explained, if not explained away, by the Christian concept of sin. To prevent crime from being committed, one better kill it whilst it's still embryonic. This requires action and the repetition of the same action will eventually change our moral personality.

Wang's "slogan" is as simple as that, and the author quotes Cua (1982, 2001) as interpreting it likewise, but he is not happy with this naïve reading and tries to elevate Wang's moral adage to a higher and more sophisticated level of human cognition and knowledge. The main problem is that *chih* in Chinese does not have the many senses which the English word *knowledge* has or has been made to acquire. To begin with, it does not suggest the idea of a knowledge system, be it epistemological or gnoseological. No doubt, Wang uses the word *chih* in various ways and on one occasion even suggests the sense of *chih* in *chih-chou* and *chih-hsien*, meaning the "overseeing" power of a magistrate or governor of a county or prefect. Needless to say, a governor does not just "see" or "oversee", but has to govern (i.e., "act"). One cannot simply infer from this that a governor who acts and sees at the same time demonstrates the philosophy of unity of knowledge and action. This is a rather simplistic generalization not uncommon amongst Westerners occasionally trespassing on Chinese philosophy.

Except for its author's strange excursion into Neo-Confucianism, the book serves as interesting reading. It gives a rather convincing survey of the "anti-representational" tradition in late modern and contemporary philosophy. This novel representation of some early pragmatists, such as John Dewey, Alfred North Whitehead, and their post-modern epigoni, in particular, the life science informed Daniel Dennett and Mark Johnson, makes the book a welcome addition to the prolonged contemporary debate of mind and body, knowledge and action.

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Owen Flanagan, *The Problem of the Soul: Two Visions of Mind and How to Reconcile them*. New York: Basic Books, 2003, xvi+364 pages. ISBN 0-465-02460-2 (hc.); ISBN 0-465-02461-1 (pbk.)

Reviewed by Liad Mudrik (Tel Aviv University)

The book's title is indeed very promising. Flanagan's reference to two visions relates to the ancient, long-standing controversy between the scientific and the humanistic approaches to human nature in general, and to the human soul in particular. But is he really able to achieve reconciliation between the two? Unfortunately, and despite his declared purport to do so, I believe that the answer is negative, as I will try to argue.

Firstly let us clarify the concepts on which the book is based and the large gap between them. The *scientific view*, as Flanagan defines it, claims that

> we [humans] are all animal… The mind or the soul is the brain. Or better: consciousness, cognition and volition are perfectly natural capacities of fully embodied creatures engaged in complex commerce with the natural and social environments. Humans possess no special capacities, no extra ingredients, that could conceivably do the work of the mind, the soul, or free will as traditionally conceived (p. xii).

On the other hand, the *humanistic view* (or "manifest image") holds that

> we are spiritual beings endowed with free will — a capacity that no ordinary animal possesses, and that permits us to circumvent ordinary laws of cause and effect…the mind or the soul interacts with — but is metaphysically independent of — the body (pp. ix, xii).

Over the past few decades, following the developments and achievements of the relatively new and exciting field of neuroscience, this old collision of views has emerged again, with full power. Materialism has raised its head, stronger than ever before, denying the dualistic view. Evidence of various cognitive and emotional impairments caused by brain lesions,[1] the efficiency of psychiatric