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Was Fukuzawa a Philosopher?

David A. Dilworth

Fukuzawa's Status as a Philosopher
Principles and Parameters of His Unfolding Philosophical Career
Its Universalist, Perennial Character

1. Fukuzawa's Status as a Philosopher

In the Preface to his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* Kant remarked that "there are scholars for whom the history of philosophy (both ancient and modern) is philosophy itself; for these the present *Prolegomena* are not written" (KANT 1977, 1). This remark was an extension of a passage in the concluding section of his *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant distinguished the nature of the philosopher, who is the lawgiver of human reason, from the mathematician, the student of nature, and the logician, who exhibit merely technical skills in the use of reason. Under student of nature Kant included all those who we would today classify as the learned practioners of the hard and soft sciences as well as the engaged scholars in the humanities. He calls the "technicians" of ideas "artificers of reason." The first-tier philosophers, he says, are engaged in legislating—though ever falling short of—an ideal of a "cosmical concept," that is to say, the most systematically universal formulations of the principles of the "the nature of things." The artificers or technicians of reason, on the other hand, occupy a second tier; they presuppose philosophical first-principles when they factor their subject matters in specific ways (KANT, 1965, 657-58).

Despite this *locus classicus* legislation on his own part, Kant's critical coin finds purchase in those who do conflate *philosophy* with the *history of philosophy* and its subsidiary craft, *"intellectual history."* After Kant, such a conflation actually achieved a huge legitimation in the right- and left-wing Hegelian schools of the nineteenth-, twentieth-, and now twenty-first centuries. This has been true not only in Western academic circles, but was also exhibited in certain schools of Japanese thought as well. In the 1920s, for example, Watsuji Tetsurō endorsed a latter-day version of this legitimation when he read Heidegger's *Being and Time* and other contemporary European works of the period. Watsuji's central concept of *fūdo* (climaticity) pointedly aimed at reducing philosophy to "cultural anthropology"—an assimilation of philosophy to geographical and cultural differences which gave Japan a unique identity as a "typhoon culture" (WATSUJI, 1998, 221-26). In the 1930s, 1940s, and postwar years, Nishida Kitarō and his followers in the Kyoto School invested heavily in such historicist differences of an "East-West" nature (NISHIDA, 1998, 21-36).

In the aftermath of right- and left-wing Hegelianism in Europe, strains of so-called Continental Philosophy (e.g., in Heidegger, and especially in the Parisian Heideggerians, and again in the post-Marxist schools of Critical Theory which trade in the language of "sociology of knowledge") also conspicuously featured *sense-constituting* historico-cultural assumptions. In contemporary postmodernism, history is similarly refracted into the "differences" of competing cultural histories—which is to say, into agonistic linguistic matrices and their attendant cultural symbolics foundationally legislated as to their irreducible particularities.

If I may evoke the spirit of the American philosopher Charles S. Peirce, I call such deliberately particularistic constructions *nominalistic*—devoted to the material particularity of cultural and historical contextualism—and I don't think they can withstand serious philosophical scrutiny. Any genuine philosophy has both *material*/contextual and *formal*/universal features. I will suggest that this is true of Fukuzawa's essential philosophical text; it should be read as largely in agreement with Peirce and other universalists who eschew the reductive premiss of historicist nominalism.

To be sure, Fukuzawa wore two or more hats. He also wrote as an educator, journalist, and politician subjectively involved in the shifting spirit of his times.

In those capacities he traded in the currency of contemporary opinion. While of interest to Fukuzawa's biographers, these writings have no lasting philosophical value; at most they enter the "data bases" of the indefinitely expanding constructions of the competing narratives of intellectual historians. Fukuzawa's philosophical insights, on the other hand, enjoy a life of their own on another plane—they are contributions to a timeless republic of letters that are worth pondering for their intrinsic value as fundamental options of human intelligence. To adopt the terms of Karl Jaspers, Fukuzawa's philosophy has "historic," and not merely "historical" interest. In its "historic" character, it contributed a page to Kant's sense of a "cosmical concept."

In this latter respect, Fukuzawa is remarkable for having philosophized out of his own innate genius and temperament, while absorbing the general trajectory of Western Enlightenment thought but also reprising and transforming the legacy of his own Japanese Neo-Confucian heritage as mediated by his early background in Dutch Studies. And he accomplished such a synthesis in a non-polemical form of articulation. He was of course supremely interested in Japan's national identity; he strove to articulate its status in his theory of the progress of civilization, but he did not conceived that in merely eristic terms either. He was perhaps modern history's first world-philosopher, legislating from the Eastern side a universal paradigm of "civilization" (*bunmei*) that advanced Kant's "cosmical concept" beyond the binary of Asian and Western cultural differences.

Let us recall that Confucian, and particularly Neo-Confucian, ideas played a role in the development of the ideal of post-medieval "secular enlightenment" in the modern West. Through the letters sent back to Rome by the Jesuit missionaries in China, Leibniz became the chief conduit for the importation of those ideas into Europe at a serious philosophical level. Subsequently important authors such as Wolff, Voltaire, Bayle, and Hume's friend Adam Smith contributed their prestige to the reception of them［CHING and OXTOBY, 1992］. Fukuzawa's journeys to the West brought him into contact with the array of Western Enlightenment ideas in full swing. In his early career he reversed the process, absorbing those Western ideas into the intellectual thought matrix of his native Neo-Confucian heritage. The result was a novel transformation of both heritages (CRAIG in FUKUZAWA, 1966, revised edition 1992).

To be sure, in several of his writings Fukuzawa aggressively criticized the Confucian and Neo-Confucian literature as consisting of 70% political and only 30% moral teachings (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 44-45, 190-93). He emphatically rejected the former and transformed the latter into his own ethics and politics of independence and self-respect (*dokuritsu jison*). But such an ethics and politics of independence and self-respect was not exclusively Western; as discussed below, it drew from the spiritual and intellectual resources of his Confucian and Neo-Confucian background as well.

There is of course more to the story of both his rejection and re-appropriation of his Confucian, and particularly Neo-Confucian heritage; but for present methodological consideration I am suggesting that *as a philosopher* Fukuzawa not only rejected antiquarian teachings of the past, but also anticipated, intercepted, and undercut the politicized trajectories of the entire range of contemporary technocratic methodologies that trade—up to 70%!—in the coin of historical and cultural "differences"; and at the same time his *essential philosophical text* transcended the interpretive nets of the intellectual historians whose constructions ("narratives") compete with and replace each other from generation to generation.

Since the Meiji period it has been customary in Japan to distinguish the terms *shisō* and *tetsugaku*. The word *testugaku* for philosophy was coined by Nishi Amane in 1874 (KOSAKA, 1958, 97, 107). In these terms the *shisōka* is a significant figure in "intellectual history" (*shisōshi*), while the *tetsugakusha* is the "philosopher." As the latter term was imported from the West, the binary has often been invested with the meanings associated with "East" and "West," respectively. This has always been an egregious error, having as its net effect to occlude the genuine world-philosophical classics of Japanese, Chinese, and Indian traditions. As indicated above, the error persists in the academy today in the form not only of the continuance of various "multicultural" agenda that ring further changes on an ideological East vs. West divide, but also in a range of methodologies broadly aligned with "sociology of knowledge" approaches to interpretation. To be sure, such interpretive approaches *rightly belong* to the gamut of inquiries conducted in the historical, anthropological, sociological, and other of the "soft sciences"; but they tend both to feed into and draw from a range of hermeneutical models of texts identifiable as Marxist and post-Marxist, Phenomenological, and

the like, many of which are merging today in a more broadly-based "para-phenomenological," or interdisciplinary, style of *shisōshi*, or "intellectual history."

I will argue here that Fukuzawa, despite the ephemeral quality of many of his minor, journalistic writings, ought to be approached as a *philosopher* of "historic" standing, and indeed that there is no reason to deny the persistence of this quality of his mind across his entire publishing career.

To be sure, such a career-text goes through stages of maturity, and may reach "vintage" expression in only one work (such as his *Bunmeiron*); but the entire process comprises an open-ended teleological movement of a philosophically legislating character. On its own terms Fukuzawa's career-text cogently integrates *realistic* and *idealistic* features, as will be explored below. It has its own principles and parameters—its own infrastructural hardwires, so to speak—as well as its distinctive rhetorical profile (the latter in his studied endeavor to speak to the common citizen in contempoarary terms instead of the stylized Chinese constructions of the Confucian classics). Its principles and parameters, by his own lights, are congruent with certain of the sense-making structural determinations of Western and Neo-Confucian philosophical texts. But in the final analysis, both Fukuzawa's philosophy and the philosophies he incorporated into his own synthesis are neither "Eastern" nor "Western," but rather derive their intellectual force from a transcultural, universal, perennial paradigm of philosophical presuppositions. Indeed, only in this sense does Fukuzawa's career-text take on the credentials of a world-philosophical text.

To put this in another way, if Fukuzawa is reduced to the status of *shisōka*, he would indeed retain his star-status in the context of early modern Japanese history; but the fact is that his worldview today continues to have a huge relevance for the modernization of societies outside of the Japanese historical and cultural context—a sure sign of its universalist, "historic" character. If only Iraq or Pakistan, Afghanistan, Colombia, Paraguay, or many of the nations of Africa—as well of course as the putatively advanced countries of the United States, Japan, and of Western Europe—were capable of realizing Fukuzawa's prescient tenets of "civilization" (*bunmei*) and "independence and self-respect" (*dokuritsu jison*) along the full gamut of their political, cultural, and socioeconomic trajectories!

Among other things, Fukuzawa's *philosophical* contribution to Japan con-

sisted in his formulation of an entirely new theory of history itself. It is distinctly *idealistic* in its "cosmic" principle of a limitlessly expansive process of potential human melioration grounded in a principle of "Heaven" (or the equivalent), in effect enfolding Western Enlightenment concepts drawn from such authors as Buckle, Guizot, and Mill in the Neo-Confucian paradigm of "Heavenly principle" (*tenri*) he inherited from Japan's own past.

At the same time Fukuzawa's text is distinctly *realistic*—empirical and pragmatic, opportunistic, and nationalistic—in its focus on historical contingencies, and particularly on the exigencies of Japan's nationhood in the nineteenth-century geo-political context—a central ontological focus he elaborates in terms of the "changing of the times." I will now proceed to argue that his most fundamental concepts such as *jitsugaku* ("pragmatic learning" as opposed to *kyogaku*, "empty learning"), *bunmei*, and *dokuritsu jison* blend the idealistic and realistic meanings together to constitute Fukuzawa's own distinct, bottom-line philosophical legislation—that, once again, cannot be reduced to any merely contextual hermeneutics.

2. Principles and Parameters of Fukuzawa's Unfolding Philosophical Career

Structurally considered, Fukuzawa's "historic" philosophical text is built out of bottom-line semantic, or sense-constituting, operators. These work infrastructurally as essential presuppositions in the production of meaning for his various major writings. Naturally, in its largest movements, both within and between writings during a forty year stretch, Fukuzawa's thought progresses dialectically through a range of thematic and tonal oppositions. The largest opposition is that between fully contextualized realistic renderings of the "changing of the times" the Japanese people were undergoing after the Meiji Restoration—a veritable *Sturm und Drang* in the nation's cultural symbolic—and his commitment to the *idealistic* tenets of Neo-Confucian and Western Enlightenment paradigms. Fukuzawa explored these tensions both in individual foci and in tandem with one another. They reach "vintage" integration in certain passages of certain writings, notably for example in his *Bunmeiron* and *Fukuō Hyakuwa*. But the basic principles and parameters of textual meaning- and value-production work as Fukuzawa's essential philosophical neurogram, so to speak, in the various phases of his career. Let me now

address the realistic and idealistic features of Fukuzawa's mindset in turn.

Fukuzawa's Realism

The *realistic* features of Fukuzawa's philosophy can be analyzed into the two textual profiles of *epistemic warrant and ontological focus*. The first of these is Fukuzawa's authorial voice, which is conspicuously exhibited in the form of his own subjective presence in his writings. In no uncertain terms Fukuzawa "authors" —that is, authorizes, stands personally behind, and warrants the truth of—his own text. (He is no postmodern "absent author"; nor does he claim a higher authority, as in the epistemic presuppositions of the standard religiously revelatory texts—he repudiates all of the latter claims to epistemic authority of both Western and Eastern traditions.) Fukuzawa's youthful *Sturm under Drang* did not take the form of Goethean romanticism. But he did highlight the emotional and intellectual cataclysm he personally experienced as a participant in one of the most momentous metamorphoses of Japanese history. Again and again he took pride in living through these changes, having had in effect the advantage of living two lives in the period spanning the end of the Tokugawa regime and the establishment of the new order of Meiji Japan.

The evidence of this subjective episteme productive of a distinctive literary self-image is most obviously found in Part Four of *Gakumon no susume* and the Preface to *Bunmeiron*. In such passages Fukuzawa concluded that, on the basis of his personal experience, he himself was the one to demonstrate what an independent life should be and to indicate such a way of life for all the people, including the scholars of Western learning, to follow. As late as 1878, in his published letter of reply to Nakamura Ritsuen (*Nakamura Ritsuen Sensei ni Kotau*), he speaks of the dangers to himself personally as an early advocate of Western learning when reactionary conservative advocates (mostly of Confucian persuasion)—namely the *shishi* patriots—still roamed the streets in the name of *sakoku* and *jōi* (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 117). As educator and journalist, Fukuzawa continued to speak from his personal experience and prestige. "One Hundred Discourses of Fukuzawa" (*Fukuō Hyakuwa*, 1896), "Fukuzawa's Moral Code" (*Shūshin Yōryō*, 1900), and his *Autobiography* are further instantiations of this point.

If anything, his *Autobiography*, a work dictated to a secretary by the failing Fukuzawa in 1898, was a final case of Fukuzawa' authorial self-imaging. It can be regarded as one that distortionally invents an earlier career in the Bakumatsu period as Fukuzawa the old man wished it to have been. A self-imaging authorial presence always harbors the danger of its own inherent finitude of perspective. Such a "realistic" witnessing power is inevitably mixed up with tendencies to failed memory, dissimulation, and self-deception that inevitably go with our glassy centers of subjective consciousness.

In addition to its personal perspective, the second realistic feature of Fukuzawa's career-text is its manifest focus on historical change. Here I am asserting that the concept of historical change is a foundational ontological factor for Fukuzawa. He wrote that the spirit (*kifū*) of civilization originates in something akin to a world-spirit, or to Mencius' "great moving force." Such a world-spirit, he says, is in constant motion; it advances or retreats, has successes or failures. It is not to be identified with the external trappings of civilization; it rather resides in the inner life, namely, in the presence and absence, degree and force, of the independence of a people. It is epochal in character. This is the bottom-line sense of reality that pervades Fukuzawa's philosophical text. He holds it in concert with all the existentialists in the world-history of philosophy.

In this regard Fukuzawa astutely referred to a social stratum of doctors and writers who crossed status lines at the end of the Tokugawa regime; and he added that this trend of intellectual power subtended the real revolution going on as it fed into the burgeoning of a new middle class in the Meiji period. As for the proponents of the old "private virtues," he opined that the moral teachings of the advocates of Christianity, Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism were all pretty much evenly matched, but that was not the point. All such moral disputants were out of touch with the trend of the times: they blocked the road of inquiry embodied in the new spirit of *jitsugaku* requisite for Meiji society. Chapter Seven of *Bunmeiron* is devoted entirely to this theme of the existential application of public knowledge and virtue to the new "times and places"; but again, this ontological sense is a ubiquitous sense-making operator throughout his writings.

Another aspect of Fukuzawa's realistic sense of historical change took the form of his theory of the mutations of human progress. He generalized this in

terms of the progress of humanity from primitive, to semi-civilized, to civilized stages. He extolled Western civilization as having found the right path to a possible millennium, while recognizing that it sometimes deviated from the correct path. The Western type was itself an example of epochal change as the confluence of innumerable accidental forces. But all other types of civilization in the world were, in his mind, wrong or primitive, destined either to extinction or to evolve along the lines of the Western type. Thus he concluded that humanity had made civilized progress; and he charted it in line with his sense of historical change as the rising tide for the re-formation of Japan's own cultural symbolic.

With respect to this pointedly *realistic ontological sense*, we should note that Fukuzawa early-on showed an innate instinct for focusing on the wholesale changes signaled by Japan's opening up to the West. His first contact with the West came in 1854 when, at the age of nineteen, he began studying Dutch. Five years later he first met a foreigner, and in 1860, at the age of twenty five, he went abroad to San Francisco, followed by a second trip to the United States, then in 1862 to Europe. His first major work, *Seiyō Jijō* ("Conditions in the West"), contained the seeds of a vast quantity of knowledge of Western civilization which Fukuzawa acquired within a relatively short time span—and which, in comparative terms (despite its hodge-podge character), qualify Fukuzawa as perhaps the first historian of "world-history" in his time.

It was the real changes in public sentiment which, in Fukuzawa's eyes, energized the Meiji Restoration. He came to intuit that these changes made the old institutional teachings of Confucianism obsolescent. Thus he came to speak of a complete reversal in the structure of society from that of the ages of the Duke of Chou, Confucius, and Mencius, such that there is no reason to expect the theories of those days to apply to modern times. His central concept of *dokuritsu jison* ("independence and self-respect") was the reverse side of this critical coin. It contained the potential of creative change in it. His emphasis on national progress and world progress followed from that. This was the final *realistic* import of the various tenets of "Fukuzawa's Moral Code" (*Shūshin Yōryō*, 1900) as well. But we will now explore how this ontological sense of historical change fused in his text with recognizable idealistic sense-making features.

Fukuzawa's Idealism

We come now to the opposite side of the ledger, namely, Fukuzawa's *idealistic* mindset. I will suggest that working in tandem with the realistic features, the semantic dynamic of his text's major concepts derived from its *sublational logical operator* and its *comprehensive principle* of cosmic rationality. Let me take up each of these idealistic factors in turn.

First, Fukuzawa's philosophy organizes its concepts in consistent patterns of sublational, not eristic, formations. While he sharply criticized the doctrines and superstitions of the past and ridiculed the credulity of those blinded by "empty teachings" (*kyogaku*) in the past and the present, his overall temperament and disposition was not agonistic. He had no truck with mind-boggling paradoxes and the gamut of unrelieved conceptual tensions that functioned centrally in the logic of ancient Buddhist and also of skeptical and out-and-out polemical discourses. As we have seen, he rejected the preponderance of "70% politics" in the Confucian classics as well. But Fukuzawa's philosophical text is synthetic and positively resolutive in intent. While the Confucian classics taught one to be fond of the old so as to know the new, Fukuzawa stood for the opposite principle of positively transforming the old into forward-looking orientations.

Of course, the most conspicuous manifestation of Fukuzawa's sublational/synthetic method of thinking was in his welcoming attitude toward the values of Western modernity. To highlight this point, we can note again that the later Kyoto School advocates of the 1930s, 1940s, and beyond introduced a definitely agonistic logic that contrasted the cultural and metaphysical forms of "Eastern" over against "Western" thought. Contrary to this tendency, Fukuzawa's theory of human progress embraced the West; it recognized the paradigmatic accomplishments of Western civilization in the progressive trajectory of humanity from primitive, to semi-civilized, to civilized states. And his basic thought was that Japan's assimilation of the civilized progress of the West presupposed and enacted an even greater potential for both Japan and the West. The assimilative and harmonizing trajectory of his thought overrode and controlled its eristic potential, even where the interface of East and West came prominently into focus.

The markers of Fukuzawa's sublational spirit are ubiquitous in his writings. He speaks constantly of the balanced reciprocity of man's physical and mental

powers and of the desired confluence of diversified human energies and talents. His is a theory of the whole nation, he says, not just of the individual, where the energies of the private and the public sectors interactively work to achieve forms of harmonious congruence. His consistent theme is that Japan's government and private scholars must complement each other, and he conceives the role of the "public intellectual" as occupying a middle ground that mediates between the government and the common people. He cites—and transforms—Mencius's doctrine of the four beginnings of virtue in the service of his own sense of the expansion of private into public virtue. The Bakufu's politicized Confucianism was limited to "private virtue," he contended, but the Japanese citizens of the Meiji era need to learn "public virtue" or "wisdom" so as to be able to appreciate and provide leadership for the "spirit of the times." It will be persons embodying *dokuritsu jison* and thus the power of creative thinking who take on this responsibility—as illustrated in his own case by his founding of Keio University in the private sector.

Thus Fukuzawa likened public intelligence in the private domain to a productive "craftmanship"—reminiscent of Plato's concept of the function of the Demiurge. As well, his brief history of the West in *Bunmeiron* was all about spontaneous outcroppings in rational intelligence, which eventually intertwined to produce the complex advances of modern European civilization. The founding of Keio University may have had all kinds of subjectively realistic motivations and causalities, but at the same time it represented in microcosm Fukuzawa's idealism concerning the productive, synthetic powers of the human mind to contribute to the common weal.

This logical operator can be traced across his writings. In 1868, in his "Pronouncement at the Inauguration of Keio Private School" (*Keiō Gijuku no Ki*), Fukuzawa wrote in typically sublational fashion: "our purpose is not by any means private. We have opened the doors of the school wide to the public to all men, regardless of their status as samurai or commoner, to come and participate in our program" (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 15-16). His attitude of social mediation continues in a sequel passage in the same inaugural address when he wrote: "Our group has pursued Western studies for many years, but we have had but a glimpse of the whole. Hundreds of subjects still untouched are so extensive that

we are ever lured with the vision of the ocean of wisdom before us" (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 18). In their logical form, such statements of expansive synthesis are microcosms of his entire career-text that is keyed to the generalizing power of civilized intelligence.

In 1870, in "Words Left Behind in Nakatsu" (*Nakatsu Ryūbetsu no Sho*), he went on to write: "We should read widely in the books of all countries to discuss the public affairs of the world in the common language of the world" (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 41). These too are sublational, not agonistic, articulations which contain his philosophy in miniature. Their embracive intentionality also found expression in *Gakumon no susume* when he wrote: "Take Japan, take any nation of the West: every nation is under the same heaven, illumined by the same sun, enjoying the beauty of the same moon, sharing the same ocean, breathing the same air, possessing the same human sentiments. Therefore, whatever we have in excess we should give to other nations, taking whatever they have in excess, teaching each other and learning together, mutually praying for the happiness of all" (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 69). These are indeed idealistic pronouncements of a sublational sort. His text tells us here that he thought in terms of balance and harmonization of opposites, not of unrelieved and irreconcilable "differences."

Now, functioning in tandem with this sublational method of concept formation, the second idealistic factor functioning as presuppositional and infrastructural semantic variable in Fukuzawa's text I have identified as its "cosmic" principle. This is a time-honored principle of certain great classics in the world-history of philosophy—examples of which range from Plato's Idea of the Good/Beautiful, Leibniz's principle of the maximum compossibility of the created monads (principle of pre-established harmony), to the all-inclusive principles of the *I Ching* or of Chu Hsi. Of course other governing assumptions of these texts need to be factored in to account for their differences. But all such classics anchor their "historic" discourses in a metaphysical first principle of cosmic harmony; this is a principle of inexhaustible rationality and interpenetrative variety that is both generative and encompassing of the phenomena of life and human nature understood in distributed forms of participation in the universal archetype. Such a principle grounds a sense of precise causalities in the workings of physical and human

natures but also inscribes the plentitude and goodness of life and its inherent potential for qualitative perfectibility and harmonization. I argue here that this principle is sense-constituting for Fukuzawa's central concept of "civilization" (*bunmei*)—a principle subtending, though often submerged, even his more ephemeral forays into journalistic writing.

What was the provenance of Fukuzawa's philosophical text which, in its own fashion, rings the changes on this paradigm of rational determination and qualitative perfectibility, in conjunction with the realistic values we have explored above? It is undoubtedly the Neo-Confucian heritage which he absorbed from his boyhood on and which, mediated by his Confucianized Dutch Studies and intellectual work for the Bakufu, formed the conceptual matrix he carried with him on his three journeys to the West. The significant point to realize here is that Neo-Confucianism had expanded for many centuries in East Asia into a multi-layered array of "pools of thought" implicating a full gamut of metaphysical, cosmological, moral, and intellectual intentionalities. Certain positivistic-minded scholars have endeavored to find a "dissolution" of the Neo-Confucian intellectual matrix in the latter half of the Edo period (MARUYAMA, 1952; BLACKER, 1964.) However, that interpretation, based on a sketchy linear-causal model of historical change in the Edo period, hardly fits the historical facts and does not tally with the details of Fukuzawa's own formative years either (DILWORTH, 1979).

My thesis here is that Fukuzawa's formative years of intellectual development were indeed formative, and had lasting impact on his mindset, including his Confucianized literary vocabulary which retained the nuances of such key concepts as *ten* ("Heaven"), *tendō* ("Heaven's Way")—which are under-trans-lated by the flat term "nature"—and, to mention only a few others, such terms as *jitsugaku* ("practical learning") and *kyūri* ("the investigation of the principles of things"), though this latter term was gradually transformed into "physics" in Fukuzawa's day. To grasp the multi-sedimented heritage of these terms in the background of Fukuzawa would require an extensive study of the several strands of the Neo-Confucian heritage in China, Japan, and Korea (DeBARY and BLOOM, 1979).

And my thesis here is that only when we understand the co-functioning of

Fukuzawa's encompassing, distributing, and energizing principle of the qualitatively Good in its Neo-Confucian provenance—together with his personal authorial perspective, existential sense of historical contingency, and sublational method of concept organization—that we can appreciate the full flavor of his fundamental concepts of *dokuritsu jison, bunmeiron*, *gakumon no susume*, *jitsugaku*, etc. Thus, for further specification, Fukuzawa's integration of all four semantic values accounts for the "big picture" he formed in his mind and articulated in *Bunmeiron* —his theory of the three stages of civilization, with special reference to its open-ended process of potential development in free, rational intelligence both for the Japanese nation and for the world.

In *Bunmeiron*, which most explicitly expresses this optimistic principle of civilized progress in free, rational intelligence, Fukuzawa begins by saying we should listen to all theories "to see where the highest good lies" (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 9). This would be, he continues, to occupy "a lofty vantage point"—let us call it an Archimedean point on the basis of which he goes on to inscribe the key idealistic points of his philosophical discourse. For himself as well as for his Meiji readers, he drew that Archimedean point from the Neo-Confucian lexicon of such terms as "Heaven" (*ten*), "Heavenly principle" (*tenri*), and "Heaven's Way" (*tendō*).

We have already mentioned his celebration of the multifaceted expansion and integration of human powers, encompassing a great diversity of human talents and affairs, which he found in the modernizing West in contrast to the closed social systems of antiquity. Such a multifaceted higher civilization, he argues, "is what Heaven intended for mankind." His transformation of Mencius' four beginnings of virtue into the efficacious qualities of "public intelligence" is grounded by the same governing assumption. People, he insists, have a natural propensity to do good, and this propensity will only increase in qualitatively new forms on the track of open-ended civilized progress. Needless to say, this idealistic tenet also anchored the importance of education in his thought and its concrete embodiment in his founding of Keio University.

In *Bunmeiron's* brief history of Western civilization, Fukuzawa stressed the irreducible diversity of Western intellectual currents. All of these he regarded as nurturing the trajectory of unlimited progress in rational intelligence. The

same "cosmic" principle therefore energized his industrial-strength belief in personal freedom and independence of mind—concepts he came to discovered in Western philosophy but which were universal qualities of the human mind as already prominently inscribed in the many "pools" and ramifications of Neo-Confucian philosophy he had absorbed from his boyhood on. The same ideals of the Neo-Confucian philosophy he expressed in his belief in the destiny of the Japanese people to achieve a better individual life and society under the leadership of the intellectual class who promote the public "wisdom" of the nation. And such a meliorative sense of the dynamic *telos* of civilization was again anchored in his comprehensive principle of "Heaven's Way" (*tendō*)—the Chu Hsi philosophy's principle of the True and the Good—which lures the progressive edges of humanity to increasing qualitative realization.

In Fukuzawa's case, the provenance of his meliorative idealism was undoubtedly his Neo-Confucian heritage. To be sure, he roundly criticized antiquated forms of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism for their politicized dogmas of social stasis. He impugned the still credulous exponents of Meiji period Confucianism for seeking to roll back the times in favor of outmoded concepts of morals and politics. If anything, he conflated Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism with the political settlement effected by the military class at the beginning of the Edo period. Two and a half centuries of top-down *military rule* produced an "official" interpretation of the cultural symbolic that in fact encased Neo-Confucianism in a cast-iron politicized mold. But such a de facto politicized mold was unrelated to the metaphysical, cosmological, and humanistic essence of Neo-Confucianism as contained in the "historic" classics themselves. The "changes of the times" leading to the Meiji Restoration liberated the multifaceted spiritual resources of the Neo-Confucian heritage to serve other purposes of Japan's modernizing cultural symbolization.

Fukuzawa rode the crest of these historical changes in reprising and transforming its fundamental principle of cosmic rationality and human melioration through "the investigation of things" and other major concepts of his Neo-Confucioan heritage. It was his own intensive, manifaceted, and deep-rooted background in Confucianized Dutch Studies that subtended his activities as a leading intellectual of the "Enlightenment" years of early Meiji. He brought those forma-

tive influences to his travels abroad before the Restoration, and he ended up creatively liberating and recasting the same formative Neo-Confucian "worldview" to articulate his own rational idealism of individual and historical freedom. While jettisoning the cast-iron concept of the antiquated political relation between lord and subject, he even retained the other four of the Five Constant Relations on the basis of his fundamental concept of *dokuritsu jison*, which was itself grounded in the power of creative thought and action in a rational universe.

As early as his "Pronouncement at the Inauguration of Keio Gijuku" (*Keiō Gijuku no Ki*) in 1868, Fukuzawa expressed a transformed version of NeoConfucian rationalism when he wrote: "What places Western learning apart from all other learnings is that it is a true product of nature and rides with reason; it teaches the ways of human kind and it moderates between an individual and society. It contains all the truths with no vestiges of untruth, it possesses all knowledge, large or small; it is a learning that people, as long as they are people, must learn" (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 18). This is not a passage about Western learning *per se*, but rather concerns the power of rational intelligence he endorsed in Western learning.

The passage should be read in tandem with his pronouncement two years later in 1870 in "Words Left Behind in Nakatsu" (*Nakatsu Ryūbetsu no Sho*):

> Human beings are the lords of creation! This saying does not mean that anyone would deserve the title when he has a body complete with the organs—ears, eyes, nose, mouth, hands, and feet—and he is able to talk, act, and sleep. One must cultivate moral virtues by following Heaven's rule, acquire knowledge and understanding worthy of a human being, associate with people and experience things, work for one's own independence and succeed in earning a living for one's family—only after these, may one be called a lord of creation.
>
> Here is something that neither the Chinese nor the Japanese have noted in the past: the principle of freedom and independence which exists as an inborn constitution. (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 36)

Fukuzawa uses the word *ten* for Heaven in this passage. "Heaven's rule" has its

provenance in Neo-Confucian philosophy, which regarded human morality, natural scientific learning, social organization, and government institutions, as all belonging to one system of inherent principles energized by an overarching Principle of the True and the Good.

We can note in passing that in his "Daily Lessons" (*Hibi no Oshie*) written two years later (1871) for his two eldest sons, Fukuzawa rang the changes on th e preceding passage by substituting the concrete image of the "Sun" for the Neo-Confucian concept of Heaven:

> The rules of the great Sun have never failed since long, long ago. When you sow wheat, wheat will grow; if you sow beans, beans will grow; a boat made of wood will float and a boat made of mud will sink. All these are true always and people do not stop to wonder at them. And so, when you do good, you will have good results and when you do evil, you will be rewarded with evil. All these are the rules of the Sun, and they have not changed since ancient times. (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 53)

Here Fukuzawa, the great advocate of historical change, speaks of the rational principles of the universe ("the rules of the Sun") that govern all causalities and have not changed since ancient times (since time immemorial). The "times and the places" do change, but not their universal principles that have the equivalent of the ontological status of Platonic Ideas systematically organized by an overarching Idea of the Good. Such an overarching principle accounts for the plenum of precise physical causes as well as the potentials of human development set in an ancestrally stable world system. We see, then, that his *jitsugaku* was not merely an empirical concept, but rather had the additional connotation of efficaciously functioning within the framework of a rational cosmos.

Fukuzawa's recognition of the "basic rules of Heaven" also motivated his "Nakatsu School Announcement" (*Nakatsu Shi Gakkō no Ki*) in 1871, where he argued to the effect that the privileged, non-working samurai class does not respect nature's rules of earning one's own living by one's own labor. He made so bold as to declare that "this custom of hereditary fiefs itself, was, from its in-ception, a creation against the rules of Heaven" (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 60). These early

pronouncements preceded the major articulations of *Gakumon no susume* (1872-76) *and Bunmeiron* (1875) where his attack on the unnatural, Heaven-unsponsor ed, hereditary privileges of the ex-samurai class reached its theoretical highpoint.

In *Gakumon no susume*, for example, Fukuzawa famously wrote in allusion to the first sentence of the Declaration of Independence:

> 'Heaven never created a man above another nor a man below another,' it is said. Therefore, when people are born, Heaven's idea is that all should be equal to all others without distinction of high and low or noble and mean, and that they should all work with their bodies and minds with a dignity deserving of the lords of creation, which they are, and make use of all things in the world to satisfy their needs in clothing, food, and dwelling, freely but without interfering with others, each to live happily through life. (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 66)

Or again: "... it will be found that the difference comes merely from whether the man has an education or not, and there are no Heaven-made distinctions" (67). Such passages witness the fusion of Western Enlightenment concepts of modernity with the Neo-Confucian tradition of the Way of Heaven (*tendō*).

In *Bunmeiron*, he keynoted this idealistic tendency of his work with the words: "... the purpose of this discourse is to discover a precise and consistent principle. Such being the case, this deliberation on civilization is a truly difficult process" (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 102). The precise and consistent principle was his comprehensive principle of Heaven that authorized the unlimited potentials of advancing "civilization" based on and productive of "independence and self-respect." The same principle of Heaven energizes *jitsugaku*, which is the instrument of inexhaustible human perfectibility toward the future millennium. Fukuzawa accordingly wrote the script for a *forward-looking* Neo-Confucianism that transformed its ancient teaching of "exhausting the principles of things" in a novel way. In a typical passage he wrote: "Those great inventions of steamships, steam locomotives, and guns and other weapons or telegraphy and gas lights—they all appear grand and formidable, but they all emerged from minute studies, analyses, and inferences of seemingly trivial principles that scholars applied to

human affairs" ("The Importance of Physical Science," *Butsurigaku no Yōyo*, 1882; FUKUZAWA, 1985, 126). One hears the echoes here of Chu Hsi's teaching of "the investigation of things through the exhaustion of their principles." The "principles" Fukuzawa had in mind were not merely physical, but pertained also to the entire spectrum of individual, political, and socio-economic dimension of human existence.

Fukuzawa's thought was set in a larger movement of ideas which gained expression in another pronouncement of 1882: "The civilization of human beings is an eternal thing: its domain is widespread. It advances in leaps, each leap spanning a thousand years, which in terms of a whole civilization will appear to be a mere day" ("Imperial Household," *Teishitsuron*, [1882] FUKUZAWA, 1985, 142).

But, in brief, we are tracing here consistent articulations and ramifications of Fukuzawa's modernized principle of Neo-Confucian rationalism which dovetails in essential respect with a Platonic principle of the Good. Without this motivating presupposition, we have argued, his idealistic master-concepts of *bunmeiron, dokuritsu jison, gakumon,* and *jitsugaku,* lose their semantic efficacy in his philosophical text.

According to Eiichi Kiyooka, Fukuzawa, feeling in his old age some leisure from his engagements in society, decided to write on more fundamental problems. The fruit of these "vintage" philosophical cogitations are expressed in "One Hundred Discourses of Fukuzawa" (*Fukuō Hyakuwa*) of 1896, which contains such variations on his principle of cosmic rationality as the following:

> 1. The Universe. Who created the universe? Or did it come about of its own?: This is the question that religious theorists have argued ceaselessly. Leaving those arguments aside, I prefer to simply observe the universe as it is and marvel at its beauty, its infinite greatness, the refinement and precision of its structure, and the permanence and regularity of its rules. When I seriously think about the universe, I never cease to wonder. The more I think, the more mystified I become, until I am simply lost in myself. In such a state of wonder, some will believe this infinite state to be the power of a god or the truth of the Buddha. Such beliefs are quite under-

> standable. ... [But] not being acquainted with gods or the Buddha, I cannot call them by such names. Then, I remember that there was a custom, which I was familiar with since my childhood, to call anything beyond human power "Heaven" [*ten*] or "Heaven's Way" [*tendō*]. Therefore, I will use this term to represent the wonders of the universe. This Heaven, Heaven's Way, Heaven's Wonders, Heaven's Will, and such terms are commonly used today, but Heaven is not the blue sky above us or the sun. It is used here to represent the immeasurable, unfathomable something with no beginning or end, infinitely big while infinitely minute, extremely strong and extremely certain, mysterious beyond human comprehension. And we are to represent all these with the one word "Heaven." Therefore, if someone should think of a more appropriate term, he may freely use it in place of Heaven. (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 241)

In this context Fukuzawa goes on to say: "However, what really impresses us is not these extremes of largeness and minuteness. It is the mystery of the everlasting infallible laws that governs the universe with never an error. Our attempts to solve what cannot be solved will bring us only to the deeper realization of the limits of the human intellect" (242).

I submit that from the beginning to the end of his writing career Fukuzawa philosophized from the strength of such a comprehensively rational metaphysical principle of "the infallible laws" of the universe. It is important to see that, like his Neo-Confucian forefathers, he left the principle flexibly vague, yet serviceable for his commitment to personal freedom and social melioration in higher civilization. In effect, he turned the older Confucian idealism on its head, directing it to the present exigencies of the Japanese nation and futureward to the millennium instead of backward to the sage kings of antiquity. This was Fukuzawa's version of Kant's "cosmical concept."

In his late philosophical musements Fukuzawa also pondered what might be called Schopenhauerian arguments concerning the imperfection and evil aspects of the universe that seem to militate against his own cosmic optimism. But true to his own principle of Heaven's Way, he adduced cogent arguments to the contrary that are semantically motivated by his principle of the Good. He wrote, for

example: “These arguments have their own reasoning, backed by facts. However, from what I see, such arguments are too narrowly confined and their observations are limited to very short time spans. These theorists have not conceived the vastness of Heaven’s ways. Let us carefully consider human history since its beginning. There has been progress but never regression” (FUKUZAWA, 1985, 244). Or again: “Some may consider it unscholarly to dream of a thousand or ten thousand years in the future just for one’s peace of mind. But my dreams are not necessarily empty dreams. I base my dreams for the future on the facts of the past. Granting that Heaven’s ways are true and that human beings are a progressing and improving species, forecasting the future in several thousand or several ten thousand years with the examples of factual human progress of the past 5000 or 6000 years does not strike me as absurd” (246). Or again: “Ancient society was threatened by many enemies, and people had to be on their guard at all times. Society today is safer, and we are able to enjoy leisure. There are countless instances of a better world” (247).

These are considered philosophical arguments on Fukuzawa’s part. They are idealistic, to be sure, expressing an optimistic faith of cosmic proportion. To any sane believer in the values of modernity, they make eminently good sense. A person of good will will have William James’ sense of the will-to-believe them, taking them as guidelines of his or her civilized conduct and historical evaluation. They are values one passes down to one’s own children. Under Fukuzawa’s writing brush they have their own cogency, adduced in the form of a combination of empirical and metaphysical claims as to human progress—which require the privileging of other, less optimistic, first principles to gainsay them. On its own terms, Fukuzawa’s discourse performs its own semantic commitment to a species of historical idealism that runs parallel to similar trajectories of the European Enlightenment. It has its own ring of truth within the parameters of its master-concepts of *jitsugaku, bunmei* and *dokuritsu jison*, as these are concretely applied to the case of his own Japanese nation.

Every great philosophical text is self-contained and self-representing in such a fashion. Many of them participate in the same universal realm of theoretical discourse as Fukuzawa’s which is remarkable for its cognitive originality in the context of Meiji Japan.

3. Fukuzawa's Perennial Paradigm

In the introductory pages of this paper I stressed that Fukuzawa was indeed a first-tier philosopher who legislates for human reason and whose place and status cannot be reductively assimilated to the nominalistic, materialistic, and historicist "sociology of knowledge" paradigms of interpretation in the contemporary academy. These latter are politicized patterns of interpretation which, frankly, have a business-like character in the "mannered" politics of tenure and promotion in the postmodern university.

For his part, Fukuzawa's philosophy intercepted and forestalled the range of postmodern hermeneutics based on an agonistic concept of "difference." Fukuzawa was a genuine pluralist, a multiculturalist in a generous, sublational sense, as opposed to such eristic models of historicism and cultural relativism. His master-concepts of *jitsugaku, bunmei,* and *dokuritsu jison* anticipate and turn the tables, as it were, on the postmodern discourses. His sanity of philosophical intentionality resides in the peculiar blend of realistic and idealistic values we have explored above.

Fukuzawa can be considered a retailer of Western ideas rooted in the modern social contract theories of the West. The wholesalers of such views were Hobbes, Spinoza, and Locke. His millennium thinking on the perfectibility of human nature can be traced to Rousseau and Kant. But Fukuzawa was a creative thinker in his own right. His cognitive originality can be said to consist in achieving the first wholesale recasting of the Confucian heritage of two and half millennia in Asia. His synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies was genuine, unprecedented in its day, and in its essential tenets it continues to stand up against all competitors as the essential paradigm of modernization in today's world.

It is important to reiterate that Fukuzawa advocated assimilation of Western learning for the reason that he found it to be the de facto model of civilized progress in his own personal experience. He did not promote Westernization *per se*. In the larger picture he envisioned Western and Japanese civilization as capable of participating in a general perfectibility of the human race. In his sublational way of thinking, it was decidedly not a case of "West" vs. "East," but rather of

a world-progress in civilization that subsumed East and West in an ongoing higher synthesis.

In comparative terms, we find parallels to Fukuzawa's realistic idealism (or idealistic realism) in his contemporary nineteenth-century context. Not the unilateral and closed-ended totalism of right- and leftwing Hegelian historicism, but such American authors as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) can be cited as dovetailing with Fukuzawa's philosophical project in significant respects. (And these two authors remain the United States' two great philosophers.)

Emerson's concept of the Oversoul—vague as it is in its many rhetorical expressions—uncannily coincides with Fukuzawa's principle of Heaven, and grounds an affine ethos of "self-reliance." Emerson rang the changes on this doctrine in many brilliant essays such as "The American Scholar," "Divinity School Address," "The Transcendentalist," "Circles," "Experience," "Illusions," and "Fate," which can be fruitfully compared with Fukuzawa's essential pronouncements. As well, Emerson did not fail to elaborate political applications of his concept of "representative men" that offers close parallels to Fukuzawa's concept of the function of public intellectuals in the national consciousness.

Peirce inherited the legacy of Emerson in the latter part of the nineteenth- and first decade of the twentieth-century—a span of years encompassing Fukuzawa's own life. The founder of American Pragmatism, Peirce promoted in *par excellence* fashion the equivalent of Fukuzawa's scientific *jitsugaku* in the service of open-ended progress of human civilization. Both philosophers, the Japanese and the American, based their discourses on the principle of cosmic rationality tied to pragmatic intelligence in the open-ended historical process. Peirce, incidentally, repudiated the inevitable march of Hegel's absolute in favor of the irreducible spontaneity and variety of nature and human affairs that are also championed by Fukuzawa.

Not to pursue these interesting parallels here, the upshot of this paper is to affirm that Fukuzawa was indeed a first-tier philosopher. His philosophical discourse is deceptively simple given his endeavor to speak to the emerging middle class of his country in the context of the Meiji Restoration. But it is actually a sophisticated worldview, a unique synthesis of realistic and idealistic

principles. His cognitive originality emerges against the backdrop—the painted stage-scene, as it were—of centuries of Japanese cultural stasis in its "closed country" Tokugawa phase. With astonishing rapidity and dexterity he "caught up" with the best philosophical trajectories of the West, particularly its leading edges of scientific and political modernity, and he forecasted their future potential for Japan. He thus wrote the basic script for Japan's progessive modernization in the last century and a half. The reverse side of this coin is that his philosophy also legislates a criterion for the critical rejection of the regressive deviations from the progress of civilized modernity witnessed in Japan's history and in that of all other nations in the last century and a half. His philosophical text has such a universal import that it can and should be imported to many parts of the world today. In its essential sanity it gives the lie to the advocates of medievalism and postmodernism alike in this, our own changing times.

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