

The Dialogue Between Robert C. Neville and Confucianism: Neville's Doctrine of Creation *ex nihilo* and the Transcendence-Immanence Debate

(An abstract)

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One of the main issues in Confucian-Christian dialogue is whether Heaven, or God, is “immanent transcendence” or “transcendent transcendence.” This paper aims to go behind the topic *via* Robert Cummings Neville's theology of creation *ex nihilo*. Neville named himself a Boston Confucian and is well known as a western scholar devoted to the construction of theology of religion especially with regards to Chinese tradition and religions.

This paper will delineate the process concept of God, and rephrase it in Confucian language to show the resemblance of the two. Then, by introducing Neville's idea of “interpretant” and “creation *ex nihilo*,” the writer demonstrates how Neville revises the idea of God in process thought by strengthening the “transcendent” pole to prevent the God of creation from becoming one among his own creation. To explain the idea of “interpretant,” which comprises four dimensions for the comprehension of reality, the writer dialogues with Neville in the discussion of *you-wu* (there being or non-being) philosophy of Taoism, as well as the *tai-ji* and *wu-ji* (great ultimate and ultimate of non-being) concept in *Chi-Hsi*'s philosophy for elaboration and

comparison.

It may be argued that although the theory of *you-wu xiang-sheng* (the co-existence and co-evolution of being and not being) can be established from a phenomenal and noumenal perspective, the idea of *you-sheng-yu-wu* (being comes from non-being) should not be ignored. The writer shows how Neville demonstrates that *wu* comes before and is the foundation of *you*; thus, likewise, *wu-ji* is the foundation of *tai-ji*. God, in this case, co-exists with the creation and is the foundation of all creations. Thus, a doctrine of God's transcendence does not necessarily exclude his immanence.