Polishing the Chinese Mirror:
Essays in Honor of Henry Rosemont, Jr.
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Polishing the Chinese Mirror:
Essays in Honor of Henry Rosemont, Jr.

Edited by

Marthe Chandler & Ronnie Littlejohn

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Introduction

Marthe Chandler

When the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy met in Asilomar, California in 2003 the society wanted to honor its founders, many of whom, including Eliot Deutsch and Henry Rosemont, attended the meeting. At a panel organized around Rosemont’s work, the participants and audience were struck by the number of people who had been inspired by Henry Rosemont, the depth of their affection and respect for him, and the range of their interests. In conversations following the panel, Ronnie Littlejohn, Peimin Ni and Marthe Chandler decided that the essays presented at the panel would be the core of a collection honoring Henry Rosemont by responding to his work. This volume is the result of that decision. Although the essays take up a wide variety of topics and often present conflicting views, taken together they reflect great admiration and gratitude for Rosemont’s work and life.

The essays in this collection take up three major themes in Rosemont’s writings: his work in Chinese linguistics, his contribution to the theory of human rights, and his interest in East Asian religion. But there is another aspect of Rosemont’s contributions to scholarship that is hardly touched on in these essays: his political activism in progressive politics. He was active in civil rights and anti-war dissent in the 1960s. In 1971, he was elected to the Board of Resist, a foundation funding activist organizations for social change. Since that time, his desire to influence social change has not abated. He has published political articles in the Resist Newsletter, In These Times, The Raven: Anarchist Quarterly, Z Magazine, and Social Anarchism.

Rosemont claims to have learned his progressive politics, identification with the working class, and love of jazz at home. When he started public school, however, things changed. Rosemont writes

The world was turned upside down. Most of my heroes—Big Bill Haywood, Joe Hill, Kropotkin, Malatesta—were seen as villains, and my
As a young Marine in Korea, Rosemont learned that “war is insane” and “East Asian cultures were ancient, mysterious, and beautiful in their own right, and fascinating because they obliged others to confront their own culture(s) in a very different way” (1993, 130). Thus from this beginning, Rosemont saw East Asia as an alternative to the West. In the book from which our title is drawn, *A Chinese Mirror: Moral Reflections on Political Economy and Society*, he explains that understanding Chinese traditions has far reaching implications for the American culture in which he was raised and where he lives:

> The more openly and deeply we look through a window into another culture the more it becomes a mirror of our own, and my reflections of and on China are given here in the hope that the American Dream will one day be replaced by a more universal dream, one that can be shared by all peoples, holding their humanity in common. (1991b, 7)

After earning a Ph.D. in 1967 at the University of Washington, Rosemont spent two years working with Noam Chomsky at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. At MIT, Rosemont says “I learned much, doing linguistic theory from nine to five, and politics from six until midnight” (1993, 131).

The notion of linguistics in the morning and politics at night recalls the young Marx’s dream of being able “. . . to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner” (Marx, 160). Nevertheless it is possible to read Chomsky’s theoretical, philosophical work and be completely unaware of his deep political commitment to progressive politics.¹ This is not the case with Rosemont whose academic writings almost always refer to his political concerns: the increasing gap between the world’s rich and poor, the power and destructiveness of transnational capitalism, the ability of corporations to destroy communities, the plight of Chinese workers and peasants, the history of American intervention abroad that invariably makes people worse off than they were before, and the injustice of treating health care, education, employment and a clean and safe environment not as rights, as they are described by the United Na-

¹ I should know. I did.
tions Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, but only as “aspirations” or “ambitions” (Rosemont, 1998a).

The impact of Chomsky’s rigor, his linguistic theory, and his political activism are apparent in every aspect of Rosemont’s work. In linguistics, for example, classical Chinese is frequently proposed as a counter-example to Chomsky’s innateness hypothesis. However, in his ground breaking article “On Representing Abstractions in Archaic Chinese,” Rosemont argues that classical Chinese was probably never a spoken, natural, language (1974, 407). Thus he was able to show that since classical Chinese was not a natural language in the relevant sense, it was not a counter-example to Chomsky’s theory (1974, 1978).

Rosemont’s understanding of classical Chinese language had implications far beyond debates in philosophical linguistics. In his essay “Kierkegaard and Confucius: On Finding the Way,” Rosemont describes the impossibility of translating Western moral vocabulary into classical Chinese. Rejecting the strategy of accepting the closest analogue for “moral” in Chinese and going on from there, Rosemont notes that not only is there no lexical item (character) corresponding to “moral,” in classical Chinese, there are none for “freedom,” “choice,” “objective,” “duty,” “rights,” “dilemma,” “individualism,” “autonomy,” or “ought” (1986, 206). In “Kierkegaard and Confucius” he outlined the differences between the Western moral vocabulary and the classical Chinese concept-cluster containing terms like shi 士 (scholar or knight), junzi 君子 (gentlemen or ruler), shengren 聖人 (sage or saint), li 禮 (rituals, propriety) and dao 道 (Way) – a list that can be supplemented with ren 仁 (human-kindness, benevolence, goodness), yi 義 (reverence, justice, rightness), shu 恕 (reciprocity), xiao 孝 (filial piety), xin 心 (heart-mind), zhi 知 (realize, knowledge, know), de 德 (power, virtue, inner strength) and xin 信 (trustworthy, sincerity, faithful, authenticity). Another philosopher might argue that this demonstrates the truth of moral relativism, or conclude that classical Chinese thinkers have nothing to say about ethical evaluations, but Rosemont consistently rejects relativism (1988a) and has the deepest respect for Confucian ethical thought.

In a number of articles Rosemont argues that the Western and Confucian vocabularies reflect radically different metaphysical assumptions about human nature and support distinct conceptions of human rights. Thus, translating ethical discourse from classical Chinese into contemporary English leads Rosemont to a discussion of human rights – one of the most significant issues in modern moral and political philosophy.

Rights are often divided into first generation civil and political rights, described in the U.S. Constitution; second generation economic and
social rights to things like education, health care and employment; and third generation community rights, such as the rights of indigenous people living in nation-states (Rosemont 1998a, 1). Rosemont argues that first generation rights are derived from the assumption that human beings are autonomous, free, and essentially isolated individuals. Second generation rights, on the other hand, can grow naturally from the Confucian view that people are fundamentally social, defined by their roles as parents, children, rulers, subjects, friends, and their relationships to other people. First generation rights are often described as negative rights, rights to be left alone. I can usually respect your first generation rights simply by ignoring you. Second generation rights, on the other hand, are active: someone must pay for my health care and education. If there is any conflict between first and second generation rights, modern Western liberal theory assumes that first generation rights are more fundamental than second generation rights, although it is often argued that second generation rights can most easily be obtained after a society has achieved first generation rights. Rosemont disagrees. Indeed, he wants to shift the ground from rights discussion entirely.

Rosemont’s critique of the liberal theory of human rights is intimately connected with his critique of global capitalism. Although Rosemont does not want to eliminate first generation rights, he believes that these rights have been increasingly construed by “perceptive servants of corporate power” (1998a, 4) in a way that seriously undercuts claims to second generation rights. The sort of reasoning which concerns Rosemont was demonstrated when British Petroleum, a transnational oil company, closed a plant in Lima, Ohio, devastating the local community. The plant was not losing money; indeed it was profitable, but not profitable enough. A corporate executive justified the move because BP’s “first responsibility was to our stockholders” (1998a, 3). BP was exercising its first generation right to do whatever it wished with what it owned. In an even more compelling example of the danger inherent in an extreme interpretation of the first generation right to individual “freedom,” Rosemont quotes the President of a conservative think tank, who claimed that the most fundamental human right is “the right to own and control what is yours” and hence as more important even than the right to vote (1998a, 4).

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2 He has suggested that we “do away with rights language” but only to find a way to better articulate our moral intuitions (2000, 126).

3 The “right to vote” however is not one of the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution, although it is part of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The founders of American thought from Thomas Jefferson to Oliver Wendell Holmes were as suspicious of corporate greed as Rosemont is.
Rosemont’s critique of contemporary interpretations of first generation rights is made in the context of his progressive attacks on the interventionist aspects of American foreign policy and on the purported Chinese “economic miracle” (1991b, 1995). Rosemont’s brilliant, perceptive, and unabashedly partisan reflection on contemporary Chinese society, politics and economics, *The Chinese Mirror*, was written shortly after June 4, 1989 when the demonstrations for democracy in Tiananmen Square were crushed by government tanks. Rosemont was in Beijing on June 4 and interpreted the events as a dramatic demonstration of what everyone—students, workers, party bureaucrats knew—that the economic reforms of the 1980s were not working and that there had to be changes. There was, however, no agreement about what those changes should be (1991b, 14 ff.).

On Rosemont’s analysis, China is facing the consequences of two pernicious ideologies. First there is the hard-line socialists’ claim that political freedom, including the active participation of citizens in decisions affecting their lives, is a luxury a poor country like China cannot afford. In addition, perhaps more importantly for Americans, a capitalist ideology is emerging in China. Influenced by the belief that the “freedom” of rights-bearing individuals means doing what one pleases, this ideology seems to lead to a disregard for the consequences in terms of social and environmental destruction (1991b, 98-99).

In order to even know what to hope for China everyone who wishes humanity well must find a conception of a good life that, among other things, is not defined by the American dream of two cars for every family. The American standard of living is not possible for all the peoples of the world, and indeed may not be possible for us in the very near future. Rosemont’s hopes for China, and indeed all the people of the world, include not merely relieving the economic miseries of the poor, but developing a conception of life that embraces the qualitative goods of life and instantiates the second generation rights to security, health care and education (1991b, 98).

In line with his suspicion of the dangers in a strong central government, Rosemont hopes that China will be able to develop democracy from the ground up by giving local governments increasing political autonomy. He admits this might result in a return to warlordism, but still believes it “would very probably result in less misery for the Chinese peoples than they currently endure, and will continue to endure in the future” (1991b, 99).

He concludes *A Chinese Mirror*

If these reflections from a Chinese mirror are not badly distorted, they suggest that the Chinese people should no longer have, and do not
need, a strong, monolithic Communist Party and central government. And they suggest as well that the Chinese people should not have, and do not need, Western industrial capitalism either. Neither does anyone else. (1991b, 100)

In Rosemont’s view the focus on first generation rights and the attendant rise of global capitalism has caused more evil than simply a distribution of the world’s resources that enriches a small minority of the world’s peoples at the cost of impoverishing the majority. Wealthy as we are with respect to most of the world, many autonomous rights-bearing American individualists are gazing into an “ethical, psychological, social, and spiritual void” (1986, 208). Rosemont describes Westerners as leading meaningless lives working at “jobs we do not like or find satisfying in order to buy things we do not need and that do not satisfy us either, all the while destroying the social and natural environments in which we live” (2001, 10).

Rosemont’s interest in religious experience and claims, and his philosophical reflection on religious traditions grows out of an attempt to find a meaningful conception of life and what it means to be a human being. Although he considers most of the ontological and metaphysical claims of the world’s religions too fantastic for a rational person to believe (2001, 10-11), Rosemont writes that “in many basic respects all sacred texts are saying the same things, and contain the same truths we can all come to believe without in any way surrendering our rationality” (2001, 11).

What sort of truths are these? Rosemont thinks it is clear that the Confucian texts, with their refusal to discuss any sort of transcendent ontology and their emphasis on our ethical obligations to make life better for people here and how, express something closer to what may be called a religious truth than a scientific one. Rosemont suggests (2001) that the world’s religions, and even classical Confucianism, describe a variety of “spiritual paths” (2001, 25-30). He recommends reading sacred texts because they “go against the grain” of the contemporary self-centered materialism of capitalist ideology. Given the dominance of this ideology, Rosemont is skeptical that a purely secular alternative will have much hope of success. Indeed, he believes we must “look, at least in part, to the traditions of the sacred, East and West, for the revisioning and renewal of our lives” (2001, 58). In Rationality and Religious Experience, Rosemont suggests that by emphasizing a transcendent realm Western religion may have made us

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4 If I were writing about another philosopher I would describe these as his spiritual concerns and his interest as one in the philosophy of religion. I do not think however that Rosemont would appreciate either the “new age” implications of the first description, nor the systematic ones of the second.
not only unable to understand and appreciate other religious traditions, but also to lose much that is important in our own tradition (2001, 58). He suggests that Chinese sages and Confucian texts can show us “how to more fully dwell in the secular to make it sacred” (2001, 58).

In all of his writings Rosemont clearly believes that understanding the Confucian Dao and achieving the second generation rights it supports offers more hope for global peace and justice in the twenty-first century than current American ideology has provided for the twentieth. The essays in this collection investigate various ways Rosemont’s views may be worked out. The articles fall naturally into three groups. The first two, by Noam Chomsky and Roger Ames, provide a general view of Rosemont’s career and influence. The second set of essays focuses on his critique of the liberal theory of human rights. The essays in the final part of this collection respond to the metaphysical, cosmological and religious aspects of Rosemont’s Confucian alternative.

Part I

After Noam Chomsky’s brief and moving personal reminiscence of Rosemont, Roger Ames’ essay presents an overview of Rosemont’s career, beginning with his groundbreaking work in Chinese linguistics. Ames describes the significance of Rosemont’s original and enduring work on archaic Chinese, and explains how it became the foundation for their collaborative work in their translation of the Analects (1988). Ames then turns to Rosemont’s unlikely interest in Leibniz, a theme that will be taken up in a later essay by Dallmayr. Finally, Ames commends Rosemont’s “gregarious pluralism” (22) and locates him in the American tradition of Emerson, Thoreau, James and Dewey. Ames takes note both of Rosemont’s suspicions of all top down order “Stalinist, Papal, or Maoist, the hegemony of large capitalist corporations, or the arrogant unilateralism of our own federal government” (22) and his commitment to an analysis that considers “real people living real lives” (28).

Part II

Three of the essays in this section, those by Philip Ivanhoe, Sumner Twiss and Erin Cline, are relatively critical of Rosemont’s view of human rights. They argue in various ways that Rosemont’s critique of first generation
rights is misguided and suggest that an adequate moral theory would accommodate both the Confucian and Western visions.

Ivanhoe focuses on Rosemont’s Confucian conception of persons as essentially, or entirely, role bearing. He associates Rosemont’s view with Gilbert Ryle’s behaviorism and argues that behaviorism does not provide an adequate basis for moral theory. Ivanhoe holds Confucians describe the self in terms of a robust and complex inner as well as outer life, and thus that conceiving of Confucian ethics as a virtue ethics would be an improvement over Rosemont’s interpretation. Although Ivanhoe does not believe that even a Confucian Virtue Ethics would be a wholly adequate view, he acknowledges the value of Rosemont’s view because it reminds us how important attention to social roles is in making society more just, decent, and humane.

Sumner Twiss claims that Rosemont’s views on human rights evolved in three stages. He argues that Rosemont began by simply comparing Western and Confucian moral visions and practices. Later he sharpened the contrast between the Western and Confucian positions and recommended the development of an intercultural moral theory combining aspects of both philosophies. According to Twiss, in Rosemont’s third stage he rejected the Western liberal view entirely and proposed doing away with it in favor of a Confucian moral vision.\(^5\) Twiss believes this last move was a mistake and endorses what he describes as Rosemont’s second stage because it accommodates both the insights of Western theories of rights and the Confucian moral vision. Twiss notes that the original draft of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was deliberately crafted to include both first and second generation rights, and describes the effort of one of the men responsible for that draft to ensure that in the language of the document the word “conscience” was understood as a translation of the Chinese term “xin,” human heart mind.

Erin Cline claims that Rosemont has conflated the views of Kant, Mill and Rawls. She argues that Rawls, unlike Kant and Mill, does not have a metaphysical theory of what it is to be a person and concludes that Rawls is closer to the Confucian alternative than Rosemont realizes. Cline thinks there are important differences between Rawls’ view of citizens as free, equal, and politically autonomous, and Rosemont’s account of the Western liberal view, which sees persons as purely rational, self-seeking, morally autonomous individuals. She wants to highlight the space on a continuum

\(^5\) Twiss finds Rosemont presenting the first stage in (1976) and (1986); the second in (1991a); and the third in (1998b), (2000a) and (2004).
between the positions Rosemont attributes to the Confucian and Western liberal traditions, and believes Rosemont's work can help us appreciate the points of resonance between the Rawlsian and Confucian positions, as well as the differences between the views involved (87-88).

Herbert Fingarette's essay also appears to take an accommodationist position in which the doctrine of human rights does not threaten traditional non-Western cultures. Fingarette argues that “rights,” even in the context of slogan of the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity,” should be understood as a complex web of duties owed by members of a society to each other. He notes, however, that rights have always been limited by the traditional formula: “one has the right to liberty so long as one does not harm others” (121). Fingarette treats “harm” as anything that strikes at a society’s “fundamental moral values and economic institutions” (121). Thus he argues that the addition of a doctrine of human rights to a traditional Muslim society would not mean that women were morally justified in asserting “rights” to independence—driving cars, walking down the street unaccompanied. They would not be. Moreover, sons in traditional Confucian societies would be morally wrong to do more than “remonstrate” with their fathers in any conflict between them about the course of the son’s life. But things could change. If, for example, Muslim attitudes to women should become more like Western ones, lifting restrictions on women’s liberty would be not only justified but required. The extent of all our liberties depends on the deepest and most ubiquitous values and practices in the culture. Fingarette argues that if a culture is strong and vital, under the appropriate circumstances the integration of the Western rights doctrine need raise no profound problems.

In sympathetic extensions of Rosemont’s views Ewing Chinn and Peimin Ni both argue for a Confucian moral theory that accommodates many of the values of liberal democratic theory. Chinn claims that Rosemont is recommending an ethical theory based on a newly constructed concept-cluster “that can be applicable to, understood and appreciated by, all of the world’s peoples” because all reasonable people who constitute the vast majority of the world will accept it (69). Chinn believes that such a theory is compatible with the sort of relativism which does not claim that every belief is as good as every other belief, but only that a moral theory is not true because it corresponds to “the way the world is.” Chinn argues that although first generation rights are consistent with a denial of second generation rights, the denial of first generation rights is inconsistent with second generation rights. He concludes that there is no doubt that freedom is a high value in a Confucian society, and that such freedom is not possible unless
we nurture the attitude of “[establishing] others in seeking to establish themselves and [promoting] others in seeking to get there themselves” (74). Chinn associates this with the method of a person of ren (Analects, 6.30) but also with the method of democracy: the method of a free, self-governing society.

Peimin Ni describes the effort of a number of contemporary Chinese scholars to develop a Confucian moral theory consistent with the ideals of modern democracy, including a conception of political freedom allowing Confucians to criticize existing social values, something he notes Rosemont frequently does. He agrees with the position he ascribes to Rosemont that Confucianism and democracy are not compatible if we mean that Confucius believed that government should be made of liberal autonomous individuals. Although such a rights based democracy would destroy Confucian values, Ni thinks that a democracy defined in terms of a community of responsible citizens in which there is a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled is precisely what modern Confucian moral theory requires. Confucianism and this kind of democracy are like water and fish. Fish cannot survive without water, and water cannot become a meaningful habitat for fish without fish in it.

Using her conception of “specious dichotomies” Mary Bockover provides a Confucian theory of rights that purports to resolve the conflict between first and second generation rights. Bockover offers a Confucian adaptation of having a right that avoids the conflict between first and second generation rights. She rejects the traditional Western idea that we are exclusively autonomous individuals, as well as the traditional Confucian idea that persons are exclusively relational. In contrast to Fingarette, Bockover’s analysis shows that hierarchical relationships based solely on differences of gender are arbitrary and should be eliminated. She calls for a reconciliation of individual rights and social justice and argues that a properly understood Confucian human rights theory would support gay rights and the goals of contemporary feminism.

Like Henry Rosemont, Tu Weiming is a deeply committed Confucian. His essay situates his New Confucian humanism within the context of contemporary philosophers Richard Rorty, Hans-Georg Moeller, and Niklas Luhmann. Tu argues that the importance of self-cultivation in Confucian social ethics undercuts Rorty’s claim that self-realization and social service are incompatible (149-50). He contrasts the wishful thinking of champions of a “global village” in which cultures are homogenized into a mutually beneficially community with a view of globalization that imagines it as characterized by differences that have been harmonized rather than obliterate-
Tu argues that Confucian humanism is a conceptual resource that offers a way of thinking about this unprecedented situation. In Confucianism, Tu thinks we are entrusted, individually and communally, with the duty to realize, through self-cultivation, both our aesthetic ability to appreciate the wonderful presentation of Heaven’s resourcefulness and our moral power to actively continue Heaven’s great work. He holds that while Confucian discourse regards humans as preeminent, it does not view the cosmos exclusively from the human point of view, nor does it attribute human characteristics or behavior to nonhuman things. According to Tu, Confucian humanism further claims that, as an ultimate concern, the human heart-and-mind can, through self-cultivation, acquire an experiential understanding of the Way of Heaven.

Part III

The final section of the collection begins with Fred Dallmayr’s essay which returns to a theme introduced by Roger Ames: Rosemont’s unlikely affinity for the Enlightenment philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Dallmayr argues that Rosemont, like Leibniz, is a peacemaker, whose writings are connected to the political events of his time. Leibniz and Rosemont both lived in an age in which a universalizing impulse threatened the values of humanism. In the seventeenth century universalism meant spreading the “good news” of the Gospel. In our own time the universalizing project involves a “new world order” dominated by the market, the Internet and consumerism. Dallmayr argues that Leibniz and Rosemont are allies in defending humanism, or classical Confucian, as a vision of how various traditions can learn from each other how to live more humane and fulfilling aesthetic, moral, social, political and religious lives.

Bao Zhiming’s essay is the most narrowly focused one in the collection. Zhiming’s analysis presents technical linguistic evidence for Ames and Rosemont’s philosophical thesis about classical Chinese. Bao shows how the process of world formation in classical Chinese reflected a metaphysical predisposition to view the world as dynamic and relational, rather than static and eternal – humanistic and particular, not universalizing.

Ronnie Littlejohn, Harold Roth and Jeffrey Dippman use Daoist metaphysics and cosmology to support Rosemont’s Confucian vision. Littlejohn’s essay begins by noting that in the Abrahamic tradition the language of religious experience typically refers to supernatural entities in a non-natural, transcendent realm. Because Rosemont rejects any sort of
metaphysical dualism he seems forced to remain agnostic about the reference of \textit{tian} in classical Confucian texts. Littlejohn holds, however, that Confucius’ religious experiences require us to make some sense out of his spiritual life. Littlejohn claims that in five phase cosmology religious terms such as \textit{shen}, \textit{shengren} and \textit{tian} should not be understood as referring to phenomena existing in a transcendent ontological realm. Religious uses of these terms can be understood as referring to things in different phases. He argues that classical Chinese cosmology provides a resource from which to make a more consistent interpretation of Confucius’ path of spiritual progress than either Rosemont’s agnosticism or Judeo-Christian dualism.

David Jones suggests several pathways through the intersubjectivity found in continental philosophy, the turn of contemporary science toward complexity, and a homecoming of the lost emergent religious sensibilities of human nature as ways of extending Henry Rosemont’s insightful contributions in making our world a more just and religious place. Jones holds that while Rosemont initially seems to use only linguistic concepts in his conceptual clarifications, psychological and phenomenological analysis is vital to Rosemont’s search for political and social justice. Jones describes a number of ways in which continental philosophy, contemporary science and “a homecoming of the lost emergent religious sensibilities” (212) can be used to extend work to make the world a more just, humane and spiritual place.

Harold Roth finds resources in religious Daoism, particularly the \textit{Huainanzi}, for dealing with the political themes that concern Rosemont. Roth’s detailed analysis of the Daoist cosmology in the \textit{Huainanzi} explains how human nature and social order can be harmonized by self-cultivation providing a way to think about the political organizations that can organize and direct a harmonious society.

Rosemont’s writings frequently refer to contemporary political and socio-economic contexts. In an analogous way Jeffrey Dippmann’s essay begins by recounting a series of incidents of gross incivility taken from recent headlines. Dippmann endorses Rosemont’s view that Confucian emphasis on formal politeness would provide a remedy for the overindulgent, rampant individualism of contemporary life. Moreover Dippmann continues the theme of the previous essays by suggesting that the Daoist tradition has much to offer Rosemont’s Confucianism, particularly in terms of the civility and respect we owe animals and the natural environment.

William LaFleur’s essay also centers on a contemporary moral problem involving a Japanese woman whose husband had been promised a badly needed heart transplant when one became available on the American West Coast. While the couple waited for the transplant they became in-
creasingly disturbed by the thought that they were wishing for the death of an unknown stranger and ultimately they refused a transplant. Arguing that most Americans would initially fail to understand the ethical perspective involved, LaFleur extends Rosemont’s sensitivity to the dangers of globalizing Western morality by making the Japanese couples’ views plausible, if not acceptable, to an American audience.

In their essay Michael Nylan and Harrison Huang return to the classical Confucian ethical vision and provide a careful and detailed analysis of the central role of pleasure and desire in Mencius’ writings. They show how Mencius’ arguments and rhetorical devices—parables, odes and flattery—take advantages of listeners’ desires. They thereby encourage them to reinterpret themselves as beings capable of becoming sage kings who self-consciously pursue personal integrity and have compassion for others. Nylan and Huang associate this ideal with the goal of Confucianism.

Eric Hutton’s essay explores Rosemont’s view that the ancient Confucian text *Xunzi* contains a social ideal that is un-democratic yet can withstand tough criticisms from one of the foremost proponents of democracy in the twentieth century, Sir Karl Popper. Hutton compares Plato’s metaphysical conception of the Form of the Good with Xunzi’s view of the Confucian *Dao* and argues that Xunzi’s views, unlike Plato’s, made him aware that the common people had to be protected from bad rulers. Plato, Xunzi and Popper were all concerned with how much ignorance is tolerable in government, and Hutton ends his essay noting that American democracy has yet to resolve precisely this question.

The final essay in the collection returns to some familiar themes. David Wong argues that we can understand a Confucian self that is wholly constituted by its relations and yet is also autonomous. His argument involves comparing the notion of the virtues in Western and Confucian ethical theory. In Confucian cultures virtues are thought of as context specific traits. One is more likely to be generous to one’s family, but not to an enemy on the battlefield. Moreover one’s response to a stranger in trouble seems to depend on whether one is late for an appointment with an important authority figure. Wong argues however that moral exemplars, *junzi*, have learned to stand apart from circumstances and behave virtuously in every situation. This Confucian autonomy is clearly not the metaphysical autonomy of the western individual who can make free–unconditioned–choices under any circumstances. Confucian autonomy, the autonomy of the truly moral agent is an achievement, not a metaphysical given. Wong describes how Mengzi and Kongzi help their students achieve moral autonomy. At first they give advice that is specific to the student’s character and
situation until students learn to respond “as my teacher would.” An ideal student will become an equal, one with whom a Confucian teacher can have a relationship of mutual trust and confidence because the student and teacher can rely on each other to do the appropriate thing and respond in the appropriate way. According to Wong, Confucians prize equality not because it is having as much as others or having the same status as they do, but because of the nature of the social relationship it makes possible with them.

REFERENCES


PART I
Reminiscence

Noam Chomsky

I have to apologize – to Hank, to the readers and editors – because I simply cannot find the moments to write something appropriate for this very welcome publication.

Hank and I met in the 1960s, through common interests in both professional and political lives. At MIT, we were delighted that he could join our department several times as a visitor and participant in seminars and research – and even teaching, which I do not think he expected. The only time I have missed several classes was in 1970, when I went to Laos and Vietnam for two weeks. Hank was my first choice to take the classes over, as he did, and not to my surprise, it went extremely well. Over the years, with both of us living very intense lives, opportunities to meet were far too few, but we have managed to keep in regular contact on shared interests ranging from philosophy and linguistics, to human rights and resistance to state crimes. For me, our friendship, interchanges, and common work have been a rare and treasured experience, not to speak of his very illuminating work which I have constantly read with much profit and appreciation.

I had never read the Analects until Hank sent me his translation and commentary, and I was captivated. One phrase has always stayed prominently in my mind. The description of the exemplary person as “the one who keeps trying although he knows that it is in vain.” Hank is one of those who have shown that when the assessment is too grim: it may be hard, but it is not in vain.
In this essay, I want to argue that Henry Rosemont is a philosopher of his times. The philosophical sensibilities he appeals to in his interpretation of the Chinese tradition, once contextualized, are much larger than simply a fair account of what until only recently, has been a remote and curious culture. Like the hero of that other story, there is a single thread on which the many parts of Rosemont’s intuitions are strung, and it is that thread that has led him to the Chinese tradition as a way of expressing his own best philosophical allegiances.

Let me try to find one end of the Rosemont skein by returning to my earliest encounter with his work. As a graduate student, I first met Henry Rosemont (as I did David Hall) in the pages of the comparative philosophy journal, *Philosophy East and West*. Fresh from his post-doctoral work with Noam Chomsky at MIT, Rosemont wrote an article entitled, “On Representing Abstractions in Archaic Chinese” that in its arguments was so original and has been so enduring as to have served a generation later as the foundation for the “Introduction” and “Appendix” to our collaborative translation of the *Analects of Confucius*.

Perhaps the most radical argument in this article is Rosemont’s “uniqueness thesis,” a considered challenge to the commonplace that most linguists in the study of language focus on speech almost to the exclusion of its written forms. This thesis states that “literary Chinese is unique, being sharply distinct not only from all non-Sinitic languages but from spoken Chinese as well, and that the differences between the two Chinese languages are of greater linguistic and philosophical significance than their similarities” (Rosemont 1974, 75). Far from the written form being derivative of and accidental to the spoken language, the written and spoken forms of the Chinese language (until this last century) are importantly different in their semantic, syntactic, and phonological constraints, and both must be
taken into account in philosophical speculations about the nature of Chinese thinking.

A second important insight in this article, inspired in part by the work of David Keightley on Shang dynasty oracle bones, is that “early writing was intimately bound up with ritual religious practices,” and hence that “the development of the written forms must have been under the direct and powerful influence of extra-linguistic factors, especially the religious and other beliefs of the early Chinese people” (Rosemont 1974, 75). To understand the language we needs must appeal to the wholeness of the culture.

A third contribution of this Rosemont piece is a challenge to the widely assumed exclusivity of the semantic and phonetic components in the pictographs and ideographs that make up the majority of the archaic characters, reinstating the visual and semantic features of the written language as a counterbalance to phonetic and syntactic considerations. The argument is not that the “ideographs” somehow represent meaning independent of speech, but rather that historically the visual form of the character as these graphs emerged in their earliest inception were deliberate and innovative in an attempt to in some way capture and reveal what is meant by the spoken word.

And finally, Rosemont argues for the priority of context and semantic information over syntax and phonetics in the decoding of classical Chinese texts. In Chinese education, the more formal features of the language have traditionally been learned from the rote memorization of specific canonical texts that provide intellectuals a shared reservoir of contextualized usages from which they can draw analogies in their own creative expression. Rosemont’s insight here is that the Chinese worldview, whether words or persons, begins from ontological parity and the uniqueness of the particular.

In all of these insights into the nature of the early Chinese language and philosophy, the thread of Rosemont’s arguments is that broadly speaking “the Chinese concern was not so much with ontology or epistemology as it was with the relations among and between things, events, and qualities” (Rosemont 1974, 88). Said another way, order in a Chinese world is best understood by the art of correlating and contextualizing within the eventfulness of the human experience. Culture is the production of meaning through the efficacious coordination of the phonetic and the semantic, the semantic and the syntactic, the visual and the oral, the ritual and the literal, the particular and the contextual, and most importantly, the formal and the informal (or the determinate and the indeterminate).
This correlative “yinyang 陰陽” sensibility is a pervasive feature in the various dimensions and layers of Chinese culture. If we reflect on medicine for example, gan 肝 does not identify just the organ, the liver, but the various functions associated with it. There is priority of process and change to formation—in this case, physiology to anatomy—that is captured in the correlative notion of “reforming and functioning (tiyong 體用)” as a persistent assumption about the emergence of order in the tradition. The emphasis in this tradition is on the resonance among interdependent phases of an ongoing process and the intrinsic and constitutive nature of relations. Persons, for example, do not “interact” in their communities, but are embedded in their shared relationships, and grow and become distinguished through effective associated living. The liver does not interact with other organs, but becomes efficient by optimizing the relationships that locate it within the organic system.

Joseph Needham too has characterized this Chinese modality of thinking in the following terms:

A number of modern students . . . have named the kind of thinking . . . "coordinative thinking" or “associative thinking.” This intuitive-associative system has its own causality and its own logic. It is not either superstition or primitive superstition, but a characteristic thought-form of its own. . . . In coordinative thinking, conceptions are not subsumed under one another, but placed side by side in a pattern, and things influence one another not by acts of mechanical causation, but by a kind of “inductance.” The key-word in Chinese thought is Order and above all Pattern (and, if I may whisper it for the first time, Organism). (Needham, 280-81)

I want to suggest that to understand the philosopher Rosemont, even more important than his sinological credentials and contributions which are indeed considerable, are the reasons why his best philosophical instincts led him to the gates of China in the first place. The Confucian sense of community begins from the uniqueness of each particular person constituted by familial relations, and the responsibility of that person to achieve virtuosity within those roles and relationships.

But this same sense of community is not unknown in the American experience, and it is the unachieved promise of indigenous American philosophy that has brought Rosemont to China. Rosemont begins and is at heart an Emersonian American—the non-conformist, antinomian, and passionately particularistic conscience of an age in which our own ethnocentric philosophical tradition is being challenged and slowly reconstructed by appeal to history and culture. Rosemont not only believes but lives unre-
lentingly according to a pluralist creed: that is, the real American soul is composite and alloyed, and its tenacity increases as it is forged out of a manifold of cultural differences, differences that emerge both at home and in our encounter with other traditions.

Rosemont’s gregarious pluralism combines non-conformism with a spontaneous and imaginative relation to community. His notion of non-conformism is not the kind that has been associated with social destabilization and the undermining of all order by the uncritical assumption that all forms of order must need be hegemonic. On the contrary, for Rosemont the emergent and dynamic order of the flourishing community finds its point of departure in the singularity and resolve of each individual. In Rosemont’s communitarianism, it is a spirit of innovation and adventure within the socio-cultural structure combined with a strong sense of accommodation that is the community’s source of growth and life. It was a century later and to Chesapeake Bay rather than Walden Pond that this Henry repaired to the woods to live deliberately.

At the heart of Rosemont’s philosophical life is a rejection of top-down wholesale, centralized strategies for achieving order—ethical, social, political, religious—whether such strategies be Stalinist, Papal, or Maoist, the hegemony of large capitalist corporations, or the arrogant unilateralism of our own federal government. Instead, Rosemont advocates a decentralized, participatory, and inclusive conception of order always made local by appeal to the indigenous impulse.

In fact, what has drawn Rosemont to the Confucian tradition, I suspect, is his recognition of a fundamental and pervasive precept that is the signature of Confucian practical philosophy: that is, Confucianism rejects coercion as a diminution of creative possibilities. Like Confucius himself in a very different place and time, the central thread that runs through Rosemont’s philosophical oeuvre has been “deference (shu)" and “doing one’s best (zhong).” And it has been deference to alternative cultural sensibilities and an attempt to make the world better by doing so that are fairly reflected in Rosemont’s attempt to understand China on China’s own terms. Only such an understanding of China can provide us most fully with those alternative resources for challenging and enriching our own culture.

In this cross-cultural adventure, a younger Rosemont was inspired by a kindred soul who shared some of his own aspirations. Rosemont became interested in the attempt of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a comparative philosopher in an earlier age, to make productive sense of China. Rosemont, (together with his collaborator, Daniel Cook) has been responsible for making Leibniz’s important writings on China available to contemporary schol-
arship (Cook and Rosemont, 75). Leibniz is seemingly unlikely company for Rosemont to keep, for after all, Leibniz was a universalist of the first order. Politically he was a federalist, religiously an ecumenicalist, and linguistically, he searched for a language that would unify the world. He saw parallels between the yin and yang lines of the Yi jing's hexagrams and the binary sensibilities that had led him to develop infinitesimal calculus. In the last year of Leibniz’s life (1716), perhaps anticipating a better place at the Lord’s table, he wrote the Natural Theology of the Chinese. He argues that Chinese civilization had early on been quite properly Christian, but that they had “strayed from the truth and even from their own antiquity” (75). In reflecting on the early Confucian doctrines that celebrate “Heaven (tian 天),” Leibniz concludes that the tradition “is pure Christianity, insofar as it renews the natural law inscribed in our hearts” (105). Unfortunately, according to Leibniz, intervening cultural distractions and Confucian hubris led modern China and its Mandarins into a kind of religious amnesia.

The universalistic and rationalistic impulses behind Leibniz’s contribution to the Western philosophical tradition have led some scholars to dismiss his interest in China as at best condescending, and at worst, a kind of cultural imperialism. In short, as the story goes, his motivation in turning to the East was simply corroboration, and thus his celebration of China amounts to nothing but an appeal to another high culture as a means of demonstrating the truth of European universal indices. But those who would rehearse such a story should know Leibniz better.

In the Preface to the Novissima Sinica written over the period 1697-99, an astute and penetrating Leibniz offers a synoptic comparison between the contributions of European and Chinese culture that would satisfy Rosemont and the most optimistic interpreters of this antique Chinese culture. Leibniz allows that in technologies, crafts, and artifacts, we Europeans stand on equal ground with the Chinese, with each people having “knowledge which it could with profit communicate to the other.” In theoretical disciplines such as mathematics, logic, metaphysics, and theology, however, there is clear European superiority. Indeed, we Europeans “excel by far in the understanding of concepts which are abstracted by the mind from the material.” We own the theoretical sciences and surpass the Chinese in those intellectual tools of the mind that lead to demonstrable truth, whilst they struggle with a kind of empirical geometry owned by most artisans.

1 Leibniz wrote this treatise in relatively bad French that, mon dieu, might have also distanced him from the God that in the salons of Paris is associated directly with this particular language.
As a reluctant aside, Leibniz offers a second area in which Europe overshadows the China of his day. For it is much to Europe’s shame that they have a decided advantage in the military arts. Leibniz allows that this particular superiority is not out of ignorance on the part of the Chinese, but rather a matter of deliberate choice, and it is to their credit, for as a people they properly “despise everything which creates or nourishes ferocity in men.”

In fact, the Chinese antipathy towards conflict and belligerence is not unrelated to what Leibniz perceives to be their greatest cultural achievement. On Leibniz’s reading, the Chinese excel in the not unimportant pursuit of civil life where Chinese “civilization” has set a standard far superior to that found in Europe. China’s ongoing achievements in practical philosophy—“the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and the use of mortals”—have enabled them to excel in the establishment and maintenance of social order at all of its different levels. Leibniz attributes this inspiring public virtue to the way in which *li*—the continuing process of personalizing ritualized roles and relationships—functions to produce the *ethos* in the human community.

Considering the relatively limited information on China available to Leibniz in his own historical moment, this philosopher, resisting his own formalist philosophical proclivities that would incline him steeply in the opposite direction, was indeed a surprisingly keen and honest observer of the human experience. In advancing his own generalizations about European and Chinese cultures, he saw a clear contrast between the value invested in those abstractive disciplines in the European academy that are in search of axiomatic-deductive demonstration, and the more aesthetic and pragmatic applications of the Chinese tradition—a distinction that broadly distinguishes science from the art of living. In fact, it was this fundamental sympathy and respect for Chinese culture that led Leibniz to defend the accommodationist side of Matteo Ricci in the Rites Controversy (Rosemont 1991, 70-71).

Unfortunately, this Leibnizean sense of a basic and pervasive contrast between European deductive rationalism and a Confucian bottom-up

2 The language that has emerged to identify China as a political entity in the contemporary world reveals precisely this cultural self-understanding: *zhonghua renmin gonghe guo* 中華人民共和國—literally, “a country in which a centered and flourishing human population share in harmony.”

3 Although Rosemont argues that Leibniz believed that “most Chinese views were fully compatible with European views,” I am not entirely persuaded that the terms of this compatibility were entirely free of a cultural reductionism.
aestheticism was lost on most of the heirs to the Industrial Revolution who saw their own Enlightenment rationality as the only game in town. Indeed, the European interpretation of the Confucian tradition has been much simplified by overwriting it with their own assumptions. For Hegel, as an example of this commitment to a theoretical-deductive understanding of ethics, the Chinese are not even immoral—they are amoral—because they do not personally affirm objective moral law:

Moral distinctions and requirements are expressed as Laws, but so that the subjective will is governed by these Laws as by an external force. Nothing subjective in the shape of disposition, Conscience, formal Freedom, is recognized. Justice is administered only on the basis of external morality, and Government exists only as the prerogative of compulsion . . . . Morality is in the East likewise a subject of positive legislation, and although moral prescriptions (the substance of their Ethics) may be perfect, what should be internal subjective sentiment is made a matter of external arrangement. . . . While we obey, because what we are required to do is confirmed by an internal sanction, there the Law is regarded as inherently and absolutely valid without a sense of the want of this subjective confirmation. (Hegel, 111-12)

The impact of this Hegelian picture of a top-down Oriental despotism in which all authority lies with the emperor has enormous play even today in the way in which we have come to understand Chinese history, politics, and its philosophies. But the assumptions about the nature of order that inspire this interpretation of a Chinese despotism are not just a matter of Hegel or modern philosophy, nor do they give rise to simply an interpretive problem that has led us to misconstrue the Chinese tradition. The issue runs much deeper. The Leibnizean valorization of the theoretical-deductive sciences as the hallmark of the European self-understanding perpetuates a fallacious way of thinking that has become increasingly apparent in the modern phase of the Western philosophical narrative—a way of thinking that Rosemont’s indigenous American sense of order rejects utterly.

In reflecting upon modern Western and ancient Chinese concep-
tions of persons in his evaluation of contemporary rights talk, Rosemont gives voice to what he takes to be the limitations of recommending an ab-
stractive, rationalistic model of order to alternative cultural traditions. He states:

In the first place, the view of human beings as autonomous, rational in-
dividuals would be seen by a great many of the world’s peoples as sim-
ply false. Utilizing an impoverished—and largely bureaucratic—
technical vocabulary emphasizing law, abstract logic, the formation of policy statements, and employing altogether implausible hypothetical
examples, contemporary rights-based moral and political philosophers, it would be argued, are no longer grounded in the real hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, ideas, and attitudes of flesh-and-blood human beings. Since the time of Descartes, Western philosophers have increasingly abstracted a purely cognizing activity away from concrete persons and determined that this use of logical reasoning in a disembodied “mind” is the choosing, autonomous essence of individuals, which is philosophically more foundational than are actual persons; the latter being only contingently who they are, and therefore of no great philosophical importance. (Rosemont 1991, 62-3)

William James, like Rosemont an heir to Emerson, expresses precisely this same concern about the consequences of investing so much in this rationalist approach to knowing our world:

The theorizing mind tends always to the over-simplification of its materials. This is the root of all that absolutism and one-sided dogmatism by which both philosophy and religion have been infested. (James, 222)

In fact, James sees a challenge to this kind of rationalism to be the nub of his own philosophical contribution:

It is . . . the reinstatement of the vague and inarticulate to its proper place in our mental life which I am so anxious to press on the attention. (165)

This uncritical commitment to a Leibnizian rationalism in its various forms is, in fact, one bit of faulty reasoning so persistently exercised by the philosophical elite that John Dewey, one of the few thinkers to consistently avoid this particular deformation professionelle, dubbed it “the philosophical fallacy.” Simply put, the philosophical fallacy is committed whenever the outcome of a process is presumed to be the antecedent of that process. Notable examples of this fallacy are the assumption that bare sense data are the beginning points of knowledge (rather than abstractions constructed from the wholeness of primitive feelings), or that the coherence and stability won from the control of the precarious aspects of existence are the ground rather than the outcome of human practices—as when the ordered cosmos is presumed the model for human personal and social order rather than the reverse.

A. N. Whitehead identifies the more pernicious forms of this fallacy with taking the formally abstracted to be concrete. In this guise, the philosophical fallacy is the fallacy of misplaced concreteness (Whitehead 1967 passim). Suffice to say that the philosophical fallacy exists anytime the terminus ad quem is placed before the terminus a quo.
In fact, we philosophers are urged by the responsibilities of our office to warn against all fallacious forms of reasoning. But like the preacher who, come Monday, commits the very sins he railed against the day before, we are ourselves rarely delivered from the idols of the mind. Sometimes the fallacy is overlooked by polite conspiracy—as when we allow the author of a book to call the last written pages the “Preface,” or when we give the name “Presocratic philosophers” to those who in some seemingly necessary way anticipated the questions that would preoccupy the agora’s barefoot philosopher. In such cases, the fallacy seems both innocent and harmless.

Moreover, given the extreme difficulty of avoiding this fallacious bit of reasoning, we may be justified in overlooking it, for, as James says: “We live forward but we think backward.” Jorge Luis Borges reinforces this wisdom when he remarks: “All life is anachronistic, and every man is born at the wrong time.”

Like almost every other issue, of course, philosophers are likely to disagree as to precisely when the conditions leading to the commission of the philosophical fallacy obtain. A strong ontological disposition, sustained by a distinction between the orders of knowing and of being, will suggest that it is always appropriate to place Being before the beings of the world through which it is made manifest. The teleologist might find in some “far off Divine event” the ground as well as the goal of understanding, or perhaps anticipate the perfectibility of the “ready-made” human being in the actualization of a given potential.

One of the more pernicious of the many instances of the philosophical fallacy involves the kind of anachronism that reads history narrowly backwards from a given theoretical construct, finding at the origins of an historical narrative what in fact is merely one of the reflective fruits of that narrative. Such are the prejudices of teleological historiographies: Marxist, Hegelian, Christian, and indeed Scientific. This is not only one of the more damaging forms taken by this fallacy, it is also one of the most difficult to avoid. After all, if one is to achieve any coherence in the construction of an historical narrative, one must appeal to some pattern of meanings, where natural necessity can elevate that putative pattern to be the object of systematic knowledge.

In any event, what Dewey long ago termed the philosophical fallacy has become the philosophical issue of our day, and it is to this problem that the work of Rosemont has consistently been addressed. An internal critique continues to be waged against the philosophical fallacy within professional Western philosophy under the many banners of hermeneutics, post-modernism, neo-pragmatism, neo-Marxism, deconstructionism, feminist
philosophy, and so on, that takes as a shared target what Robert Solomon has called “the transcendental pretense”—the philosophical fallacy expressed as idealism, objectivism, foundationalism, absolutism, the master narrative, the myth of the given. Dewey from early on saw as “the most pervasive fallacy of philosophical thinking” the error of ignoring the historical, developmental, and contextualizing aspects of experience. The methodological problem as he saw it is “the abstracting of some one element from the organism which gives it meaning, and setting it up as absolute” and then proceeding to revere this one element “as the cause and ground of all reality and knowledge” (Dewey 1961-1972, 1, 162).

What is at risk in perpetuating the philosophical fallacy? Only process itself—development, education, creativity, particularity, temporality, history—what Rosemont would call real people living real lives. Take the issue of human nature, an assumption fundamental to the rights talk in which Rosemont has been a prominent participant. Dewey in presenting his understanding of human nature uses John Stuart Mill’s individualism as his foil. He cites Mill at length, who claims that “all phenomena of society are phenomena of human nature;” that is, “human beings in society have no properties but those which are derived from and may be resolved into the laws of the nature of individual man.” While expressing appreciation for Mill’s motives in liberating the common man from a powerful landed aristocracy, Dewey is unwilling to embrace this notion of “ready-made” person that for him is another example of “the philosophical fallacy.”

In fact, Dewey wants to invert Mill’s assumptions about the relationship between the person and the society. For Dewey, discussion of the fixed structure of human nature independent of particular social conditions is a non-starter because it “does not explain in the least the differences that mark off one tribe, family, people, from another—which is to say that in and of itself it explains no state of society whatever” (Dewey 1993, 223). For Dewey, then:

. . . the alleged unchangeableness of human nature cannot be admitted. For while certain needs in human nature are constant, the consequences they produce (because of the existing state of culture—of science, morals, religion, art, industry, legal rules) react back into the original com-

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4 J. E. Tiles in his discussion of the philosophical fallacy cites Dewey: “Personality, selfhood, subjectivity are eventual functions that emerge with complexly organized interactions, organic and social. Personal individuality has its basis and conditions in simpler events” (Dewey 1981-1990, 1, 162). And from this Tiles infers that Dewey “will accuse those who assume individual human beings are constituted as conscious rational beings prior to, or independently of, their entering into social relations, of committing ‘the philosophic fallacy’” (Tiles, 21).
ponents of human nature to shape them into new forms. The total pattern is thereby modified. The futility of exclusive appeal to psychological factors both to explain what takes place and to form policies as to what should take place, would be evident to everybody—had it not proved to be a convenient device for “rationalizing” policies that are urged on other grounds by some group or faction. (223-4)

For Dewey and for Rosemont too, the human being is a social achievement, an adaptive success made possible through the applications of social intelligence. Given the reality of change, this success is always provisional, leaving us as incomplete creatures with the always new challenge of contingent circumstances. And yet this success is progressive and programmatic. “We use our past experiences to construct new and better ones in the future” (Dewey 1976-1993, 12, 134). The danger recognized by both Dewey and Rosemont is that the selection and privileging of one factor out of many to rationalize the human experience is usually not innocent. In fact, it is often a clear signal of some form of political or religious hegemony attempting to assert its superiority over other possible claims.

Where Leibniz had the acuity to recognize in China a radically different sense of order, Rosemont has spent his career both explaining this bottom-up, anarchic, and aesthetic sense of order and promoting it as a worthy alternative to rationalism in all of its various forms.

As a counterbalance to the notion of a “ready-made” person, for example, Rosemont argues for taking seriously an emergent model of becoming human. He appeals to the example of Chinese culture in which there has been a sustained appreciation of how it is that the informal mechanisms as well the more formal function together to produce human character. In the absence of an individual soul or essential nature, a human being in classical Confucianism is ultimately an aggregate of shared, usually familial experience. Ritual activity entails the symbiosis between formation and function (tiyong) that we have identified above as a pervasive feature of the Chinese qi 氣 cosmology. Li are both a formal and a personalized medium which insures that this cumulative experience is constantly refined and meaningful. Thus the always unique human being becomes an “enchanted” being—and the social relationships focused by that being are themselves processes of the continued enchantment of the world.

The eliding of law and li, rule and ritual, has been a sustained weakness in the otherwise often insightful interpretations of many distinguished sinologists, and is at bottom a failure to appreciate the extent to which informal social mechanisms such as “observing ritual propriety (li)” and the cultivation of a shame culture (chi 恥) are conduits through which
the community effects its own order. This is precisely what is at issue in *Analects* 2.3:

Lead the people with administrative injunctions (zheng 政) and keep them orderly with penal law (xing 刑), and they will avoid punishments but will be without a sense of shame. Lead them with excellence (de 德) and keep them orderly through observing ritual propriety (li 礼) and they will develop a sense of shame, and moreover, will order themselves.

This passage gives us an aspirational Confucian model of *ars contextualis*: the art of construing community non-coercively through full participation in ritually constituted roles and relationships.

To conclude, it is not the Chineseness of this emergent sense of order but this sense of order itself as advocated within the Confucian sensibility that has occasioned Rosemont’s allegiance, and has made him an original and powerful voice in advancing these same values for our own place and time. There is a wholly memorable phrase in Rosemont’s review of Herbert Fingarette’s *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. In commenting on the way in which this participation in communal life forms allows the people to shape their own world, Rosemont states:

> By focusing narrowly only on oppressive traditions, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that many more people have been oppressed by the formal instruments of political and economic power—bureaucracies, armies, large corporations—than have ever been oppressed by customs, rituals, and ceremonies. In this light, Confucius (Fingarette) appears to be neither culture-specific nor out of date: the decent and harmonious functioning of a society may indeed be too important a task to be entrusted to governments, and tradition may be a viable alternative. (Rosemont 1976, 476)

**REFERENCES**

5 Donald J. Munro (1985, 4-5) is an important example of someone who takes “sameness” as a fundamental Confucian value:

> But I would argue that in Confucianism the common traits of the sage-like types stand out as the ideal features for people to copy. . . . Difference is a fact of life to be coped with and changed if possible. The goals to prize are the common (not the unique) traits of the sages . . . .


The Shade of Confucius:  
Social Roles, Ethical Theory, and the Self

Philip J. Ivanhoe

Introduction

In his essay “Rights Bearing Individuals and Role-bearing Persons” (Bockover, 71–101), Henry Rosemont, Jr. argues against the adequacy of dominant strands of contemporary Western moral and political theory because they are committed to a certain view of “morality”—one that is based upon a conception of the self as a rational, free, and autonomous, agent of choice—or as he puts it as “rights-bearing individuals.” He contrasts contemporary Western moral theory and its corresponding view of the self with early Confucian ethical views and their relational conception of the self—what he calls “role-bearing persons”—and holds that the latter offers the hope of a superior ethical theory and a more plausible view of the self.

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1 Henry Rosemont, Jr. is one of a precious handful of philosophers who have opened up and defended the early Chinese tradition for both Western and East Asian readers throughout the latter years of the 20th century and into the opening years of the 21st. He has played a critical role supporting, encouraging, and inspiring generations of younger scholars—some of whom, like myself, are not so young anymore. Henry is a living treasure and I am most grateful to the great Dao for bringing forth and sustaining such a great man throughout these years. Semper fidelis!

2 Many thanks to Erin M. Cline, Eric L. Hutton, T. C. Kline, III, Justin Tiwald, and Christian Wenzel for very helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.

3 Rosemont’s attack is directed primarily against deontological and contractarian forms of morality. It is not clear how he views utilitarianism. However, the latter theory relies upon a view of the self that is in many ways more dramatically different from common sense. For a work that shows and defends the relationship between utilitarian views of the self and ethics, see Parfit, 1990. For criticisms of utilitarianism on the basis of its view of the self, see Bernard Williams’ essays “A Critique of Utilitarianism” (Smart and Williams, 77–150) and “Persons, Character and Morality” and “Utilitarianism and Moral Self-indulgence” (Williams 1981, 1–19, 40–53). See also John Rawls’ famous objection that “Utilitarianism does not take seriously the distinction between persons” (Rawls, 27).
At times Rosemont seems to argue against contemporary Western moral theory because it is not shared by a majority of people on the earth. However, he offers a more powerful and interesting objection when he develops his criticisms of its underlying conception of the self. If, as he argues, modern Western conceptions of morality rest upon implausible views of what human beings are and can be, this would present a strong challenge to the viability of such views, even on their own standards. I take this to be Rosemont’s primary philosophical objection to contemporary moral theory and construe the latter roughly as the union of different versions of deontology and contractarianism.

To some degree and in several respects I share his concerns, and he and I are not alone. A number of prominent Western ethicists have expressed similar criticisms of contemporary moral theories, particularly about the ways in which such theories generate “alienation” among their modern followers. The field of contemporary moral theory is much broader and richer than the many varieties of deontology and contractarianism. In addition to utilitarianism, the past forty years have witnessed a revival of different kinds of virtue ethics—inspired by both early Greek thinkers such as Aristotle and more modern British philosophers such as Hume. This movement continues to gather in strength and sophistication. There are also important thinkers who have developed theories such as “an ethics of care” (Noddings 2003) or “sensibility” theories (Slote 2000). All these views are very much in play among contemporary ethicists and several have much more in common with early Confucian ethics than the most influential forms of deontology or contractarianism. Advocates of these emerging alternative views have raised many of the same kinds of objections that Rosemont raises in regard to the dominant strains of contemporary Western moral theory.

Role-bearing persons

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4 See for example, Michael Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories” (Crisp and Slote, 66–78).
5 The revival of virtue ethics began with G. E. M. Anscombe’s 1958 article “Modern Moral Philosophy” (Crisp and Slote, 26–44). One of its most influential advocates has been Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre 1984). The movement is well represented by several recent anthologies (Crisp and Slote 1997, Crisp 1998, and Walker and Ivanhoe 2006).
6 See also Slote’s “Famine, Affluence, and Virtue” (Walker and Ivanhoe).
Having noted this happy news, I would like to turn to Rosemont’s arguments in favor of the ethical view advocated by early Confucians. He insists on referring to this alternative as “ethical” in order to distinguish it from the particular sense of “moral” that is distinctive of many contemporary Western moral theories. I will follow his nomenclature throughout my discussion and focus on two issues raised by his account. The first concerns the nature of the alternative he describes. To what extent and in what sense can the early Confucian view of role-bearing persons be understood as constituting or at least offering the resources for constructing a possible alternative ethical theory that is superior to the modern Western moral theories Rosemont criticizes? As noted above, he claims that one of the chief strengths of the role-bearing persons view is its more plausible account of the self, and this leads to the second issue I will explore. Is the role-bearing persons view of the self indeed more plausible than the one he criticizes and rejects? My goal is not to defend any particular modern Western moral theory but rather to offer an alternative reading of the early Confucian tradition as a form of virtue ethics.

Rosemont never claims that the role-bearing persons view offers a ready to hand alternative ethical theory nor does he directly defend the weaker claim that it offers sufficient resources to construct such a theory. He asks rhetorically,

Is it possible to have an ethical and/or political theory that did not employ the concepts of autonomous individual, or choice, or freedom, or rights, and did not invoke abstract principles? Could there be such a theory, grounded in a view of human nature as essentially involving interpersonal relations…? (Bockover, 92)

He replies to his own question by saying, “I do not know…” but his essay strongly implies that the role-bearing persons view can play an important role in the construction of such a theory. At the very least, he suggests that it will play the critical role of offering a superior view of the self and, as

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7 Rosemont treats the works associated with Kongzi, Mengzi, and Xunzi as representing “early Confucianism.” In my view, there are difficulties associated with treating all three of these texts as representing a single uniform ethical theory. For example, Xunzi makes no direct appeal to innate sensibilities as the ultimate ground for moral claims, while this is a central feature of Mengzi’s view. Kongzi seems closer to Xunzi in this regard, though the issue is controversial. I will though grant Rosemont his more homogenous view of early Confucianism. Indeed, my own defense of these texts as representing forms of virtue ethics sees them as belonging at least to the same family of moral theory.

8 A similar distinction is implied in Anscombe’s early essay, referred to in note five. It is developed at length by Bernard Williams (1985).
Rosemont argues, a plausible view of the self is essential to the construction of any adequate ethical theory. What might an alternative ethical theory that was based upon the notion of role-bearing persons look like?

There are places in his essay where Rosemont seems to say that early Confucianism offers a set of ideal roles, a set of various scripts for human life that offer one the way to the morally best life that one could lead. If people pick up and fulfill these roles, they and the society in which they live will realize the Way. They both will be not only good but as good as either can get.

All of the specific human relations of which we are a part, interacting with the dead as well as the living, will be mediated by the rituals of li, i.e., the courtesy, customs, and traditions we come to share as our inextricably linked histories unfold, and by fulfilling the obligations defined by these relationships we are, for the early Confucians, following the human Way. It is a comprehensive Way. Quickly sketched, by the manner in which we interact with others our lives will clearly have an ethical dimension infusing all, not just some, of our conduct. (Bockover, 91)

On pages 90-91 of his essay, Rosemont presents a lively and compelling description of how the roles one fulfills play a constitutive role in who one is and, by implication, the value of one’s life. His account offers a modern expression of the view found in passages such as Analects 12.11: “…Let the ruler be a ruler, the minister be a minister, the father be a father, the son be a son…” The idea is that if all fulfill their proper roles, each will have the best possible life and together such people will form the most satisfying and humane society possible. On such a view, the notion of role-bearing persons has fundamental explanatory power and in this sense it can serve as the basis for a distinctive type of ethical theory.9 The idea is that the roles themselves somehow make both people and societies good.

The notion of role-bearing persons must play such a critical part in defining what is good if it is to serve as the foundation for a distinctive type of ethical theory. If the roles of early Confucian ethics simply offer the means to some further good, they would not have fundamental explanatory power within the theory.10 For example, one might argue that these roles

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9 My notion of fundamental explanatory power is inspired by Gary Watson, who uses the notion of the virtues being “explanatorily primary” to describe what role they must play in a virtue ethical theory in order to establish it as a third alternative to utilitarianism and deontology. See his “On the Primacy of Character” (Flanagan and Rorty, 449–69).

10 Kwong-loi Shun (1993) advances a similar argument about the nature and status of the li asking whether we should interpret them in terms of what he calls the “definitionist view” or the “instrumental view.”
enable one and one’s society to attain the greatest happiness or that these roles are endowed by Heaven and fulfilling them is the true end of human beings. In the former case, social roles are part of a utilitarian moral theory, while in the latter they are part of a deontological moral theory. In neither case are they part of a new kind of ethical theory.\(^{11}\)

However, it is important to note and account for the fact that early Confucian texts distinguish between the ethically authentic and inauthentic fulfillment of roles. Simply occupying the throne does not make one a true king any more than merely fathering a child makes one a true father.\(^{12}\) The Analects and other early Confucian texts make this distinction in various ways, one way is by using the contrasting modifiers da “great” and xiao “small” or “petty” to distinguish between the authentic and inauthentic. For example, Analects 6.13 says, “Be a great scholar, not a petty scholar.” The same kind of contrast regularly is drawn regarding human beings in general, yielding the contrast between ethically “petty” and “great” people.\(^{13}\) Kongzi’s primary term for describing an ethically excellent human being, junzi “gentleman,” is particularly revealing. Here we see him using a term that earlier had described a particular role or social station to describe an ideal way of being. The junzi, like Aristotle’s phronimos, is an ethical ideal, something anyone can achieve and a way of being human that can be manifested in a wide range of social roles.\(^{14}\)

All of this shows that there is something more fundamental than social roles defining an ethical life. There are of course some roles that could never be part of an ethically good life—one could not follow the

\(^{11}\) One might argue that the roles of Confucian society offer one the normative guide only to a particular way of life. They would then be like the position assignments for a football team or the different musical assignments within a symphony orchestra. The claim then would be that these roles are constitutive of the good for football or for orchestral performances. However, without considerable augmentation such a view is not an alternative ethical theory. There would have to be something fundamentally good about football, symphony orchestras, and the Confucian Way in order to make them parts of an alternative ethical theory. If taken in this direction, the view Rosemont sketches is best understood as a form of virtue ethics.

\(^{12}\) Mengzi regularly uses the term wang in the sense of “true king.” For example, see Mengzi 1A7. He uses the term jun “lord” in a similar sense in Mengzi 1B:8 to refute the claim that it is permissible to kill one’s lord.

\(^{13}\) See for example, Analects 2.14, 4.11, 4.16.

\(^{14}\) Deplorably, given the patriarchal nature of Kongzi’s society, women were not thought capable of achieving the status of junzi. However, women were thought capable of cultivating and expressing a wide range of ethical and intellectual virtues (Raphals 1998). My comparison of the junzi to the phronimos should not be taken as the claim that these describe similar ideals, only that they are similar in describing ethically ideal ways of being.
Confucian Way while serving as a guard at Dachau. However, among the various possibilities that a normal social life offers, what matters is not so much the role that one plays but how one plays it. What makes one a good ruler, minister, father, mother, or child is not the role per se but the virtues one expresses through these various roles. Rulers, ministers, fathers, mothers, sons and others all are to be benevolent, trustworthy, courageous and the like. The way in which benevolence, courage, or some other particular virtue is manifested will often differ depending upon the role that a good person fulfills, but the various roles described by early Confucians all afford one the opportunity to develop and express a range of common virtues. It is this collection of virtuous dispositions or human excellences that constitutes what is good in each case and that have fundamental explanatory power within early Confucian ethics.

If the roles themselves played the critical part in Confucian ethical theory then Confucianism would prove to be of little value for contemporary ethical reflection. We do not want even really good kings to rule over us. And it would be unfortunate if being a good person required someone to be a good father or mother. As rewarding as these particular roles can be, for one reason or another many people never become parents. It would be unacceptable if an ethical theory were to insist that such people could not lead good human lives.

If social roles played the primary part in describing what is ethically good, it would also imply if not entail that there are distinct and fundamentally different goods associated with the various roles of Confucian society. And yet there is very strong evidence that the kind of character traits that make people good in one kind of role are quite similar to the traits that make a person good in another kind of role. For example, what makes a ruler good is what makes a parent good; in fact the latter is the paradigm for the former.

The view that I am describing does not deny that people who do not take up and fulfill certain roles cannot enjoy certain goods. It only insists that a good human life is defined in terms of a set of virtues rather than any particular set of social roles.

The picture of early Confucian virtue is more complex than what I have sketched here. For example, there is the virtue of filial piety. Filial piety is a distinctive virtue: roughly it is the appropriate response a child has in regard to its parents. At the same time, filial piety is thought to be both an expression of other virtues (such as benevolence) and the source of virtuous dispositions in general. Filial piety does seem tied to a specific role: the role of being the child of one's parents. However, in this case too, what makes filial piety excellent is that it brings together a distinctive set of virtuous dispositions. These are what make filial piety worthy of admiration and praise. One can express these dispositions toward those who are not one's biological parents and could even do so to a group of different people who were not one's kin. The traditional account holds that one should express filial piety toward good teachers as well as parents. While there is something like a "role" uniting these different
When we recognize that virtues and not roles are the foundation of early Confucian ethics, there is nothing preventing people who are not parents from being full participants in rich and rewarding ethical lives. For regardless of the roles one plays, one can always play them well. The virtue ethics interpretation also preserves the shared nature of those general qualities that make a life good. Rulers no less than parents need to be benevolent, courageous, worthy of trust, etc.

Interpreting early Confucian ethics as a form of virtue ethics should not lead us to ignore the extent to which early Confucians discuss the practice of virtues in terms of fulfilling one’s roles and carrying out specific social rituals. Nor should it lead us to fail to appreciate these aspects of their writings. Properly fulfilling one’s roles and carrying out the rites are important, for these activities call attention to the everyday practical nature of a good life. According to Confucians, one cannot hope to become a benevolent or courageous person apart from the practical demands of daily human life. And so how one fulfills one’s roles, whatever they may be, and how one carries out the particular social rituals that happen to be one’s responsibility, are extremely important concerns. This more specific and textured practical focus is characteristic of Confucian forms of virtue ethics. Its distinctive features include impressive theories of human nature, rich accounts of moral psychology, and an appreciation of the role that social practices and traditions play in our ethical lives.

I would now like to turn to the second concern mentioned earlier. Is the role-bearing persons or relational view of the self more plausible than the one that Rosemont criticizes and rejects? Early Confucians did indeed place great value on the importance of human relationships but they are not unique in this regard. Aristotle insisted that good “friendships” are among life’s most precious goods and that no human being could truly flourish without them—as a Cyclops manages to do. The analysis of philia occupies approximately one-fifth of the Nicomachean Ethics. However, there is little discussion of particular social roles. Aristotle developed his ethics around an ideal community of male aristocratic warriors—the only ones he

expressions of filial piety, it is quite general and clearly nothing like a script. It makes more sense to say that filial piety is a certain set of dispositions and that these are developed and find expression when one stands in certain relations to other people. This emphasis on the dispositions over particular behaviors is clear in Kongzi’s famous remark in Analects 2.7. Mengzi expresses the same general idea in Mengzi 4B:19. For my own analysis of traditional forms of filial piety and their importance for contemporary ethics, see my “Filial Piety as a Virtue” (Walker and Ivanhoe 2005).

The best source for Aristotle’s views is his Nicomachean Ethics. For a general introduction to notions of friendship in the Western tradition, see Pakaluk 1991 and Badhwar 1993.
thought capable of leading a life guided by rational activity—rather than, as early Confucians did, on the model of the family. This helps us to understand why a general conception of “friendship” plays a much more central role in Aristotle’s ethical scheme, while particular social roles play a far greater role for Confucians. Rosemont is right to emphasize the importance of social roles for the Confucian conception of ethics. It is a distinctive feature of their approach. However, according to Rosemont, early Confucians understood the self as wholly constituted by the constellation of roles that one occupies. In his own words,

It is in this epistemologically and ethically extended meaning of the term “roles” that the early Confucians would insist that I do not play or perform, but am and become the roles I live in consonance with others, so that when all the roles have been specified, and their interconnections made manifest, then I have been specified fully as a unique person, with few discernible loose threads with which to piece together a free, autonomous, choosing self. (Bockover, 91)

While it is true that the roles we fulfill help to shape the kind of person we become, Rosemont goes much further. At the very least, his position suggests that the core of the self evaporates up and condenses into the matrix of one’s social roles. At the extreme, his view is that there never was or shall be any core to the self.18

It is interesting and revealing to note that Rosemont presents his account of the role-bearing persons view in an essay dedicated to the work of Herbert Fingarette and particularly to his justly famous book Confucius: The Secular as Sacred (Fingarette 1972). Rosemont applauds the fact that throughout this work Fingarette avoids the language of rights and autonomous individuals and instead describes the Confucian Way in terms of shared ritual performance. This leads Rosemont to suggest that he and Fingarette share a common understanding of the Confucian self—and he is

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18 In comments on an earlier draft of this essay, Christian Wenzel offered several revealing insights on this aspect of Rosemont’s view. First, he noted that in classical Greek plays the actors wore masks. These masks represented ideals or ideas—not individuals or persons. Indeed it was critical for the actor not to show personal, individual characteristics, as these would interfere with the expression of the role. Wenzel further pointed out an apparent difficulty with Rosemont’s claim that when “all the roles have been specified, and their interconnections made manifest, then I have been specified as a unique person.” On such a view, the “specification” of a role is not enough to establish one’s unique character as a person; we have to rely on the “manifestation” of the interconnections. But then what is the status of such manifestations? If they are part of the role, then we remain on the descriptive level of the role and “uniqueness” becomes problematic. But if they are not on this level, how can they be seen as part of the roles?
right to see this similarity. In *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* Fingarette argues for a view of the self that is remarkably like what Rosemont advocates in his, more recent, essay. Instead of roles, Fingarette's primary interest is ritual. Nevertheless, like Rosemont, he describes the self exclusively in terms of its publicly observable position, stance, and behavior. Also like Rosemont, Fingarette sees philosophical value in the *Analects* because it advocates what he considers to be a more plausible alternative to an influential but mistaken Western view of the self.

Fingarette was led to develop his interpretation of Kongzi through his acceptance of Gilbert Ryle's criticisms of the Cartesian view of mind, a view that requires us to posit a “ghost in the machine” of every person (Ryle 1984). Against such a view, Ryle claimed that mental predicates most often are used as a kind of shorthand to express dispositions to behave in certain ways. For example, when I say that John is angry, what I am really saying is that presently John is disposed to exhibit characteristically angry behavior. Anger is *nothing more* than these sets of characteristic behaviors. To believe that when I talk about John being angry I am really talking about John’s inner mental states or even his underlying physiological states is to exhibit confusion about the nature of mind. Terms like “angry” refer to dispositional properties not inner states. To confuse such dispositional properties with inner states is to make a conceptual error that Ryle dubbed a “category mistake.” Following Ryle’s analysis, Fingarette claims that one

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19 Several scholars have raised objections to Fingarette’s interpretation of the *Analects* and especially the concept of the self that he attributes to Kongzi. Perhaps the most sustained and well-known criticism is by Benjamin L. Schwartz (Schwartz, 56–134). Schwartz attributes Fingarette’s claim that Kongzi did not believe in “a sustained inner life of the person” to “Fingarette’s own involvement with the modern Western psychology/sociology antithesis rather than anything found in the *Analects*” (74). In his early review of Fingarette, Rosemont offers a more accurate characterization of Fingarette’s account. He points out that Fingarette’s interpretation of Kongzi’s view of the self applies Ryle’s distinctive notion of mind to early Confucianism. Despite these early reservations about Fingarette’s interpretation, in his own recent essay Rosemont advances a remarkably similar picture of the self when he describes the role-bearing persons view.

20 Both Fingarette and Rosemont also claim that early Confucians do not rely on appeals to Heavenly sanctions to support their ethics. Fingarette describes Kongzi as advocating a “this-worldly, practical humanism” (Fingarette, 3) while Rosemont makes the broader claim that “Confucianism has never had recourse to supernatural support. It is entirely a secular philosophy, grounded in this life, making no appeal to divinity or divinities...” (Bockover, 93). Such claims may be true of Xunzi, but there is little viable support for them in the case of Kongzi, Mengzi, or many later Confucians. For my own view on this matter, see “Heaven as a Source for Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism” (Ivanhoe 2006).
of the great merits of the *Analects* is that it makes no use of a whole range of odd and implausible ideas associated with Cartesian views of the mind. Compare this to Rosemont’s criticisms of the modern Western notion of self, which he claims is inferior to the role-bearing persons view of early Confucians.

Since the time of Descartes, Western philosophy—not alone moral philosophy—has increasingly abstracted a purely cognizing activity away from concrete persons and determined that this use of logical reasoning in a disembodied “mind” is the choosing, autonomous essence of individuals, which is philosophically more foundational than are actual persons; the latter being only contingently who they are, and therefore of no great philosophical significance. (Bockover, 84)

Ryle’s views about the nature of mind held great sway in analytic philosophy for some time but now are widely regarded as mistaken. Most, though by no means all, contemporary philosophers believe that there is nothing inherently mysterious about mental states and that they cannot be reduced and eliminated by appealing to the behaviors normally associated with them. As David Armstrong has argued (Armstrong, 1-15), mental states are real states of the mind, not just the behaviors that often are associated with having these states, in the same way that the brittleness of glass is a quality of glass not simply its disposition to break under certain conditions.

Rosemont’s description of role-bearing persons shares important similarities with Fingarette’s account of ritual performance. Most important for our purposes, both rely upon a description of the self as a constellation of social positions, stances, and behaviors. However such an account of the self suffers from the same problems that plague Ryle’s modern presentation. We are not just what we do but also what we feel, believe, intend, and aspire to. The role-bearing persons view of the self, as described by Rosemont, seems no more plausible than the kind of view that he rejects. In fact, given that the former leaves no room for any robust inner mental life, it seems much less plausible than the kind of view that Rosemont criticizes.

This points to another difficulty with Rosemont’s account of the self: its implications concerning the degree to which cultivated Confucians lack a substantial sense of being individuals with distinct personalities. Rosemont’s strong contrast between “rights-bearing individuals” and “role-bearing persons” and his description (quoted above) of the way in which developed Confucians become the various roles they occupy leaves little room for any distinctive sense of such people as individuals with their own projects and personalities. One might think that there is room for individuality since the particular set of roles that each person fulfills will vary to
some degree and each person must fulfill his or her role in a specific and context-sensitive manner. However, Rosemont’s description of how we fulfill our roles rules out such a response. According to Rosemont, we don’t \textit{play} roles; we \textit{become} the roles we fulfill. As noted earlier, such an implication does not follow simply from an insistence upon the importance of interpersonal relationships.\footnote{Alasdair MacIntyre makes a similar point in his response to Wan Junren in “Once More on Aristotelian and Confucian Conceptions of the Virtues” (Wang, 153-154).} It does follow though from a view in which the self evaporates up and condenses into the matrix of one’s social roles, however this is understood. Aside from the plausibility or desirability of such a view, it is hard to reconcile this lack of individuality and personality with what one finds throughout the text of the \textit{Analects} and its later commentarial tradition. For both in the text and its subsequent interpretations, a prominent theme is the distinctive and unique character of Kongzi. Consider \textit{Mengzi} 2A:2,

Sages are the same in kind as other human beings, but stand out from and surpass the members of their group. Since human beings first came forth and down until the present day, there has never been anyone who surpasses Kongzi.

One could argue that for understanding the strength and vitality of the Confucian tradition the distinctive \textit{persona} of Kongzi is at least as important as the teachings one finds in the \textit{Analects}. In addition, the various strengths, weaknesses, and personalities of his different disciples are unmistakable features of the text and have played an important role throughout the commentarial tradition. Any viable interpretation of early Confucianism must take account of these aspects of early Confucian texts.

The view of the self that Rosemont attributes to the early Confucian classics is not the most plausible interpretation of these Chinese texts. While early Confucians do regard fulfilling one’s role-specific obligations as a critical way to both develop and manifest one’s character, they do not claim that the self is constituted by the roles that one happens to occupy. No matter how carefully one specifies a \textit{role}, as opposed to a description of character, one is still describing a pattern of social conventions and behaviors and not a set of inner beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and dispositions. Seen in this light, the \textit{role-bearing persons view} ignores the depth and complexity of the Confucian self. Consider \textit{Analects} 3.26, “The Master said, ‘To occupy a high station without being generous, to carry out the rites without
reverence, to engage in mourning without grief—how should I regard such behavior?"

Like many passages in the early Confucian corpus, here we see a great concern with one’s inner moral life. The goal is not simply or even primarily to occupy a certain role or to behave in a certain way. On the Confucian view, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and dispositions—not social roles—are largely constitutive of proper action. The descriptions that one finds, in texts like the Analects, of teachers and disciples working to develop themselves into better people reveal a robust sense of them as possessing their own distinct characters and personalities.

Conclusion

Rosemont has done a great service by focusing our attention on early Confucian interest in social roles and the relationship this interest has with their underlying view of the self. As I noted at the outset, he never claimed that the role-bearing persons view contains a ready-made alternative to contemporary moral theory. But he did hold out the hope that it might play an important part in the construction of such a theory. I have argued that the role-bearing persons view does not provide us with what is needed for the construction of such a theory and that instead we should interpret early Confucians as advocating a distinctive form of virtue ethics.

I then argued that the role-bearing persons view is in fact much less plausible than the kinds of theories that Rosemont criticizes because it distorts the degree to which one finds a vibrant sense of individuality and distinctive personalities within early Confucian texts. Fortunately, early Confucians do not advocate—either explicitly or implicitly—anything quite like the role-bearing persons view. They describe the self in terms of a robust and complex inner as well as outer life. Their texts insist that we not only have the ability but also the obligation to steer and shape our beliefs, feelings, intentions, and aspirations into virtuous dispositions to perceive, respond, and act in an ethical manner. One of the results of this view of the self is that early Confucian writings offer a remarkably rich resource for moral psychology and are especially insightful concerning a range of issues connected to moral self-cultivation.22

22 For an introduction to my own work on the theme of moral self-cultivation in the Confucian tradition, see Ivanhoe 2000.
What then is significant about the role-bearing persons view? It is crucially important for bringing into focus the characteristic concern that early Confucians show for social roles and how these are related to a conception of the self. Early Confucians pay a great deal of attention to how we must work to fulfill our various social and political roles and how these efforts affect our understanding of both self and society. They insist that ethical theory must always retain not only a practical but also an everyday focus. They show us how fulfilling roles plays an important part in fulfilling lives and making one’s society more just, decent, and humane. Most contemporary ethical theory pays little or no attention to the everyday aspects of human life including the issue of how we might teach ourselves and those we care for how to be better. This has led a number of contemporary philosophers not only to question these theories but also their underlying conception of self. Some of the most interesting work in contemporary ethics is being done on this set of topics, broadly construed. Rosemont is right about his concerns with contemporary moral theory and he is right that early Confucianism has much to offer to ethical theory in our own and future days. He has shown the way for the Way to be more deeply understood and more powerfully incorporated into contemporary ethics.

At the same time, it is important to avoid attributing to early Confucians a view of the self that is the product of a misstep in modern Western analytic philosophy. Rosemont’s account and Fingarette’s related claims have been embraced by some contemporary Western scholars, but these views are not plausible either as interpretations of Kongzi’s thought or as independent philosophical theories. I would like to close by offering two additional reasons to avoid the kind of view that Rosemont and Fingarette endorse. The first shows that such a conception of the self needlessly multiplies the difficulties involved in describing Kongzi’s overall philosophical position and leads to obscurity and mystification. The second points out a

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23 This became an issue in the later Confucian tradition when more metaphysically laden theories came to replace earlier Confucian views, which were based primarily on theories of human nature, moral psychology, and anthropology. This theme was expressed in dramatically different ways in the writings of thinkers like WANG Yangming (1472–1529), YAN Yuan (1635–1704), and DAI Zhen (1723–77). For an introduction to their thought, see the appropriate chapters of Ivanhoe, 2000. For an in-depth study of DAI Zhen, who insisted on the need for moral deliberation throughout the course of our everyday lives, see Tiwald 2006.

24 For example, Rosemont’s account of the self is endorsed by Richard E. Nisbett in the historical introduction to Chinese philosophy that appears in his recent book (Nisbett 2003, 5), though it is not at all clear how such a view can support many of the claims that Nisbett goes on to defend.
well-known weakness in Ryle’s conception of the mind that any theory of the self would do well to avoid.

As pointed out in our earlier discussion, Rosemont has noted that his account of the early Confucian view of the self finds a clear precedent in Herbert Fingarette’s seminal *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. One feature of Fingarette’s view has drawn a considerable amount of criticism and generated some puzzlement even among his supporters: his claim that the ritually guided life Kongzi advocated involves a form of “magic.” Fingarette employs a rather idiosyncratic sense of “magic” and is particularly interested in the “magical dimension to human virtue” (Fingarette, 5). By “magic” he means roughly the frictionless ease with which we can act and elicit action from others. His two primary examples are shaking hands and politely requesting a book from one of his students. I want to suggest that he is driven to employ the word “magic” because his view of the self allows him no other causal explanation, even for the actions he uses to illustrate his view. If, as Fingarette insists, shaking hands, at least ideally, is a deeply meaningful activity that involves mutual sensitivity and personal investment, then he must invoke the language of an inner mental life in order to make sense of the phenomenon.

As he himself notes, “Beautiful and effective ceremony requires the personal ‘presence’ to be fused with learned ceremonial skill” (8). The scare quotes around “presence” cannot disguise what he has here admitted. This is a clear reference to an inner self that plays a critical role in ideal ritual interaction. The point is even more obvious in the case in which Fingarette ceremoniously expresses his wish that a student bring a book from his office and “In almost no time the book is in my hands, as I wished!” (11). In this example, there are only three possible causal explanations for the behavior in question. One has to believe in some innate book-fetching instinct; one has to understand the student’s actions as the result of classical or operant conditioning; or one has to rely upon a complex story about innate inclinations, learned dispositions, and a range of other desires and perceptions that all interact to produce this admittedly marvelous human action. Since either of the first two are untenable explanations for the kind of actions that Fingarette so elegantly describes,

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25 These claims are most prominent in chapter one: “Human Community as Holy Rite.” Chad Hansen offers the most sustained criticisms of this aspect of Fingarette’s reading (Hansen 1976).

26 On page eight, Fingarette clearly rules out any hint that such effortless actions are mindless, rote behaviors, “It is important that we do not think of this effortlessness as ‘mechanical’ or ‘automatic’” (Fingarette 1972). Developing ideas first described by David S. Nivison, I have argued that a much better account of such actions is to see them as expressions of moral charisma. See Ivanhoe 2000, ix-xvii.
one must embrace the third. But this requires one to abandon his view of the self, the same kind of view that Rosemont advocates.

Another important advantage in abandoning the role-bearing person account of the self is that it avoids saddling early Confucian thinkers with a highly problematic and largely discredited theory. As many critics of Ryle’s account have pointed out, one of its most dramatic weaknesses is that it ignores a wide range of experiences that people have every day. We all experience a rich inner mental life; we have joys, dreams, intentions, plans, pains, and fears that never get expressed in any kind of exterior behavior. Human beings are distinguished by having a rich panoply of second order thoughts, desires, and intentions. These complex mental states perform a critical role in our ability not only to assess our own and other people’s behavior but also in our efforts to learn, correct, and reform ourselves. Inner self-reflection plays an important part in our efforts to get our selves back on “the way.” The good news is that this general picture is shared by a variety of remarkably insightful and sensitive thinkers in the early Confucian tradition, whose teachings can still inspire, guide, and inform our self-understanding today.

REFERENCES


Confucian Ethics, Concept-Clusters, and Human Rights

Sumner B. Twiss

Introduction

One term of art developed and deployed by Henry Rosemont in his comparative philosophical work is “concept-cluster,” by which he means a fundamental set of characteristic concepts underlying or presupposed by a given philosophical worldview.1 Much of Rosemont’s work has devolved on comparing and contrasting two particular concept-clusters associated, respectively, with Confucian ethics and Western ethics. Rosemont characterizes the Confucian concept-cluster as pivoting around the notion of a thoroughly social or relational person who is defined essentially by the totality of roles he or she inhabits and performs in the social community, while being committed to following the Tao (Way) as channeled through the li (rites) and guided by the spirit of jen (humanness). In strong contrast with this concept-cluster, Rosemont identifies the Western concept-cluster as pivoting around the notion of a human being as a freely choosing autonomous individual who is not inherently social but rather defined essentially by his or her freedom to choose to lead a life (of whatever sort chosen) made possible by inherent human rights and constrained solely by respect for the similar rights of others. Rosemont, of course, is too good a scholar to remain content with simply sketching these stereotypes, and so he deepens them considerably with extended discussions of, for example, Confucian paradigms of self-cultivation, the reciprocities involved in Confucian

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1 The term is ubiquitous in Rosemont’s writings, many of which are cited below. The characterization in this paragraph of Rosemont’s contrasting concept-clusters is freely drawn from those writings. At the outset I wish to express my appreciation to Henry Rosemont for goading me—indirectly through his writings and directly through personal interaction—to develop the position articulated in this paper. I believe that civil engagement, even to the point of disagreement, with a scholar’s views is one of the highest honors that one can confer.
civility, the Western paradigm of a largely disembodied, purely logical, and calculating rational mind, and the Western notion of a certain self-seeking competitive individualism. In what follows, I largely accept Rosemont’s characterization of the Confucian concept-cluster, but by the same token I wish to challenge the adequacy of his characterization of the presuppositions of Western ethics, particularly with regard to his understanding of the international human rights movement, which he views as the inheritor and advocate of those presuppositions. In so doing, I will be seeking a rapprochement of sorts between Confucian ethics and contemporary human rights.

Background

Rosemont’s own thinking about Confucianism and human rights has undergone a development, of which he may or may not be aware, since it emerges gradually over a period of some years. In his earlier work, particularly in the 1970s and to the mid-1980s, Rosemont was content to characterize and compare the Confucian and Western concept-clusters largely in an effort to make clear the distinctive features of Confucian moral vision and practice—thus, for example, his attempt to clarify a Confucian moral theory of human actions (in which all human actions have moral significance); to demonstrate how the *li* as a code sufficient for regulating society resists the advent of a legal system which, in Rosemont’s view, introduces the notion of human beings as autonomous individuals faced with having to solve conflicts between customs and secular laws; and to develop an illuminating contrast between Kierkegaard’s choice-making individual (choosing from among alternative ways of life or modes of being) and Confucius’s notion of the thoroughly relational self who simply resolves to follow the *Tao*. In the early 1990s, Rosemont’s work takes a somewhat different turn when, in drawing the contrast between Western rights-bearing individuals and Confucian role-bearing persons, he explicitly develops the contrast between Western self-governing autonomy making “us” uniquely human and the Confucian relational person who becomes distinctively human only in concrete interpersonal relationships and interactions. In one essay in particular, Rosemont ascribes the Western view to the *Universal Declaration of* 2

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2 See Rosemont 1976 and 1986. Actually, although it is of little consequence for this essay, I take some exception to Rosemont’s view of Kierkegaard’s choice-making individual, since in the latter’s mature works (e.g., *The Sickness Unto Death, Practice in Christianity, Works of Love*), the notion of the person or self as inherently relational appears to predominate.
Human Rights (UDHR), and then raises the question whether there is a conceptual framework or concept-cluster that can be applicable to and understood and appreciated by all peoples (Rosemont 1991). He subsequently suggests that such an intercultural concept-cluster, also to be used intraculturally, could be developed if Western thinkers were more open to incorporating the views of non-Western philosophies. Moreover, he suggests that in the process of developing this new concept-cluster, some Western concepts should remain, others should be stretched, and still others abandoned altogether, without offering any further specification. Here I might remark that Rosemont is apparently proposing a constructive conceptual project open to combining in some coherent manner Western and non-Western ethical elements. In the later 1990s and the early years of the new millennium, he apparently abandons this proposed project by expressing a sharp skepticism about the concept of human rights and related notions clustered around it as ever being capable of capturing the inherent sociality of human beings. Indeed, he charges that, in proposing both civil-political and socio-economic varieties of human rights, the UDHR deploys fundamentally conflicting concepts of personhood, sociality, and human freedom. And to date, Rosemont’s final proposal is to do away with “rights” and “human rights” language altogether, adopting instead a Confucian-like moral vision in which rites, but not rights, play the principal role in human life—locally, nationally, internationally. Here I would say that Rosemont proposes to supplant human rights and company with an entirely different concept-cluster.

The development I have just sketched represents a rather extraordinary trajectory—from merely comparing Confucianism and human rights, to openness to combining them in some way, and finally to supplanting the latter with the former. For my part, I wish now to argue that the third and final turn is misguided and that the second phase of Rosemont’s trajectory represents the correct way to (re)conceive human rights conversation in relation to the world’s philosophical, moral, and religious traditions. I suspect that Rosemont was deflected from the tremendous opportunity to develop an intercultural concept-cluster, involving both human rights and social justice concerns, because he failed to see that the UDHR itself initiated such a new concept-cluster in 1948.

3 See, for example, Rosemont 1998 and 2002b.
4 See, for example, Rosemont 2002a.
Rosemont's Critique of the UDHR

As a first step in revisioning human rights in relation to cultural moral traditions, it is necessary to summarize Rosemont's view of human rights in the UDHR. Doing so will bring into focus several of his characterizations that I wish to challenge. His clearest and most comprehensive statements occur in three essays, “Human Rights: A Bill of Worries,” “On Freedom and Inequality,” and “Whose Democracy? Which Rights? A Confucian Critique of Modern Western Liberalism.” According to Rosemont, the UDHR asserts that all human beings have fundamental or basic human rights of two sorts: civil-political rights and economic, social, and cultural rights. He takes as exemplifying the first type freedom of speech, association, religious belief, and disposal of one’s property as one sees fit (although I would observe that the last occurs nowhere in the declaration). These are what I would call civil and political empowerments. He fails to note that this class also includes prohibitions of torture, slavery, inhumane punishment, and arbitrary arrest and detention as well as guarantees of equality before the law and due process. I would call these protections of people’s physical and civil security. Rosemont also acknowledges that the UDHR identifies basic socio-economic rights, citing the rights to health care, education, and work, to which I would add nutrition, shelter, an adequate living standard, and a social security net. Rosemont and I agree that these are intended to obviate natural and social impediments to living a decent human life. Now, for Rosemont, the first class of rights (civil-political) presupposes a concept of freedom as a defining characteristic of human beings who are viewed as rational, self-seeking, autonomous, self-governing individuals. In his opinion this presupposition fails to capture the inherent sociality of human beings. Furthermore, according to Rosemont, the second class of rights (socio-economic), if they are really to be instantiated, presupposes a different understanding of human beings as having their freedom, autonomy, and self-interest constrained in the interests of providing basic material goods to co-members of a human community who are basically social. He says, “To whatever extent I am obliged to assist in the creation of goods which accrue

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5 Cited above. I mention these works as a group, since there is considerable redundancy among the three.
6 The UDHR does list—as a socio-economic human right—the right to own property alone and in association with others and stipulates that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property (Article 17). I might mention that in the subsequent legally implementing international covenants, there is no mention of this article.
by virtue of these rights, to that extent I cannot be an altogether autono-
mous individual, free to pursue my own projects rather than having to assist
you with yours” (Rosemont 2002a, 118). Hence, for Rosemont, there is a
fundamental tension in the very foundations of basic human rights, an in-
compatibility which makes human rights themselves a major source of con-

At the same time that Rosemont projects this presuppositional ten-
sion, he also makes clear that he nonetheless appreciates the worth of both
classes of human rights. He sees civil-political rights as “a strong conceptual
bulwark against absolutism and totalitarianism, and their worth, power,
scope and glory would be denied only by a fool…no other single idea, or
set of actions, has contributed as much to the course of human dignity in
Europe and North America” (Rosemont 1997, 69). By the same token,
however, he also thinks that these rights “have consistently served to pro-
tect wealth, power, and privilege.” In light of this perception, Rosemont
casts his lot with socio-economic rights and our basic sociality as providing
us with a strong case to favor them “to whatever extent our moral intu-
tions incline us toward equality and social justice” (Rosemont 1998, 62 and
Rosemont 2002a, 123). That is, Rosemont resolves the incompatibility and
dilemma by opting to prioritize socio-economic rights over civil-political
rights, which has the implication of warranting constraints on the latter—
the extent and severity of which he does not explore in any detail. Indeed,
taking into account the third turn of the trajectory described earlier, he al-
ternatively resolves the problem by doing away with human rights language
and conceptuality entirely—the consequences of which he also does not
explore in any detail.

But one wants to ask at this point: is Rosemont’s view of the
UDHR correct? In particular, does the UDHR presuppose a concept of
human beings as radically autonomous and asocial, or does it presuppose
incompatible notions of human being as both radically autonomous, on the
one hand, and basically social, on the other? Can basically social and rela-
tional human beings also be autonomous in some recognizable sense that
would permit the embrace of both civil-political and socio-economic rights?

Setting the Record Straight

The UN historical records clearly show that no fewer than fifty-six coun-
tries—representing various cultural traditions from around the world,
North-South, East-West—were actively involved in crafting the UDHR. As such, the human rights it advances are not merely Western moral values and aspirations but rather represent a set of core norms acceptable to all of the countries involved—something that they conceived as a bulwark against the repetition of totalitarian abuses of persons and communities that occurred before and during the Second World War—not only denials of basic civil security and liberties but also denials of material necessities for living a decent human life. Nazi atrocities were constantly cited in the pertinent UN deliberations and debates. Other earlier abuses of persons and communities were cited as well. The historical records also show that the framers of the UDHR were gravely concerned about not building into the declaration metaphysical conceptions and epistemological appeals, beyond those that could be commonly agreed upon, that might inhibit its acceptability to the peoples of the world. Thus, no theological foundations, no invocations of natural law or any other contestable moral theory, no theories about the origins of society, no commitment to a singularly appropriate political system (other than a vague notion of democracy), no specification of the precise mechanisms and policies for implementing human rights norms, and no prioritization of one class of human rights as regnant over the other were included. What the framers did agree upon was this: there are certain social and material conditions which are absolutely requisite for human existence and flourishing in the world. I call these “priority interests” of persons and communities. The framers thought these ought to be socially guaranteed by otherwise diverse social and political systems. The notions of “priority interests” and social guarantee are captured in the use of “rights” language, and while such language was to be the lingua franca in the international arena, the use of this language was not intended to subvert or supplant other cultural idioms at the local level which might be used to guarantee the “priority interests” represented by international human rights language.

So far as I can ascertain, the philosophical framework of the UDHR is very spare, proffering a pragmatic recognition of basic behavioral norms and human needs that is intended to be compatible with diverse cul-

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7 The historical records referred to are principally the *Official Records of the Third Session of the General Assembly, Part I, Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Questions, THIRD COMMITTEE, Summary Records of Meetings 21 September-8 December, 1948*, with Annexes (Lake Success, NY: United Nations, 1948). These records represent a historical summary of proceedings, not necessarily a precise word-for-word transcription of quotations from speakers. Hereinafter I will cite this work as simply, Third Committee, followed by page references.
tural, philosophical, and religious traditions. Although spare, the UDHR
does appear to forward as a self-conscious action taken in concert a con-
ceptualization of person within community wholly at odds with the radically
autonomous and self-interested individual that Rosemont associates with
civil and political rights and Western ethics in general. Any fair reading of
the UDHR will discern considerable language regarding, for example,
membership in the human family, acting in the spirit of brotherhood, the
person as fundamentally related to family and society of which he or she is
part, the fact that a member of a society is entitled to necessary socio-
economic conditions for survival and flourishing as a responsible political
participant of that society, and the notion that persons have obligations to
the community in which alone the full development of their personalities is
possible. Moreover, it is made clear that such persons can have their actions
limited if necessary to meet the just requirements of morality, public order,
and the general welfare. These characterizations of the person appear far
closer to Rosemont's notion of the basically social than to his stereotype of
the radically autonomous individual. Accordingly, I propose reading the
UDHR as an instrument that advances a relational conception of the per-
son that the framers were able to pragmatically agree upon. It is a concep-
tion of the person founded in the family as the natural and fundamental
group unit of society, who acquires additional responsibilities and rights as
he or she matures into membership of ever larger communities, ranging
from work associations, participation in governance, communal worship,
national service, all the way up to and including the entire international
community, in which we all share.

At this point one might ask: how can this relational person be
autonomous, and in what sense of “autonomy” if not Rosemont’s notion of
radical autonomy? Here I will take a cue from Rosemont’s own essay com-
paring Confucian and feminist perspectives on the self. The response is
quite simple, and has been argued most effectively by recent feminist think-
ers who clearly reject an account of autonomy as radical independence and
freedom—according to which persons are supposedly constituted apart
from social relations. These thinkers have developed a notion of autonomy

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8 Rosemont 1986, 202. Here I am entering a correction to my earlier claims that the UDHR
does not ascribe to a philosophical position on the nature of persons but rather advances
only a set of agreed upon conditions necessary for personal development see Twiss, 1998b.
The language about person and community is replete throughout the UDHR, and since the
document is so brief I will not provide specific citations.

9 See Rosemont 1997. My own understanding of feminist discussions of relational autonomy
is greatly informed by Elshtain 1995; Tanner 1996; and Nussbaum 1997 and 1999.
as freedom from oppressive coercion so that one has some control over one’s life (including physical and civil security) as well as opportunities to develop one’s capacities. From their point of view, this modest notion of autonomy is sufficient to ground an understanding of rights—to agency and well-being—that is inherently relational, advancing social relations by making it clear to all that each person has legitimate “priority interests” which are the responsibility of all to nurture in a mutually supportive manner. Securing these interests is a constitutive part of the common good and enhances the flourishing of the community comprised of relationally autonomous persons. I will return to this modest conception of relational autonomy in connection with Confucian moral thought, but before doing so we need to consider some further points about the two classes of human rights Rosemont finds in the UDHR.

Contrary to Rosemont’s thesis of an essential and ineradicable incompatibility between civil-political rights, on the one hand, and socio-economic rights, on the other, the UDHR framers conceived of them as integrally related and virtually indivisible. This was so for a number of reasons, not least of which was the fact that the satisfaction of basic socio-economic necessities is prerequisite for responsible civil-political empowerment. People need adequate food, shelter, a living wage, health care, and education in order to be functional citizens of a polity. By the same token, they need civil-political protections and empowerments in order to hold governments truly accountable for providing material necessities. Beyond these obvious points, it should be noted that many (if not all) of the UDHR’s identifiable human rights are co-implicated, across the typological “boundary” between civil-political and socio-economic rights. For example, the socio-economic right to education intrinsically involves civil-political aspects (e.g., personal development, freedom of expression, freedom of association) as well as links to other socio-economic conditions (e.g., nutrition, clothing, medical care). Likewise, the civil-political right to life, liberty, and security of person involves evident links to many other civil-political rights. Some of these include recognition as a person before the law, equality before the law, freedom from arbitrary arrest, and due process in criminal proceedings, as well as the provision of necessary socio-economic conditions. Furthermore, the socio-economic right to work and to just and favorable conditions of work also involves the civil-political right to form and join trade unions, which in turn is linked to the civil-political rights to peaceful assembly and voluntary association, not to mention freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and the right to security of the person. My point is—and the framers’ point was—that human rights are so thor-
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Toward a Viable Intercultural Concept-Cluster

What does all of the preceding come to when reconsidering the possibility of developing an intercultural concept-cluster of the sort once envisioned by Rosemont himself, a concept-cluster that is open to human rights as found in the UDHR as well as to diverse moral worldviews? The short answer is that the preceding corrections to Rosemont’s interpretation of the UDHR reinstate the viability of such a constructive intercultural project. In fact, this project is being pursued, albeit in a piecemeal way, in intercultural human rights dialogues such as those for which Rosemont originally wrote some of his essays on human rights. In my view, these dialogues involve explicit attempts to identify and negotiate shared interpretations of human rights norms, to scrutinize critically cultural traditions for their human rights implications, and to articulate new social visions combining aspects of different traditions in a manner supportive of the “priority interests” represented by human rights. In order to make my case more persuasive, I wish now to focus some attention on two Confucian thinkers, one from the seventeenth century and the other from the twentieth. And in order to connect my remarks directly to Rosemont’s concept-clusters, I will confine myself to discussing these thinkers’ respective concepts of the person, adding links to human rights norms as appropriate.

HUANG Tsung-hsi

HUANG Tsung-hsi was a seventeenth century neo-Confucian thinker whose moral and political thought came to be particularly influential in late nineteenth and early twentieth century China, when he came to be acclaimed by reformers and revolutionaries alike as a champion of indigenous Chinese “democratic” ideas. Although the latter characterization might be overstating the case somewhat, there is no gainsaying that Huang’s views concern-

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10 For further reflections on these dialogues, see Twiss 1996.
ing the essentials of humane governance, legal reform, the roles of prince and ministers, the role of education, and the importance of land and tax reform bear uncanny affinities with the UDHR’s articles. On civil and political rights some of these affinities include equality before the law, due process, citizen participation in governance. And on socio-economic necessities they encompass subsistence, education, and no arbitrary deprivation of property. These affinities are so striking that in an essay published in 2003 I argued, following in the footsteps of Wm. Theodore de Bary, that Huang’s views are arguably no less than functional analogues to human rights norms, although Huang himself did not have access to, much less use, “rights” language. Nonetheless, Huang did identify certain “priority interests” of people and argued that they ought to be socially guaranteed by the government. I will not reargue that case here, but I do want to expend some effort in laying out the concept of the person associated with Huang’s functional analogues to human rights, because it points us in the direction of seeing how Rosemont’s intercultural concept-cluster could be developed in a manner consonant with the Confucian ethical concept-cluster.

Huang formally begins his treatise *Waiting for the Dawn* by writing:

In the beginning of human life each man lived for himself and looked to his own interests. There was such a thing as the common benefit, yet no one seems to have promoted it; and there was common harm, yet no one seems to have eliminated it. Then someone [a prince worthy of ruling] came forth who did not think of benefit in terms of his own benefit but sought to benefit all-under-Heaven.

Huang continues:

However, with those who later became princes it was different. They believed that since they held the power over benefit and harm, there was nothing wrong in taking for themselves all the benefits and imposing on others all the harm. They made it so that no man dared to live for himself or look to his own interests. Thus the prince’s great self-interest took the place of the common good of all-under-Heaven.

And he concludes:

This can only be explained as follows: In ancient times all-under-Heaven were considered the master, and the prince was the tenant. The prince spent his whole life working for all-under-Heaven. Now the

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prince is the master, and all-under-Heaven are tenants. That no one can find peace and happiness anywhere is all on account of the prince. In order to get whatever he wants, he maims and slaughters...breaks up their families...extracts the very marrow from people's bones...Thus he who does the greatest harm in the world is none other than the prince. If there had been no rulers, each man would have provided for himself and looked to his own interests. How could the institution of rulership turned out like this? (Huang 91-92)

I do not cite these passages in order to argue that Huang has some sort of implicit social contract theory about the origins of society. Neither does he presuppose a “liberal” conception of the person in some sort of original state of nature as unencumbered, atomistic, radically free or autonomous, and competitively self-interested. Such characterizations would be far from the truth. Rather these passages function as a critique of grandiosely self-interested rulers who have so debased themselves from authentically relational personhood and responsibilities that they have become uncaring and inhumane toward the people whom they ought to be serving. The passages make no sense without the presupposition of such relational personhood. At the same time, however, I would also contend that these passages presuppose that relational persons are the active subjects of their lives with a modicum of naturally appropriate self-interest and freedom which need to be coordinated by a humane ruler if there is to be effective promotion of the common good and elimination of common harm. That is to say, these passages imply the view that authentic relational persons have some degree of autonomy to pursue their interests within a socially bonded and interdependent community—a contextually and relationally defined and constrained freedom, as contrasted with any notion of a radically free and socially isolated omnipotent will.

This notion of relational autonomy within community explains the rhetorical force of such phrases as “living for oneself and looking to his own interests” and no one's now “daring” to do so because “the prince's great self-interest took the place of the common good.” And the notion is driven home by Huang's lamenting image that “in ancient times all-under-Heaven were considered the master, and the prince was the tenant.” That is to say, in those times—which Huang hopes to retrieve—the prince did not try to own or abuse anybody but rather served the entire community. The people collectively were in control under the sagacious guidance of a servant prince and each could look to his own interest within the pursuit of the common good. The idea is of the prince acting to help the people live both for themselves and for the common good. There is, then, a deeply intertwined conjunction rather than disjunction of individual and society. I
believe that a reasonable inference to draw from these passages is that Huang’s conception of the relational person who possesses both autonomy and self-interest, would provide in principle a sufficient basis for identifying functional analogues to human rights. Huang is clearly concerned about advancing the “priority interests” of active subjects living in the network of community, and these interests include both socio-economic conditions (e.g., subsistence, education) and civil-political conditions (e.g., physical and civil security, family integrity, some degree of being a master in terms of the prince’s accountability to the people).

P. C. Chang

P. C. Chang was China’s Resident Chief Delegate to the UN when it was being formed in the post-war years. Chang served as Vice-Chairman (under Eleanor Roosevelt) of the Commission on Human Rights, which drafted the UDHR. Although his higher education was pursued in U.S. universities (Clark and Columbia), Chang was significantly shaped by classical Confucian thought. He wrote and lectured extensively about its relevance to the modern world.\textsuperscript{12} Chang was consistently characterized by his peers as the towering intellect of the Commission on Human Rights and of the Third Committee who more than anyone else was responsible for imparting a universal rather than purely Western character to the UDHR. Given his role and influence in crafting the declaration, he is a particularly authoritative source for its proper interpretation. The question naturally arises therefore: how did Chang as a representative of China and the Confucian tradition understand the philosophical underpinnings of the UDHR, and, in particular, what concept-cluster regarding person and community did he think it embodied (if any)? Moreover, did he discern any essential incompatibility between his tradition and human rights? Since the most overtly philosophical discussion of the UDHR’s conceptual underpinnings occurred with respect to Article 1, I will focus principally on that part of the Third Committee’s debate and adoption of the draft declaration, before it was forwarded to the UN General Assembly for formal ratification.

Article 1 as finally adopted reads as follows: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Chang himself was largely responsible for the inclusion of the term

\textsuperscript{12} I have described Chang’s background in more detail in Twiss 2002.
“conscience,” which he accepted as a compromise solution in lieu of his original more cumbersome proposal to include “two-men mindedness” (his translation of jen) in addition to the mention of “reason” in the article’s second sentence. It was fully understood by the drafting committee of the human rights commission that “conscience” referred to the emotional and sympathetic basis of morality. Taken together, reason and conscience were the epistemic sources for recognizing human dignity and rights, serving also to justify the prescription to act in the spirit of brotherhood. In the subsequent discussion of Article 1 by the full Third Committee, Chang further elaborated on how he understood the article, saying that “a happy balance was struck by the broad statement of rights in the first sentence and the implication of duties in the second.” Moreover, according to Chang, in calling “upon men to act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood,” the article’s second sentence was perfectly consistent with the Chinese attitude towards manners and the importance of kind and considerate treatment of others [the li]. It was only when man’s social behavior rose to that level that he was truly human. “Decorum was an ideal which should not be lost sight of…in the struggle to uphold noble principles” (Third Committee, 98-99).

These comments were just a prelude to the following extraordinary statement, which I would argue is Chang’s attempt to forge a link between Western and Chinese thought:

…the basic text of article 1…would be acceptable to the Committee if it were understood on the basis of eighteenth century philosophy. That philosophy was based on the innate goodness of man. Other schools of thought had said that man’s nature was neutral and could be made good or bad, or again that his nature was all bad. The eighteenth century thinkers…had realized that although man was largely animal, there was a part of him which distinguished him from the animals. That part was the real man and was good, and that part should therefore be given greater importance…Mr. Chang urged that the Committee should not debate the question of the nature of man again but should build on the work of the eighteenth century philosophers. He thought the Committee should agree to a text beginning “All human beings are free”—using “human beings” to refer to the non-animal part of man. (Third Committee, 113-14, italics in original).

I say that Chang is forging a link between East and West—specifically Confucian ethics and European philosophy—because in characterizing eighteenth century Western philosophy’s view of human nature as

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13 I have discussed this contribution in a number of venues, including Twiss 1998a and 2002. See also Morsink 1999.
good (he had earlier explicitly invoked Rousseau as representative), he is adapting the language of Mencius.\footnote{Quotations from Mencius are taken from Lau 1970.} Consider, for example, these passages from the latter:

Kung-tu Tzu said, “Kao Tzu said, There is neither good nor bad in human nature, but others say, Human nature can become good or it can become bad...Then there are others who say, There are those who are good by nature, and there are those who are bad by nature. Now you say human nature is good. Does this mean all the others are mistaken?”

As far as what is genuinely in him is concerned, a man is capable of becoming good, said Mencius. As for his becoming bad, that is not the fault of his native endowment (6A:6).

These remarks are subsequently followed by: “If this dissipation happens repeatedly, then the influence of the air in the night will no longer be able to preserve what was originally in him, and when that happens, the man is not far removed from an animal. Others, seeing his resemblance to an animal, will be led to think that he never had any native endowment. But can that be what a man is genuinely like?” (6A:8) Mencius continues, “The parts of the person differ in value and importance. Never harm the parts of greater importance for the sake of those of smaller importance, or the more valuable for the sake of the less valuable...he who nurtures the parts of greater importance is a great man.... This is what Heaven has given me. If one makes one’s stand on what is of greater importance in the first instance, what is of smaller importance cannot displace it as a matter of fact, every man has in him that which is exalted” [i.e., the seeds of benevolence, dutifulness, conscientiousness, truthfulness] (6A:14-17).

Now I submit that all of these interventions by Chang into the debate are predicated on an understanding of human beings as both relationally free and basically social, destined to live for one another if they are to be truly human, rather than being radically autonomous and acting exclusively out of self-interest. I further submit that Chang understands human rights as inherent in that sociality and as coordinated with human responsibilities. That is, human beings as basically social have both rights to certain conditions and goods and duties to assist others in attaining those conditions and goods as co-members of the human community if all are to achieve their moral potential. This is not just Chang’s own idiosyncratic view of the UDHR, for the historical records show clearly that the majority (if not all) of the framers shared Chang’s interpretation of the UDHR’s underpinnings with respect to person and community. These records are re-
plete with claims about the social nature of human beings, that human rights impart correlative duties, that such rights are needed to fulfill obligations to community, and that duties are implicit in the UDHR’s concept of freedom.¹⁵

There is a deeper lesson to draw from Chang’s interventions. He appears to be engaged in a project of constructive comparative ethics, one that is self-consciously trying to find conceptual and normative bridges between Confucian moral thought and Western ethics in a manner that forges new angles on both traditions and how they might learn from one another. By emphasizing the interdependence of human rights and duties, Chang seems to be trying to open the Confucian tradition to a new moral-conceptual category (rights). At the same time, however, in emphasizing the importance of the 仍 (decorum, civility, manners) and linking these to the struggle to uphold noble principles (human dignity and rights), he also looks like he is suggesting that the Western tradition for its part could benefit from incorporating that distinctively Confucian moral-conceptual category. Furthermore, in using Mencian language to (re)describe aspects of eighteenth century European philosophy, Chang appears to be demonstrating that there are important similarities or parallels between the two traditions that ought to be embraced as the basis for the common project of the genuine humanization of the world. He is, in effect, showing us how to construct an intercultural concept-cluster of person, community, relational autonomy, human rights, civility, and responsibility for others that could be used by all the peoples of the world.

Conclusion

I believe that the preceding analysis, brief though it may be, demonstrates the viability of developing an intercultural concept-cluster for relating human rights to the world’s diverse moral, philosophical, and religious traditions in a manner that permits these traditions to maintain their expressive integrity while at the same time encouraging them to engage in genuine human rights dialogues in the international arena. This new concept-cluster can be framed as follows. Human beings are fundamentally social in nature and formed by their interactions together in ever enlarging communities of mutual concern and responsibility—from family, to voluntary associations

¹⁵ I discuss the communitarian and relational aspects of the UDHR in more detail in a forthcoming article, “Theology, Tolerance, and Two Declarations of Human Rights: An Interrogative Comparison,” in Adeney and Sharma.
of various sorts, to nation, up to and including the international community of nations. At the same time, they are also relationally autonomous and need to have guaranteed to them certain crucial social and material conditions—identified by civil-political and socio-economic human rights—in order to be responsible and flourishing members of communities that permit, protect, and encourage their continuing self-development in realizing their fullest potential. In this concept-cluster, there is no incompatibility between being basically social and being relationally autonomous, and there is no fundamental tension between human beings’ expressive freedom to become themselves and their responsibility to help others do the same under conditions of social justice. Social justice is requisite for all to attain the dignity that becomes human beings in realizing their personal and moral potential and in working together to humanize the world. These—rather than the radically autonomous and self-seeking asocial individual Rosemont creates—are the presuppositions of the international human rights movement.

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Confucian Ethics, Concept-Clusters and Human Rights  


Henry Rosemont was one of the first philosophers to seriously question that very basic assumption of our moral, social, and political way of life, the assumption that all human beings have certain inalienable rights, just by virtue of being human. This assumption, he points out, “is embedded in a larger conceptual framework in which the essence of human beings lies in their individuality, their autonomy, and their rationality” (Rosemont 1991a, 57). Rosemont helped to wake us up from our dogmatic slumber by teaching us about a flourishing ancient culture that did not have that conceptual framework and did not think of human beings as fundamentally autonomous, rational, rights-bearing individuals. And yet, this Confucian-centered culture placed paramount emphasis on the question of how human beings ought to live what we would construe as “moral lives.” He has in this way, through his illuminating comparison of the philosophical differences between the two cultures, made us more critical of our particular rights-based moral way of thinking (our particular theory of human rights) and more open to embracing the ethical way of that ancient tradition.

1. In “Rights-Bearing Individuals and Role-Bearing Persons,” written for a festschrift for Herbert Fingarette, Rosemont repeated his well-known argument that Confucius did not and could not have a moral view, let alone a moral philosophy, containing the Western idea of human rights, because there are no lexical items in classical Chinese that correspond to any of the familiar terms in the concept-cluster of Western morality. This lends strong support to Fingarette’s efforts to correct the misconception of

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1 I am assuming throughout this essay what is generally accepted as the distinction between “morality” and “ethics.” For example, in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Bernard Williams distinguished the “ethical” question, “how one ought to live” from questions about standards of moral behavior and action. The latter is related to, but far from exhausting the ways of dealing with the former, more basic question. So, it is more appropriate to say that Confucianism is concerned with how to live “ethical lives.”
Confucius as being nothing more than a “prosaic and parochial moralizer.” Fingarette argued in *Confucius—The Secular as Sacred* that scholars have for too long read Confucius through the lenses of Western moral philosophy and failed to appreciate and understand his profound ethical and philosophical insights (Fingarette 1972, vii). Rosemont and Fingarette both played a significant role in changing our perception of Confucius. So, it is surprising to find Fingarette, who shares essentially the same interpretation of Confucius as Rosemont, responding to this argument by writing,

> I do not think that an absence of explicit reference to [rights] or consciousness of it in other times and places shows that the claim of universal human rights is invalid. That human beings possess fundamental rights might still be a moral truth about human beings that is independent of culture, and also independent of awareness of the concept. The refutation of either of these propositions would require arguments more telling than any Rosemont provides. (Fingarette 1991, 191)

Fingarette is not defending the Western theory of universal rights; for he goes on to say that “there is a remarkable paucity of sound argument in favor of the thesis of universal human rights” (191). Nevertheless, Fingarette seems to be speaking as a *moral realist*, holding that there are objective moral truths regardless of whether we know it or not, regardless of whether we can even give convincing reasons for any putative moral truth. But moral realism is highly problematic. *Metaphysical* realism is at least sensible, for we can say that there are trees whether or not we have the concept of a tree. But does it make sense to say that human rights exist whether or not we have the concept of moral rights?

My conjecture is that Fingarette is responding in a typical way to what he mistakenly believes is Rosemont’s relativism, and “relativism” and “relativist” have become almost as pejorative as the terms “sophism” and “sophist.” But what’s wrong with being a relativist? Richard Rorty points out that three different views have been associated with the term, “relativism.”

The first is the view that every belief is as good as every other. The second is the view that “true” is an equivocal term, having as many meanings as there are procedures of justification. The third is the view that there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from

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2 Rosemont wrote perhaps the best review of Fingarette’s book in *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 26, no. 4, Oct. 1976. The next issue of the journal (vol. 27, no. 1) contained an exchange between Fingarette and Rosemont that further clarifies the distinctive contributions of *The Secular as Sacred*. 
It is clear from his writings, especially his essay, “Against Relativism,” that Rosemont associates relativism with the first view. And he rejects this view because he sees correctly that if we believe that “every belief is as good as every other,” we are forced to either be tolerant or ethnocentric, neither of which is palatable. He writes,

On the one hand, we might wish to simply accept the “diff’rent strokes for diff’rent folks” idea, and cease believing that our philosophical efforts can find a purchase beyond our Western cultural heritage; at this extreme, it cannot ultimately make any sense to argue that a particular view of human beings is any better, or any worse, than any other, because there could be no culturally independent grounds for settling the argument. On the other hand, we can simply dig in our heels, and insist that all human beings do have rights even if they are not recognized in other cultures, that if other cultures don’t have our concept of rights, they should have it, and all of them will be the worse morally and politically, if they do not. (Rosemont 1991b, 74)

Rosemont, of course, does not want to defend rights-based morality, for his sympathies are with Confucianism. What he does is to offer in “Against Relativism” and elsewhere what can be construed as a realist or objectivist alternative. He writes, “I wish to pose for consideration: that there is a conceptual framework—what I will call a “concept-cluster”—within which both ethical statements and an ethical theory can be articulated which can be applicable to, understood and appreciated by, all of the world’s peoples” (74-75). For Rosemont, that concept-cluster must include the assumptions and presuppositions of the non-Western cultures that constitute seventy-five percent of the world’s population.

The construction of a universal conceptual framework is a real possibility for Rosemont, because of his belief that there is something innate in human nature. It is a real possibility, he argues, that there are what he calls homoversal (as opposed to “universal”) principles, principles true of the human species. One example Rosemont gives is what some linguists claim is the meta-principle that underlie the particular grammars of the diversity of natural languages, the so-called universal grammar. Another example is the homoversal principles that act as abstract constraints for our apprehension of musical sounds. It is due to these innate constraints that, while classical Chinese music may sound cacophonous at first to ears trained in the tradition of Bach and Mozart, in time it will lose its cacophonous qualities. Rosemont argues that there must be homoversal principles that govern
human responses to sounds since it is obvious that there are “many possible forms of music [that] simply cannot be appreciated by human beings due to their biological endowment” (Rosemont 1998, 55).

Rosemont contends that “ethical theories derived from empirically specifiable theories of human nature [based on yet to be discovered homoversal principles] will be very different from ethical theories based on one or another of the variant concepts of practical reason [as, for example, I will add, utilitarianism and Kantianism]” (59). All this is mere speculation of course, but my problem is with the very idea of the speculation. Even if we can find, in Rosemont’s words, “homoversal principles to govern our responses to and evaluations of human conduct,” this leaves wide open the range of possible responses and evaluations—just as principles that govern our response to sounds can only eliminate what is not musical to the human ear. They leave open a whole range of possibilities of what a person might consider musical or melodic. Cultural determinants must play a major role for music as well as for ethics. My point is simply that there is no one true or best ethical theory based on any homoversal principles, simply because there are no theories that are not culturally bound.

2. I believe, however, that there is another way to interpret Rosemont’s alternative to what he calls relativism. Let us go back to Richard Rorty. Rorty observes that “relativism is the traditional epithet applied to pragmatism by realists,” because they mistakenly accuse the pragmatist of holding that every belief is as good as every other, the first meaning of “relativism.” Ironically, pragmatists (of which Rorty is one) are relativists, but only in the third sense. There are really no self-respecting philosophers who are relativists in the first sense. Pragmatists hold the ethnocentric third view that “there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society—ours—uses in one or another area of inquiry” (Rorty 1991, 23).

Rorty explains that pragmatists are not realists because they reject the idea that anyone’s views correspond to the nature of things. They think rather

[T]hat the very flexibility of the word “true”—the fact that it is merely an expression of commendation—insures its univocie. The term “true,” on his account, means the same in all cultures, just as equally flexible terms like “here,” “there,” “good,” “bad,” “you,” and “me” mean the same in all cultures. But the identity of meaning is, of course, compatible with diversity of reference, and with diversity of procedures for assigning the terms. So he feels free to use the term “true” as a general term of commendation in the same way as his realist opponent does—and in particular to use it to commend his own view. (23)
One can therefore rightfully reject moral or ethical realism and yet not be forced to take the position that “every theory is as good as every other.” One can be a pragmatic relativist and reject as meaningless or empty the realist idea of a theory being true because it corresponds to “the way things are.” If we eliminate that option, it makes perfectly good sense, contrary to Rosemont’s fears, to argue for a particular view of human nature and a way of life, even if there are no culturally independent grounds for settling the argument. If we eliminate that option, whether or not a theory is true depends on how successful you are in justifying that theory to those who are open to your arguments, those with a reasonable ear. You should not be deterred nor, for that matter, surprised, if a fanatic is unmoved by your arguments.

I propose therefore that we take Rosemont at his word when he “poses for our consideration,” that is, commends to us, an ethical theory based on a newly constructed concept-cluster “that can be applicable to, understood and appreciated by, all of the world’s people.” But we will not take him to be saying, as he implied, that this is to be a true theory that the world should accept. We will take him to be saying that this will be a true theory because (we hope) all reasonable people who constitute the vast majority of the world will accept it. As William James would say, truth is something that happens to an idea.

3. Rosemont is thinking of a theory representative of the Confucian Way, but not the ethical view of classical Confucianism per se. It must be a contemporary theory, a theory for us now, and as such it must address the question of human rights, a concept that did not exist in Confucius’ time. That is to say, the idea of human rights must lie at the heart of any ethical theory that has a chance of being accepted by all of the world’s people. I am not here to do Rosemont’s work for him (nor am I capable of doing it). But I do want to say a word about why I think this effort has a chance of succeeding.

To begin with, I was struck by a remark in a talk Rosemont gave in the fall of 2002 at my school, Trinity University, entitled, “Individual Rights Versus Social Justice: A Confucian Meditation.” The context was the current East-West debate over the nature and scope of human rights, where Western democracies favored the rights of individual freedom, the so-called first generation rights, and Asian nations favored the rights to have one’s minimal needs satisfied, second generation rights. To the best of my memory, what Rosemont said was that, in the construction of an ethical theory, it is “conceptually more difficult to move from first generation to second generation rights on the ‘rugged individualism’ model of being human than it is
to go from second to first in the Confucian vision.” I instinctively thought that what he said was not only true and symptomatic of what divides East and West; it holds the key to a way out of the impasse. I am inclined to make the stronger claim, that you cannot derive second generation rights from first generation rights, but you can, from the Confucian ethical perspective, derive first generation rights from second generation rights. But I can only at this time give the beginnings of an argument for this thesis.

It seems evident to me that within the framework of rights-based morality and the individualistic concept of a person, you can only give “lip service” to second-generation rights. The fundamental reason is contained in John Rawls’ dictum that the right is prior to the good. What this means, according to Michael Sandel, is that under the assumption that

Society [is] composed of a plurality of persons, each with its own aims, interests, and conceptions of the good, [it is] best arranged when it is governed by principles that do not presuppose any particular conception of the good; what justifies these regulative principles above all is not that they maximize the social welfare or otherwise promote the good, but rather that they conform to the concept of right [or “just”], a moral category given prior to the good and independent of it. (Sandel, 1)

It therefore follows, as Sandel again puts it,

Justice is not merely one value among others, to be weighed and considered as the occasion arises, but the highest of all social values, the one that must be met before others can make their claim…and when justice issues in certain individual rights [Sandel means first-generation rights], even the general welfare cannot override them. (16)

Some philosophers like Thomas Nagel maintain that the priority of rights of individual freedom “presupposes not just a neutral theory of the good, but a liberal individualistic conception [of the good] according to which the best that can be wished for someone is the unimpeaded pursuit of his own path, provided that it does not interfere with the rights of others” (Nagel, 9-10). Rawls disagrees, maintaining that in a society where individuals are free to choose their own ends, “we need not suppose…that people never make substantial sacrifices for one another, since moved by affection and ties of sentiment they often do, but [and here is the crucial point] such

3 I had attributed the stronger claim to Rosemont in an earlier version of this paper, and he kindly corrected me in his helpful comments on that version. I am grateful for his close reading of that version of the paper.
actions are not demanded as a matter of justice by the basic structure of society” (Rawls 1971, 178).

The difference between Nagel and Rawls is insignificant. They are only saying in different ways that individuals are not morally required or obligated to act for the welfare of others. This is tantamount to saying that the denial of second-generation rights is consistent with the theory of rights based morality in which human beings necessarily have first-generation rights, so you certainly cannot derive second-generation rights from first generation rights.

Those who conceive of morality as Nagel and Rawls do dismiss off-hand the possibility that the good can be prior to the right. They assume that to conceive of the good as prior to the right is to subordinate or define what is right or just in terms of the purported moral ends of a society. But to them this can only mean imposing some person or group’s view of the good on everyone else. This is why Rawls claims that “a continuing shared understanding of one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power.” He goes as far as to say that we cannot even share the “reasonable liberalism of Kant and Mill” without the sanction of state power (Rawls 1996, 37).

Confucius would maintain, on the contrary, that it is when there is no shared understanding of the good that state power must be employed to keep people in line. This is because Confucius did not mean by a “shared understanding of the good,” a doctrine of what is good or a comprehensive moral theory or even a set of social ends. He means a shared understanding of a comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral way of life, and when that way of life prevails, the Dao, “responsibility for effecting socio-political order [would] not lie with the ministers [and] the common people do not debate political issues” (Analects 16-2. my translation). That is to say, the common people will be engaged meaningfully in the political life of the state and not left to merely “debate political issues (or to listen to the meaningless debates on the talk shows).” There will be, in other words, a true democracy. But to have a true democracy, the good must be prior to the right.

The notion of the good being prior to the right in the Confucian sense, means that the rights of individuals must arise out of the concern of members of a community for the welfare and the life of each other, out of a shared understanding of the good life. There are no more basic obligations than the obligations of parents to feed, clothe, and house those in their care. Why not say that it is their right to be fed, clothed, and housed. In a Confucian society, such rights are extended by the state to all its people,
though they did not speak in terms of rights. If these rights are based on the concern that each one of us lives the good life, the worthy life, then more mature, responsible rights of individual freedom, the so-called first generation rights, should follow, for freedom is certainly part of the good life.

We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that freedom or the right to pursue one's ends takes on a different character within a non-Western or non-liberal framework. One major difference between this conception of rights and the conception of Western rights-based morality is that for the former, but not the latter, first and second generation rights are interdependent; they are not really two kinds of rights. In Asian societies, rights of freedom carry with them the moral responsibility to respect the common good. Tai Hung-Tao would go even further. He would contend that “The Confucian code of ethics recognizes each individual's right to personal dignity and worth, but this right was not considered innate within each human soul... but had to be acquired by his living up to the code” (Tai, 88). Human beings have to learn how to be free. Jack Donnelly, on the other hand, in defending the Western conception of rights, emphatically rejects the typical Asian position that, for example, “freedom of speech entails a corresponding duty not to disseminate lies, not to incite communal and religious hatred, and generally not to undermine the moral fabric of society.” According to Donnelly, “A right to free speech has no logical connection to an obligation not to disseminate lies. Society and the state may legitimately punish me for spreading vicious lies that harm others. Those penalties, however, rest on the [first generation] rights or interests of those who I harm, not on my right to free speech” (Donnelly, 115). In short, freedom of speech, like all other freedoms, is supposed to be absolute and unconditional. But it should be evident that such a doctrine only makes sense within the framework of rights-based morality, which is itself based on a problematic and suspect conception of what it is to be a human person.

I argued earlier that the denial of second-generation rights is consistent with the principles of rights-based morality, so you cannot derive second-generation rights from first-generation rights. We now see that the denial of first-generation rights is inconsistent with the Confucian vision of the good, and in that sense, you can at least say, loosely to be sure, that first-generation rights follow from second-generation rights.

There is no doubt that freedom, genuine freedom, is a high value in a Confucian society, but what is most important is the Confucian belief that individual freedom is not possible unless we nurture the attitude of “[establishing] others in seeking to establish themselves and [promoting] others in
seeking to get there themselves. Correlating one’s conduct with those near at hand,” Confucius said, “can be said to be the method of a person of Jen” (*Analects*, 6.30). Why not also say that it is the method of democracy, the method of a free, self-governing society.

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Rawls, Rosemont, and
the Debate over Rights and Roles

Erin M. Cline

Introduction

Henry Rosemont, Jr. writes that the Confucian tradition offers “a human capacity to go beyond the specific spatio-temporal circumstances in which we exist, giving our personhood the sense of humanity shared in common, and thereby a sense of strong continuity with what has gone before and what will come later” (Rosemont 1991, 90-91). The continuity Rosemont describes highlights the fact that the Confucian tradition has given more attention to the ethical significance of familial relationships than other philosophical traditions. Scholars of early Confucian thought are indebted to Rosemont not only for calling attention to the contributions the Confucians have made philosophically, but for the way in which he has done this. Perhaps more than any other scholar of his generation, Rosemont has placed the Confucian and Western traditions in dialogue with one another, showing us how we might begin to understand very different discussions in relation to each other. Some of his most important work concerns the issue of personhood, and in essays such as “Rights-Bearing Individuals and Role-Bearing Persons,” Rosemont argues that early Confucian philosophy formulates a view of personhood that was never formulated by philosophers in the Western tradition.

Rosemont describes the Confucian view of personhood as seeing humans as entirely defined by their roles and relationships with others. He presents this view as an alternative to that which he believes is represented in the writings of philosophers in the Western liberal tradition, where human beings are seen as “purely rational, self-seeking, autonomous individuals” (89). John Rawls is among the philosophers Rosemont considers as a

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1 My thanks to Philip J. Ivanhoe and Michael R. Slater for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.
representative of the Western view, and he maintains that Rawls’ political liberalism is characteristic of it (77, 84-86).

In this paper, I examine Rawls’ view of personhood in relation to Rosemont’s discussion. In the first part of the paper I provide an overview of Rosemont’s description of the Confucian and Western liberal views of personhood. In the second part of the paper I discuss two common misunderstandings of Rawls’ view concerning the nature of the original position, and the role communities play in shaping individual identities. In the third part of the paper I discuss Rawls’ idea of “free and equal persons” and the distinction he makes between political and moral autonomy. I argue that Rawls’ work does not exemplify the Western liberal view of personhood as Rosemont describes it, and I show how Rawls’ view is distinct from Rosemont’s characterizations of both the Confucian and Western liberal views of personhood. By exploring the differences between these views, I hope to show how Rosemont’s account of the Confucian and Western views establishes a continuum along which various models of the self can be mapped and better understood in relation to one another.

I. Rosemont’s Two Views of Personhood

One of two basic claims Rosemont makes about the Confucian view of personhood is that human beings are fundamentally social creatures. He argues that the early Confucians always thought of themselves in relation to others, and never as single individuals in any meaningful sense. Paraphrasing Herbert Fingarette, Rosemont says that from a Confucian standpoint, “unless there can be two human beings, there can be no human beings” (84). This view insists on the “altogether social nature of human life, for the qualities of persons, the kinds of person they are, and the knowledge and attitudes they have are not exhibited in actions, but only in interactions, human interactions” (89). According to Rosemont, this means that the self consists entirely of one’s relationships with others. “I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others... it would be misleading to say that I ‘play’ or ‘perform’ these roles; on the contrary, for Confucius I am my roles” (90).

The second basic claim Rosemont makes is that the Confucian view of personhood leaves no room for a “free, autonomous, choosing self” (91). Rosemont writes that according to the Confucian perspective, “in

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2 See Fingarette 1983.
an important sense I do not achieve my own identity” because “my life as a
teacher can only be made significant by my students, my life as a husband
by my wife, my life as a scholar only by other scholars” (91). He writes that
although “a great deal of personal effort is required to become a good per-
son….nevertheless, much of who and what I am is determined by the oth-
ers with whom I interact, just as my efforts determine in part who and what
they are at the same time” (91). In other words, we do not choose the roles
that identify us because others must relate to us in a particular way before
we can be those roles. Our identity, Rosemont says, is conferred upon us.
According to Rosemont, then, the early Confucians see the self as entirely
comprised of a set of roles, which we cannot wholly choose to create or
make significant ourselves because we exist only in relation to others.

Rosemont offers this view against the background of the Western
liberal view of the self, which he believes is expressed in the claim that we
have certain rights by virtue of being human. He writes that the concept of
individual human beings as rights-bearers “is not itself in serious question in
contemporary Western moral, social, and political thinking,” citing rights-
based conceptions in deontological, utilitarian, and virtue traditions of
moral philosophy, as well as in contemporary debates about abortion,
euthanasia, and the environment (Rosemont 1991, 72, 76-77). Rosemont
goes on to say that the concept of rights “thoroughly permeates contempo-
rary Western moral and political thinking, even for those philosophers who
do not give it pride of place in their moral and political thinking” (78).

According to Rosemont, rights-based thinking has prevailed be-
cause it is grounded in the idea that human beings are autonomous indi-
nuals (78-84). For Rosemont, this idea entails “a sense-absorbent and
logically calculating mind altogether discontinuous with an emotively evalu-
ating (but probably valueless) body…” (84). Rosemont seems to associate
autonomy with an isolated form of life in which individuals make decisions
in the absence of attachments, relationships, or emotional ties of any sort.

Employing altogether implausible hypothetical examples, contempo-
rary rights-based moral philosophy...is no longer grounded in the real
hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, ideas, and attitudes of flesh and blood hu-
man beings. Since the time of Descartes, Western philosophy—not
alone moral philosophy—has increasingly abstracted a purely cognizing
activity away from concrete persons and determined that this use of
logical reasoning in a disembodied “mind” is the choosing, autonomous
essence of individuals…. (84)

Rosemont’s critique of Rawls’ work centers on this set of claims.
He points out that “the conceptual framework of rights, within which hu-
man beings are seen as free, rationally choosing autonomous individuals, is at the heart of the problem” (Rosemont 1998, 57). Any rights-based view is symptomatic of the assumption that humans are autonomous individuals. According to Rosemont, Rawls’ idea that “free, autonomous individuals are already cut off from each other in the original position” is antithetical not only to a view which sees persons as fundamentally interconnected, but also one which views persons as entirely comprised of their roles (59).

Rosemont finds the Confucian account more plausible, and more appealing, than the Western account he describes. He writes, “What the early Confucian writings reflect…is that there are no disembodied minds, nor autonomous individuals…” (Rosemont 1991, 84). Further, “…there can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly” (90). As Rosemont sees it, I am a daughter, a sister, a fiancée, a friend, a student, and a teacher. Without these roles, nothing constituting a coherent “self” remains.

II. Two Misunderstandings of Rawls

In this section, I discuss two misunderstandings of Rawls’ work that often lead to a mischaracterization of his view of persons. The first misunderstanding I wish to address is evident in Rosemont’s claim that “free, autonomous individuals are already cut off from each other in the original position.” This claim reflects the view that Rawls sees the essential nature of persons as independent of and prior to their attributes and relationships, and it arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of the original position. In A Theory of Justice Rawls says that the original position is “a purely hypothetical situation” (Rawls 1999a, 104). He does not mean that humans could survive in the absence of their attachments to others, their values, or other aspects of their identity. The original position is not a theory of human nature, or a model of how people really are. Rather, Rawls uses the original position to show how we should make decisions about social justice in the absence of certain biases. The original position represents a uniquely human capacity, and an important part of what makes us human. Let us recall the reason why Rawls employs the original position.

According to Rawls, “the fact that we occupy a particular social position is not a good reason for us to accept, or to expect others to accept, a conception of justice that favors those in this position” (Rawls 1985, 237). Here, Rawls refers to the criterion of reciprocity, which emphasizes our recognition of reasons that are acceptable to others. We learn what reasons
are acceptable to others by determining whether or not they would be acceptable to us if we were positioned similarly. Rawls continues:

To model this conviction in the original position the parties are not allowed to know their social position; and the same idea is extended to other cases. This is expressed figuratively by saying that the parties are behind a veil of ignorance. In sum, the original position is simply a device of representation: it describes the parties, each of whom are responsible for the essential interests of a free and equal person, as fairly situated and as reaching an agreement subject to appropriate restrictions on what are to count as good reasons. (237)

The original position is an “artificial device of representation,” and so it does not require a person to abandon her actual roles and relationships (Rawls 1993, 28). Rawls says that the original position does not presuppose a metaphysical conception of self, nor does it have metaphysical implications for the self because our reasoning in the original position does not commit us to a metaphysical doctrine of the self. The idea that the original position presupposes a metaphysical conception of the self—one which sees the essential nature of persons as independent of and prior to their attributes and relationships—is, as Rawls puts it, “an illusion caused by not seeing the original position as a device of representation” (Rawls 1985, 238).

Further, Rawls argues that even as a device of representation, the original position does not give us a picture of individuals who are cut off from other members of society. He writes, “…the persons in the original position are not to view themselves as single isolated individuals. To the contrary, they assume that they have interests which they must protect as best they can and that they have ties with certain members of the next generation who will also make similar claims” (Rawls 1999a, 181). Martha Nussbaum expounds on this, pointing out that the original position gives us “an account of the moral point of view, a point of view we can try to enter in real life at any time…the veil of ignorance is thus a model of one part of a person, the part that is capable of being unselfish and caring for others…. In effect, as Rawls insists, the entirety of the original position is a model of benevolence.” Why can we not simply model benevolence directly, by imagining the parties as benevolent with full information? Nussbaum reminds us of Rawls’ answer. “…[T]he original position comes, in effect, to the same thing, but with a superior economy and clarity given by the fact that we do not have to ask questions such as, How intense is the benevolence and toward whom? What information precisely? And so forth (TJ, pp. 147-9/127-9 rev.)” (Nussbaum, 492-3). With the original position, then, Rawls gives us
one aspect of moral reasoning, and not a theory of human nature or a description of the extent to which persons are identified by their relationships.

The second misunderstanding I wish to address is the claim that Rawls neglects entirely the fact that persons are indebted to their community for the way they think about themselves. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls writes that he considers the community absolutely essential to the formation of a person's identity. He acknowledges that the concepts we use to describe our lives often presuppose

...a social setting as well as a system of belief and thought that is the outcome of the collective efforts of a long tradition...We need one another as partners in ways of life that are engaged in for their own sake, and the successes and enjoyments of others are necessary for and complementary to our own good. (Rawls 1999a, 458)

Indeed, one of the reasons why Rawls focuses on the basic structure of society is that “the social system shapes the wants and aspirations that its citizens come to have. It determines in part the sort of persons they want to be as well as the sort of person they are” (229). In *Political Liberalism* Rawls develops this idea further by arguing for the full publicity condition, according to which the justificatory grounds of any theory of justice must be publicly available, so that citizens are “in a position to know and to accept the pervasive influences of the basic structure that shape their conception of themselves, their character and ends” (Rawls 1993, 68).

The objection that Rawls neglects the extent to which persons are indebted to their community for the way they think about themselves has been pursued at length by a number of scholars, including Michael Sandel. In their analysis of the communitarian critique of Rawls, Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift point out that Rawls explicitly concedes the validity of Sandel's claim about the phenomenology of our moral experience (PL, p. 31), and he is happy to see such constitutive values and communal attachments flourish in the context of family life, churches, and scientific societies; what he denies is their appropriateness for the realm of politics. (Mulhall and Swift, 466)

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3 I owe this point to Stephen Mulhall’s and Adam Swift’s discussion of the development of the publicity condition in Rawls (Mulhall and Swift, 467).
5 The distinction Rawls makes between family life and the realm of politics is one of the reasons Rosemont sees Rawls' view as representing a stark contrast to the Confucian view. Although Rosemont is correct to see an important difference here, the way in which the family and the rest of society are related in discussions of a harmoniously functioning com-
III. Rawls on Freedom, Equality, and Political Autonomy

Now that we have established that Rawls does not evince a view of personhood in his discussion of the original position, and that he acknowledges and affirms the role that communities play in the formation of our identities, it is time to turn to Rawls’ own view of persons. In this paper, I will focus on the ideas of “free and equal persons” and political as opposed to moral autonomy. Before turning to Rawls’ account of these ideas, however, I wish to acknowledge the different contexts in which Rawlsian and early Confucian thought emerged.

It is clear from Rawls’ remarks about persons that his analysis is strictly political and confined in its application to a constitutional democracy. Rawls holds that in order to secure agreement between citizens on political questions of justice in a democracy, we must avoid controversial philosophical, moral, and religious questions. He stresses that this is not because these questions are unimportant, but because there are such profound differences in belief and conceptions of the good that “public agreement on the basic questions of philosophy cannot be obtained without the state’s infringement of basic liberties” (Rawls 1985, 230).

The sort of society envisioned in the Analects is, of course, quite different. The sort of pluralism that exists in a modern constitutional democracy did not exist in Confucian society. This means that the range of issues addressed by Rawls, and the way in which they are addressed, cannot be expected to coincide perfectly with the range of issues addressed in the Analects. The fact of reasonable pluralism is the reason why Rawls addresses the relationship between the private and public spheres in a way that might have been difficult for the early Confucians to imagine, and it also accounts for Rawls’ distinction between two kinds of autonomy.

In Justice as Fairness: A Restatement, Rawls writes that justice as fairness regards citizens as “free and equal.” Citizens are free in that “they conceive of themselves and of one another as having the moral power to have a conception of the good.” Rawls understands a conception of the good as “an ordered family of final ends and aims which specifies a per-

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munity in Confucianism, or a well-ordered society in Rawls, is a different issue, and so I will set it aside for now in order to continue my analysis of Rosemont’s and Rawls’ accounts of personhood. However, I will return to this issue briefly in my discussion of moral and political autonomy later in this paper.
son’s conception of what is of value in human life or, alternatively, of what is regarded as a fully worthwhile life” (Rawls 2001, 19). Part of what it means for citizens to be free is that they are capable of revising and changing their conception of the good on reasonable and rational grounds, if they choose to (21). A second respect in which citizens view themselves as free, according to Rawls, is that they see themselves as “self-authenticating sources of valid claims.” This means that they are entitled to make claims on their institutions in order to advance their conception of the good, provided that it falls within the range permitted by the public conception of justice (23).

Citizens are regarded as equal in that “they are all regarded as having to the essential minimum degree the moral powers necessary to engage in social cooperation over a complete life and to take part in society as equal citizens” (20). According to Rawls, citizens have two moral powers: the capacity for a sense of justice, which includes the capacity to understand, to apply, and to act from principles of justice, and the capacity to have, to revise, and to pursue a conception of the good, discussed above. Rawls’ discussion of citizens’ equality focuses on the way citizens conduct themselves within their individual communities and within the larger, well-ordered society. Rawls notes that one’s conception of the good is typically set within and interpreted by certain comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines that exist within individual communities. “The members of a community are united in pursuing certain shared values and ends (other than economic) that lead them to support the association and in part bind them to it” (20). Citizens’ capacity for a sense of justice, on the other hand, enables them to function in a well-ordered society where not everyone shares their conception of the good. Rather, “The citizens of a well-ordered society affirm the constitution and its political values as realized in their institutions, and they share the end of giving one another justice, as society’s arrangements require” (20).

The idea of free and equal persons belongs to a political conception of justice. It is not taken from a psychological or philosophical view of personhood, although it can certainly be compatible with one or more of these conceptions. Rawls writes that political conceptions of justice are identifiable by the fact that their principles, standards, and values “are not the result of applying an already elaborated and independent religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine, comprehensive in scope and general in range” (182). Political conceptions of justice instead formulate a family of highly significant moral values that apply to the basic structure of society. These are political values, because they arise from two special features of
the political relationship—the fact that these relationships occur within the basic structure of a society which we enter only by birth and exit only by death, and the fact that it is regularly imposed on citizens, some of whom may not agree with the justificatory reasons for the basic structure of political authority (the constitution), or with the grounding of certain laws to which they are subject. In short, the political relationship is not voluntary in some of the same ways that associational, familial, and personal relationships are. That is, the latter kinds of relationships are not backed by a coercive power such as the state’s machinery for enforcing its laws, and we could, if we chose to, enter or leave these kinds of relationships (182).

The second idea I wish to focus on is Rawls’ conception of political as distinguished from moral autonomy. Much of Rosemont’s criticism of the Western liberal view concerns a particular understanding of autonomy that he attributes to Rawls. However, Rawls writes that autonomy can take two forms; it can be political or moral. Moral autonomy characterizes a way of life and reflection discussed at length by Mill in *On Liberty*, and also by Kant, and this is the sort of autonomy Rosemont has in mind when he discusses the Western conception of autonomous individuals. Rosemont sees Mill as advocating an ideal of individuality, and he argues that this view of the self is tied to the comprehensive view of Western liberalism he criticizes. In distinguishing between moral and political autonomy, Rawls agrees that moral autonomy is tied to this comprehensive view, and that is why he rejects it as appropriate for the political realm. “Whatever we may think of autonomy as a purely moral value, it fails to satisfy, given reasonable pluralism, the constraint of reciprocity, as many citizens, for example, those holding certain religious doctrines, may reject it. Thus moral autonomy is not a political value, whereas political autonomy is” (Rawls 1999b, 146).

Rawls understands political autonomy as “the legal independence and assured integrity of citizens and their sharing equally with others in the exercise of political power” (146). Whereas moral autonomy formulates an ideal of individuality and is tied to a particular understanding of personhood, political autonomy formalizes only the independence and integrity of citizens. This kind of autonomy is not a formulation of a particular view of

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6 For Rawls our ability to reflect upon and revise our attachments is of the utmost importance from the standpoint of justice. And this view is not entirely foreign to Confucianism. In the *Analects*, Kongzi instructs his disciples not to associate with certain kinds of individuals, and to explicitly seek out, and model oneself after, others (See, for example, *Analects* 1.8, 4.1, 4.25, 7.8, 9.25). This reflects the view that individuals can and sometimes should make the decision to change—and even sever entirely—the relationships that have influenced their lives and their conception of themselves in important ways.
the self, rather, it is a formulation of the capacities and opportunities individuals have to participate in the formation of the basic structure of their society, and the fact that they have a say in questions impacting it.

For the purposes of this discussion, what is important about Rawls’ discussion of citizens as free, equal, and politically autonomous is that he discusses the importance of individual capacities and opportunities while affirming the important role communities play in developing these capacities. Thus, Rawls’ view is distinct from both of the views Rosemont criticizes.

Rawls’ view represents a contrast to the Western liberal view described by Rosemont, because the latter view sees persons as individuals in isolation, achieving their own identity through an exercise of moral autonomy without a clear distinction between the two types of autonomy Rawls describes. Rosemont also says that the Western view is not grounded in the real experiences of human beings, and that it neglects emotional and personal attachments in the midst of its concern with rationality. However, based on Rawls’ remarks about the self in relation to the community, we can see clearly that he is not a proponent of, nor is his view symptomatic of, the Western liberal view of the self as Rosemont describes it. Let us review some of Rawls’ claims in order to appreciate this contrast.

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls writes that the principles of justice allow one to experience “the realization of self which comes from a skillful and devoted exercise of social duties,” and he calls this “one of the main forms of human good” (Rawls 1999a, 73). He goes on in *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, to argue for the importance of “the cooperative virtues of political life,” writing that the public recognition of the principles of justice “itself not only encourages mutual trust among citizens generally but also nurtures the development of attitudes and habits of mind necessary for willing and fruitful social cooperation” (Rawls 2001, 117). Perhaps most importantly, Rawls does not neglect the role that enduring attachments and loyalties play in the formation and development of our identity. He writes that in addition to affirming the values of political justice and working toward the embodiment of these values in political institutions and social policies, citizens

...often do have at any given time, affections, devotions, and loyalties that they believe they would not, indeed could and should not, stand apart from and evaluate objectively. They may regard it as simply unthinkable to view themselves apart from certain religious, philosophical, and moral convictions, or from certain enduring attachments and loyalties. These two kinds of commitments and attachments—political and non-political—specify moral identity and give shape to a person’s way
of life, what one sees oneself as doing and trying to accomplish in the
social world. If we suddenly lost them, we would be disoriented and un-
able to carry on. (22)

Liberal theory is underpinned by concerns about how to achieve a
community that functions well. However, my emphasis on Rawls’ discus-
sion of the way attachments and loyalties shape our identity should not be
interpreted as the claim that Rawls agrees with the Confucian account as
Rosemont understands it. There is a significant difference between these
discussions, precisely because there is more than one kind of view which
affirms the role the community plays in shaping identities. While Rose-
mont’s account of the Confucian view formulates the “altogether social
nature of human life,” arguing that we have no identity beyond our roles
and relationships with others, Rawls’ view sees these relationships as shap-
ing our identities, but not as entirely constituting them.

Conclusion

I have argued that there are important differences between Rawls’ view of
citizens as free, equal, and politically autonomous, and Rosemont’s account
of the Western liberal view, which sees persons as purely rational, self-
seeking, morally autonomous individuals. I have also shown how both of
these positions represent a contrast to the view Rosemont attributes to the
early Confucians. While Rosemont’s account of the Confucian view sees
persons as entirely comprised of their roles, Rawls’ account sees persons as
importantly influenced by their relationships and values.

As Rosemont points out, seeing one’s roles and relationships as an
important part of the formation of one’s identity is very different from see-
ing one’s roles and relationships as entirely constitutive of one’s identity.
But what I wish to highlight is the space on the continuum between the
positions he attributes to the Confucian and Western liberal traditions.
Rawls acknowledges both the importance of our autonomy, and the impor-
tance of our attachments, placing him somewhere between the Confucian
and Western positions Rosemont describes. Here we can see how the con-
tinuum that Rosemont establishes in his work is helpful in the process of
understanding the continuities and discontinuities between different views,
even when they are rooted in traditions with very different historical con-
texts.

In this regard, Rosemont’s work can help us appreciate the points
of resonance between the Rawlsian and Confucian positions, as well as the
differences between Rawls’ understanding of persons and the Western liberal and Confucian views of personhood. It is certainly the hope of this comparative philosopher that Rosemont’s work will lead the next generation of comparative philosophers to a fuller examination of the similarities and differences of all of these positions, and thus to a more accurate understanding of the range of views in both the Western and Confucian traditions. For as Rosemont has argued, these traditions surely hold the greatest resources for articulating why it is important to cultivate a sense of continuity with what has gone before and what will come later, and thus for describing the things that are most central to who we are and who we should be.  

REFERENCES


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7 My initial interest in comparative philosophy is traceable to Henry Rosemont, Jr.’s work, which was introduced to me by my first teacher of Chinese philosophy—one of Henry’s students and friends—Ronnie Littlejohn, who is also the editor of this volume. I was fortunate to receive instruction from these two fine scholars, both of whom exemplify many of the qualities of the junzi, and I am deeply indebted to both of them. Henry mentored me throughout my undergraduate and graduate careers, and I am forever grateful for his guidance, encouragement, and instruction. It is an honor to contribute to a volume of work honoring him.
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Confucianism and Democracy: Water and Fire? Water and Oil? Or Water and Fish?
In Defense of Henry Rosemont’s View

Peimin Ni

I

One of Henry Rosemont’s main contributions to the scholarship of Asian and comparative philosophy is his comparison between the Western modern Enlightenment notion of right-bearing autonomous individuals and the Confucian notion of duty-bearing relational persons. On the basis of the comparison, Rosemont sharply criticizes liberal notions of democracy and human rights, and advocates Confucian values as an alternative. In this paper I will focus on his view of democracy rather than of human rights, although I realize that the two are so intertwined that it is impossible to speak about one without mentioning the other.

The dominant view today still holds that Confucianism and democracy are like water and fire, totally incompatible and antagonistic to each other. According to this view, Confucianism is authoritarian, repressive, and typically associated with totalitarian policies, uniformity of ideology, social hierarchy, and discrimination against women. Democracy is the very opposite: It is government of the people, by the people, and for the people. It tolerates and embraces multiplicity, upholds equality and liberty. The conclusion from the contrast seems obvious—Confucianism should be rejected. In the past one hundred years or so, Chinese people have struggled hard to overcome the dominance of authoritarian governments and obtain basic human rights and democracy. As Wm. Theodore de Bary says,

In the paroxysms of revolution, and especially in the May Fourth Movement of 1919, which, as the great breaking point between old and

1 Ewing Chinn has already written about Rosemont’s theory of human rights in “The Good is Prior to the Right: Rosemont on Human Rights” in this volume.
new, is celebrated as the highest expression of the liberationist spirit, Confucianism was made to stand for all that was backward and be-nighted in China. It bore all the burden of the past, charged with innume-rable sins of the old order: political corruption and repression, the suppression of women, concubinage, female infanticide, illiteracy, etceter-a, etcetera.

Even today, de Bary says, Confucianism is still used to justify rulership by a political elite, by a party dictatorship allegedly for the people. The dramatic appearance of the “Goddess of Democracy” at Tian-an-men would never be identified with any Chinese or Confucian tradition (de Bary, 103-8). Even the Marxists condemn Confucianism as a Feudalist ideology, worse than bourgeois democracy, and consider the rejection of Confucian social and political philosophy a prerequisite for the development of capitalism, on the basis of which the proletarian revolution will take place, leading eventually to the emancipation of all individuals.

This view, however, has been seriously challenged. Many scholars have questioned it, and have proposed alternative theories of the compatibility of Confucianism and democracy and a new evaluation of the two. Some have argued that Confucianism and democracy are both valuable in their own rights. Like water and oil, they are incompatible with each other, and neither one can be inserted into the other without sacrificing the values of one or the other, but they are capable of peaceful coexistence (Chenyang Li, 172-189). Others have gone far beyond, and argued that Confucianism and democracy are actually compatible. They cite the well known passages from the Shujing 書經, “Heaven sees through what the people see, Heaven hears through what the people hear 天視自我民視, 天聽自我民聽” (Shujing, vol. 11, p. 10), “The common people are the root or foundation of a society 民惟邦本”, the Confucian teaching “In instruction, there is no such thing as social classes” (Analects, 15.39), and Mencius’ teaching “the common people are of supreme important; the altars to the gods of earth and grain come next; last comes the ruler” (Mencius, 7B:14),

etc. to show that there are resources in classical Confucianism for developing a communitarian form of democratic society. While some who try to identify resources for democracy in Confucianism presuppose the legitimacy of liberalist notion of democracy, and tailor the Confucian resources

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2 The translations of the Analects are mainly from Ames and Rosemont, and the translations of the Mencius are mainly from D. C. Lau.

3 Even though “liberal” and “liberalist” are often used as synonyms, there are subtle differences between the two. “Liberalist” refers to someone who chooses to be a liberal consciously, whereas a “liberal” may be someone who is simply influenced by others and does
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accordingly, others are critical of rights-based democracy. They even suggest that the lack of right-based democracy in China is an advantage instead of a liability. Peter Woo, for instance, argues that, because of their Confucian belief in an underlying harmony, Chinese people did not feel any urge to fight for rights and freedoms against each other or against the state (Woo, 116). Roger Ames and others have argued that rights-based democracy is detrimental to society. The emphasis on rights and the neglect of duties in the West accounts for many of its social ills (see Hsiung, 25; Xia, 190-1; Ames 1997, 192, and Hall and Ames 1999).

Among the critics of the Western liberal notions of democracy, Henry Rosemont is certainly one of the most vocal and thorough. 4 He argues that the Western liberal notions of democracy and human rights are based on the Enlightenment notion of the right-bearing autonomous rational individual. The notion, as a descriptive term, is deeply flawed. “For most of the world’s peoples,” he says,

> there are no disembodied minds, nor autonomous individuals; human relationships govern and structure most of our lives, to the point that unless there are at least two human beings, there can be no human beings. … [T]he contemporary philosophical and social scientific stereotype of a disembodied, purely logical and calculating autonomous individual is simply too far removed from what we feel and think human beings to be. (Rosemont 1991, 63)

Rosemont further argues that when the flawed Enlightenment notion of individual is applied to our social practice as the basis of prescriptive principles, it generates deep social problems. Since individual rights and social justice are very likely incompatible, there is no way we can resolve the “prisoner’s dilemma” and maldistribution of the world’s wealth on the basis of the Enlightenment’s notion of a human being. The collective good will never be obtained, and everyone will be worse off.

Rosemont argues that the Confucian notion of an embodied, relational, duty-bearing person is much more in accord with our moral intuitions. We are human beings with concrete bodies in specific spatio-temporal locations, which generate impulses, emotions, and attitudes; and

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4 Roger Ames is another. Ames and Rosemont share many views on the subject of democracy and human rights. Therefore most of what I will say about Rosemont in this paper applies to Ames as well.
these inclinations are deeply affected by our social relations and cultural traditions. We are so essentially related that we don’t just play the roles of being a father, a teacher, a friend, etc. We are these roles (72). The role-based concept of person allows each member of a society to have a clear sense of mutual dependence on other people, and to develop a sense of caring for the interest of others. He suggests, therefore, that Confucianism can be a valuable resource and a great alternative.

Rosemont’s view has been criticized in a number of ways. In the following sections of this paper I will try to articulate and discuss his view by addressing two of the criticisms that I find most significant and challenging. But before we move on to these it is necessary to make it clear that Rosemont does not make a sweeping rejection of democracy. What he rejects is the liberalist notions of democracy and human rights. These concepts are based on a false and harmful notion of human being – the Enlightenment notion of an autonomous rational individual. He does think that the notion of democracy based on the Enlightenment notion of individual is incompatible with Confucianism and should be rejected. However, Rosemont does not denounce democracy (or human rights) entirely. In The Chinese Mirror, Rosemont says clearly that he is suggesting “a somewhat different philosophical view of democracy” (93), not a view against democracy in general. His criticism of the Enlightenment notion of persons and his recommendation of the Confucian notion of persons as an alternative are intended to build a solid basis for actualizing the ideal of genuine democracy. To the question of whether we can find resources for democracy and human rights in classic Confucianism, Rosemont says his answer is both yes and no. If we define human rights and democracy as the public and political rights of autonomous rational individuals to claim their interests regardless of any conflict with the genuine interests of the community, then his answer is negative. If we define democracy and human rights as the right and duty of every member of the community to participate in public affairs and take the public welfare of all the other members as one’s own, his answer is positive (Rosemont 2001a, Section 5). This Confucian notion of democracy is fully in accord with the spirit of democracy—a way of social and political life in which democracy does not mean only a formal procedure that protects individuals from being forced upon, but promotes the life of each member of the community to be a vital part of the society of, by, and for the people. The key Confucian constituent in this theory is that

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9 Some, including myself, have given this kind of oversimplified characterization of Rosemont’s criticism of liberal democracy. See, for example, Ni 2002a, 77-78, Chenyang Li, 181, and Chan, 215-9.
there can be a good life over and above individual preferences. In this alternative democratic community, “the desired would not be equated with the desirable, and democratic political participation—being a citizen—would involve engaging in collective dialogue about the appropriate means for achieving agreed-upon ends” (Rosemont 1991, 93). Within Confucian democracy, the participation of each individual in politics is not merely an expression of personal preferences. It is a dynamic interaction and dialogue with other members of the community, which does not and will never occur in “the economic and political marketplaces of capitalism” (98).

II

One criticism of Rosemont’s view is that he compares the ideal Confucian system of righteous rulers, which has seldom, if ever, existed in practice, with the worst consequences in actual practices of liberal ideas (Li Xiaorong, 16-17). To compare the best of an idealized and distant Confucian theory with the worst aspects of a liberal Western reality of course inevitably works to the former’s favor (Svensson, 57-8). It is asymmetrical, and therefore unfair. One might even suggest that Rosemont’s approach succumbs to a romantic longing for a lost traditional ideal, and an old tendency to romanticize a foreign society when facing problems in one’s own.

There is indeed an asymmetry in Rosemont’s comparison. He tells us that the Confucianism he advocates is not the kind that was practiced by the “authoritarian rulers, self-serving officials, exploitative parents, [and] dull pedants;” it is rather classic Confucianism the ideal of which was never realized in imperial China (Rosemont 1991, 74). Therefore, he is not defending dogmatic insistence on social hierarchy, authoritarianism, and repressive form of government. Instead, he is advocating loving and caring relationships, a nurturing reciprocity between people in different social positions.

Now if we take the ideal of democracy, we might also be able to paint a nice beautiful picture of the real core of democracy as a government of, by, and for the people, and by claiming that this ideal, though having been implemented in some countries with certain level of success, has never been realized completely anywhere in the world. If, on the other hand, we look at the actual social consequences of Confucianism and liberal democ-

6 In fact I think Rosemont’s view that the Confucian ideal never existed in imperial China is an overstatement. It may never have existed in a broad scale in the entire nation, but it surely existed in many families and small communities.
racy, we find disheartening problems with them both.

But the asymmetry is intentional. As we put Rosemont’s point into broader perspective, we can see that the asymmetry is itself a counter balance for correcting an opposite asymmetry. Responding to the charge that he is partisan in his writings about China, Rosemont writes,

partisanship does not entail an unbalanced account; on the contrary, one of my major purposes in presenting it was to offer a balance to what I regard as ideologically skewed standard accounts, accounts that are all too common in sinological scholarship on contemporary China, and in the commercial television and print coverage of the country. (2)

Another reason for choosing the asymmetry is explained in his paper “Whose Rights? Which Democracy?” Using Alasdair MacIntyre’s words, Rosemont explains his approach:

[T]he only way to approach a point at which our own standpoint could be vindicated against some rival is to understand our own standpoint in a way that renders it from our own point of view as problematic as possible and therefore as maximally vulnerable as possible to defeat by that rival. (MacIntyre, 121)

It should be obvious then that the asymmetry does not entail that there are no values in liberalism that Rosemont could accept. He says that actually his criticisms of liberalism are mostly derived from the very values endorsed by liberals themselves. But since these basic values are deeply in conflict with some other values central to liberalism, they cannot be realized within the modern liberal tradition (Rosemont 2001a, 250). As Rosemont tells us in his recent book, *Rationality and Religious Experience*,

Whether we are ultimately autonomous individuals or co-members of the human community is of course not an empirical question, and I know of no conclusive rational argument for one or the other, a priori or otherwise. Worse, these differing views are in many ways self-prophetic; the more we believe ourselves to be essentially autonomous individuals, the more easily we become such.

Exactly because “this view is very deeply rooted in contemporary Western culture, especially in the U.S.,” and is “largely responsible for much of the malaise increasingly definitive of it” (Rosemont 2001b, 91), Rosemont calls our attention to it. Similarly, because the Confucian vision entails resources for us to overcome this malaise, he tirelessly advocates it as an alternative.

The asymmetry also does not entail that he thinks Confucianism has no need of critical examination and modern transformation. For example,
Rosemont admits that classic Confucianism must be modified to accommodate the development of contemporary moral consensus, on such things as gender equality and acceptance of different sexual orientations (Rosemont 1991, 75). But he points out that these modifications only make the respective parts of Confucianism more fully consistent with the core values of Confucianism.

The asymmetry does entail, moreover, that Chinese people need to understand their own tradition in a way that renders it as problematic as possible, and therefore as maximally vulnerable as possible to defeat by rivals. In this regard, some of my Chinese predecessors have done quite well. Contemporary New Confucians Xu Fuguan (1903-1982) and Liu Shu-hsien, for instance, have both made critical and stimulating reflections on Confucianism. Both Xu and Liu were confronted by the charge that Confucianism was an outdated basis for the Chinese political system and, even worse, that its fundamental flaws made it responsible for two hundred years of social and political crises and evils. They both believe, as Rosemont does, that the real spirit of Confucianism is quite compatible with the ideal of democracy. But they point out that Confucianism lacks something for it to work effectively at some stages of social and human development. According to classical Confucianism, says Xu, “the people were not merely ‘the ruled’ who were below the rulers; they were the representatives of Heaven and the gods, above the rulers” (Xu 1980, 51). Why then are there the evils that are contrary to the Confucian ideal? Xu says that Confucianism lacked two things: (1) external standards of conduct, and (2) a democratic political system. First, since Confucianism grounded morality internally in human nature rather than on an external source, a person can make a moral stand without relying on anything external; yet because of its internal basis Confucian morality cannot be as indisputable as the size and weight of an object, and so can easily be manipulated. For example, when Confucius’ disciple Zai Yu argued with Confucius over whether a three-year period of mourning was necessary, Confucius asked him whether he felt that his heart-mind was at ease or not. When Zai Yu replied that he felt his heart-mind was at ease, Confucius could do nothing but say “if that is the case, so be it” (Xu 1980, 180). While it is disputable whether the form of three years mourning is really necessary, the passage shows, as Xu puts it, that
even though those who are “gifted” and well-cultivated are able to take their stand by their innate strength, the less gifted and not well-cultivated still have to rely largely on external forces to stand up. (179)
Recently there have been discussions about the resources within the Confucian tradition with regard to external moral constraints on the rulers. Tu Weiming points out that, while Confucianism allows more political power in the hands of the rulers, it also puts more moral requirements on them. Quoting the saying that “rituals do not apply to ordinary people” Tu says that the higher up in the social political power, the less free a person is. “I would say that the emperor were the least free of all, because the operation of rituals makes him constrained” (Tu, 79). David Wong further points out that the way rituals work in political life has a unique advantage. He says that since a set of universally recognized moral values or overlapping consensus is hard to obtain, it is a mistake to take the search for overlapping consensus as the main strategy for ensuring a democratic system. Rituals, however, allow us to have the balance between the two extremes, i.e. simply letting disintegration happen on the one end, and using harmony as an excuse to eliminate healthy disagreements on the other end. Rituals require the participants of an encounter to have the proper attitude demanded by the particular ritual setting, and rituals themselves can stimulate, enhance, and enforce this attitude. Direct appeals will lack the force that can generate the attitude of mutual respect necessary for people to listen to others, think about what others are saying, and reach consensus. There is no language of discourse involved in ritual activities. Rationality is ambiguous in rituals, and yet the resonance of feelings is rich in content and meaning. The openness and ambiguity allows people with different life orientation to unite, and provides an emotional basis for harmony, beyond rationality (see Wong 2000).

Xu Fuguan points out that there is another external constraint - historical records. Confucians made great efforts to establish historical records and imbed moral judgments into them so that all rulers, while they may enjoy unlimited political power, are reminded that they may also face moral condemnations by ten-thousand future generations. Historically this served as a powerful constraint on the rulers.

These points are illuminating and worthy of serious investigation. But rituals function on the basis of a firmly established tradition, and in Chinese history the tradition of rituals has been greatly modified to favor

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7 The saying that “rituals do not apply to ordinary people” is accompanied by another saying “physical penal punishments do not apply to high level government officials.” Song Dynasty scholar Shi Hao says, “禮與刑常相為用。禮不下庶人，刑不上大夫。”

Confucianism and Democracy

the rulers. It would take generations of collective efforts to restore or establish a set of rituals able to implement the Confucian ideal. Moreover, for the moral condemnation of history to be effective, it must go through a person’s internal moral conscience and have its relevance be recognized. Xu’s point that Confucianism lacked an effective external constraint on a not-so-perfect society remains a valid concern.

This leads to the second point Xu makes. According to Xu’s analysis, Confucianism lacked a democratic dimension. By this he means that the Confucian tradition was concerned with how the ruler should offer benevolent government to the ruled but failed to consider how the ruled might secure good government for themselves (Xu 1980, 54-55). There was no room in the tradition for the political subjectivity necessary for political participation by the ruled. Consequently Confucian political thought could do no more in Chinese history than reduce the harms of bad government, with no effective means for preventing them. Even when the emperors and ministers were morally conscientious, there was no group in society capable of supporting them. Furthermore, the lack of room for political subjectivity entailed that political change (at least peaceful changes) had to be initiated by the imperial court rather than the society. When intellectuals wanted to influence society, their only means of doing so was by influencing the imperial court. Because Chinese intellectuals lacked a tradition of pursuing knowledge for its own sake, the only social and economic ground for their existence was in the political circle as consultants or advisors. The Chinese phrases you shi 游士 [wandering gentry] and yang shi 養士 [fostered gentry] clearly show this feature of Chinese intellectuals. “Wandering” indicates that they had no root in society; “fostered” reveals that they had no means of economic support other than being fostered by someone else. Yet both the realm of their wandering and the realm in which they were being fostered were political. So Chinese intellectuals were from the very beginning parasites of politics, beggars of the ruling class (182). 8

Xu’s analysis leads to the conclusion that it is not that Confucianism is inconsistent with a political system of the people, by the people, and for the people. It is rather that Confucianism lacks a structure that can effectively implement its ideals. Liberals such as Qi Liang are right when they point out that the idea that the people are the most important component of the society (min ben 民本) does not in itself entail democracy. It does not extend beyond enjoining the rulers to take the people’s interests seriously.

8 While this point is worthy of consideration, it may need some qualifications. See Tu Weiming, 77-81, 84-87.
This idea still emphasizes personal government by the ruler, which is contrary to democracy and the rule by law. It advises the rulers about what they should do rather than telling them what is required of them, and it assumes that the people should be treated in a certain way, instead of placing them in a position to determine their own fate (Qi, 438-440).

Another contemporary New Confucian scholar Liu Shu-hsien made a similar point. Based on the observation that Confucianism relies heavily on the moral cultivation of persons, especially the rulers, with hardly any established procedure for eliminating or even regulating corrupt-rulers, Liu claims that “we have to reject the tradition in order to reaffirm the ideal of the tradition” (Liu, 34). By rejecting the tradition, he means, of course, not rejecting the core values of Confucianism but the reliance merely on the moral character of the rulers, rather than on objective democratic procedures as well.

We should notice that Liu’s suggestion is a contextualized one, namely that it is offered for those countries (primarily China) that have not yet established democratic procedures. Whether an idea is good or not should be determined within a social and historical context. Confucianism was generated at a time when the people were burdened by heavy physical labors. They were in no position to actively participate in politics, as they lacked the education, training, or time, and it was impossible for them to be well-informed about governmental affairs. It is therefore natural for the Confucians to expect rulers to be paternalistic, and provide the best guidance for the people. After two thousand years the social conditions remain largely the same. Chinese sociologist Cao Jingqing, having spent a long time doing field studies at villages along the Yellow River, concludes that

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9 Often Confucius’ saying that “the common people can be made to follow a path, but not to know” (Analects, 8:9) is cited, along with others, as evidence that Confucianism is authoritarian, and is opposed to human freedom and democracy. But Confucius could not have meant that it would be better to keep the common people ignorant forever and unconditionally. That would be inconsistent with his philosophy of education. Confucius would never refuse to teach anyone who sincerely wants to learn (Analects, 7:7; 15:39). More likely what he meant was that before one reaches a certain level of cultivation, one is unable to fully understand the reason for behaving in a certain way; therefore, pedagogically, the rulers (as the common people’s guides) should first get people to follow the correct path rather than to understand it. His intention must be very much like the rationale behind today’s movie rating and drug regulation – before people reach a certain degree of maturity, they must be prevented from seeing or having certain things for their own good. The availability of these things tends to deprive them of the possibility of learning to follow the path that is genuinely good for them. In this sense, too much freedom is deprivation of true freedom.
[Chinese] family based farmers seldom make reflections of their own interests beyond the boundary of their village. The center of their concern is what is inside the walls of their fence. Generally speaking they are incapable of representing their own interests in political and public realms, and can only be represented by “someone else.” This “someone else,” according to Marx, has to be the emperor high above. Small farmers rely on the imperial power above them for their highest political ideals, and hope that the rain and the sunshine can fall from the above…. If this situation remains the same with no substantial improvement, regional political changes in China can only be taken as changes in political structure, not polity itself, and the changes in political structure are in fact merely changes of political terminology.

Looking at the current rural political situation [in China], we have imported a lot of “modern” formalities: We have “Villagers’ Self-governing Committee” that theoretically offers extensive self-governing powers to all villagers. We have multi-level “People’s Congress” system that gives people the rights to discuss politics, to play rolls in political decision-making processes, and to participate in governing public affairs in their community. However, for all the under-developed countries that are pressured by the developed ones to select the path of “modernization,” importing a modern political system is merely a beginning. It is a far more difficult process to cultivate the “Social-psychological culture” that is necessary for the effective operation of the modern system. From my observation, the imported terminologies currently introduced to our rural areas are still merely drops of oils flowing on the surface of thick layers of traditional culture and modes of behavior. (Cao, 76-77)

A democratic system will have less reliance on the moral quality of the rulers; the leader of a nation does not have to be a sage king. This is an advantage. But as J. S. Mill pointed out, democracy requires a certain level of maturity of its participants. To say the very least, a modest level of intellectual development is necessary for a workable democracy, since, as Joel Kupperman puts it with typical humor, it “scarcely can flourish if most voters have very short attention spans and are easily captured by slogans” (Kupperman, 142). The ideal of democracy has to rely on the moral quality of the participants as well. A democratic government may pass a law that allows child pornography as a freedom of expression. Socrates was condemned through a democratic procedure. It is obvious that if the ideal of democracy is to be fully realized, it has to be more than a procedure. It requires moral cultivation and a sense of connectedness, caring, and ultimately, as Rosemont points out, a role- and duty-based notion of persons. XU Fuguan characterizes it well when he says that, while the ideal of Confucianism has to be achieved by establishing democracy, a “democratic po-
itical system can be firmly established and fully utilized only when it takes a step forward to accept Confucian thought” (Xu 1980, 53 and 60). In the ideal Confucian society the ruler and the ruled are in a morally reciprocal relation, not in a right-enforcement relation. Morality is the common ground that makes us all human. When we are all able to manifest our moral virtue to our best ability, we can live with others (and meanwhile forget the otherness) on the common ground of being human. That is the purpose and highest ideal of politics (49). The relationships maintained by legal rights are at their best external relations. External relations are not reliable, and do not allow human nature to develop freely, unless they are grounded on internal relations. To govern by virtue is to establish internal relations between individuals through the moral virtues that everyone possesses. From the Confucian point of view this is the only natural and rational relation (50). In the ideal society democracy and human rights may still be present, but few feel the need to use the language of rights. To use Zhuangzi’s analogy: When the shoes fit, one forgets their existence. Or to make a Confucian analogy: A country is like a family. When the children are small, we expect good parents to guide the children which sometimes requires the exercise of authority and paternalism. When the children grow up, good parents are able to exercise more democracy – respecting the children’s privacy and rights to make their own decisions. Finally in the ideal state every member of the family is able to live in the family with a feeling of full participation and mutual trust, no one feels the need to invoke the language of rights or to appeal to a strict democratic procedure. Children normally do not have as much authority as adults, and the voices of those who have higher moral quality and wisdom are taken more seriously than others’. But children are listened to, and not disregarded simply because they are not yet 18 years old.

III

Another significant criticism of Rosemont’s theory concerns his interpretations of liberalism and Confucianism. Li Xiaorong says, “Liberals do not need to be committed to the metaphysical ‘person’ as rendered in the Enlightenment model.”

In fact, the liberal view is a moral imperative that individuals be free to question their participation in existing social practices, and choose not to participate, if these practices should seem not worth pursuing upon critical reflection. Individuals may be born into and raised up to believe
in particular religious, social, economic, sexual, or political relationship; but they do not have to see these relationships as fixtures, essence, and core, of the “self.” (Li Xiaorong, 17)

A similar point is made by Joseph Chan, more specifically with regard to human rights. He argues that

Human rights are rights that people have solely by virtue of being human, irrespective of sex, race, culture, religion, nationality, or social position. But this concept of human rights does not presuppose or imply that human beings can be thought of as having none of these attributes. What it asserts is rather a normative claim: one’s sex, race, or culture is morally irrelevant insofar as one’s entitlement to basic human rights is concerned. Similarly, the concept of human rights does not imply that humans are asocial beings with interests independent of and prior to society, quite the contrary. The international charters of human rights include rights that protect those interests of an individual that are social in nature. (Chan, 216)

I am sure Rosemont would be relieved if liberalism were indeed not committed to the descriptive metaphysical view of autonomous individuals. Because what worries him is exactly the fact that liberals characteristically rely on this metaphysical view as a basis for their normative principles, either explicitly or implicitly. A central tenet of liberalism is the right of individuals to be left alone to pursue their own ideas of the good, and liberal democracy is supposed to protect this right. But this tenet makes sense only if liberals maintain the idea of “the separateness of persons” as Robert Nozick puts it (Nozick, 34) or “the distinctness of person,” in John Rawls’ words (Rawls 1971, 27, 29). Marx also has characterized the liberal notion of a right as the right of “the separation of man from man” (see Marx, 24-25).10 Now if a liberal is willing to admit (consistently) that human beings are essentially related to other beings, he would have to give up the claim that “I don’t need to care about the welfare of the others” (i.e. “I have the right not to take up my duty”), or “I desire this, and I don’t care whether this is desirable or not” (i.e. “I have the right to not to consider justice”). Though it is questionable whether one can remain a liberal without endorsing these claims, Rosemont would surely be happy if it were so.

10 I would like to thank Win-chiat Lee for calling my attention to these remarks when he was commenting on a paper of mine at the 2000 Pacific APA meeting.
Chan also complains that Rosemont failed to interpret Confucianism properly. With reference to Rosemont’s role-based interpretation of Confucian ethics, Chan says,

Although the sites for the realization of ren are commonly found in personal relationships such as those of father-son and husband-wife, there are nonrelational occasions when moral actions are also required by ren. That is to say, not all moral duties in Confucianism arise from social institutions or relationships. (Chan, 218)

He cites Mencius’ famous example of a child on the verge of falling into a well to show that “a man with ren would be moved by compassion to save the child, not because he had personal acquaintance with the child’s parents, nor because he wanted to win the praise of his fellow villagers, but simply because of his concern for the suffering of a human person.” He also cites Confucius’ saying that one should “love the multitude at large” (Analects, 1.6), etc. to show that Confucian morality applies to everyone, not merely the specified ones (218).

With regard to whether Confucian ethics extends to non-relational occasions, we have to be careful about what we mean by “role” and “relational.” If we interpret roles and relations narrowly, as strictly personal, then it is true that classical Confucianism goes far beyond that. Humans have very personal relations, as in father-son, husband-wife; they also have less personal roles and relations. A person is related, for example, to a family, a village, a larger community, and even to human beings as a whole species. These less personal relations are nevertheless relations, and Confucians must specify their relations to each of these groups in order to act morally toward them. The well known distinction between Confucian ethics and Moist ethics is exactly that the Confucian love and duty are specified according to different relationships, and the Moist love is not. It is also well known that the Confucian point is not that we should not love and care for those who are less closely related to us; it is rather that we should extend our love as broadly as possible, even though we start with, and give priority to, those who are more closely related to us. In the broadest sense, not only are “All within the four Seas” “brothers” (Analects, 12.5), but we are intrinsically related to the entire universe. This is exactly the metaphysical ground of the Confucian environmental ethics, although obviously, when we compare, say the value of a horse and the value of a fellow human being, the Confucian would definitely give priority to the latter (Analects, 10.17). For this reason I think Confucian environmental ethics is a different kind of anthropocentrism, or, as Tu Weiming calls it, an “anthropocosmic vision.”
In Confucianism, humans are valued more highly than other species, but they are also responsible for caring for other species.

Li Xiaorong’s criticism actually entails more than an interpretation of liberalism. Li says, “People are certainly embedded in specific ends or purposes shaped by communal values. But ends and purposes are not forever attached to particular, fixed communal values” (Li Xiaorong, 18). She also points out that within Confucianism there is a recognition that, “though deeply entrenched in relationships, obligations and their conventional interpretations, human beings remain able, and should aspire, to question, re-examine, or reject socially given roles and ends upon reasonable, reflective judgment” (20). In his version of Confucian democracy Rosemont seems to have over stressed the sharing of community values and engagement in “collective dialogue about the appropriate means for achieving agreed-upon ends” (Rosemont 1991, 93), and to have neglected the critical re-examination and re-formulation of the ends themselves. This is particularly disconcerting because, says Svensson,

> today’s authoritarian regimes in Asia use the common good, defined by themselves, as a pretext to clamp down on individual dissent. In an authoritarian political system, to emphasize consensus and expect people to shoulder duties while ignoring their individual rights only serves to benefit the power holders. (Svensson, 57-8)

There is indeed a rich resource in classical Confucianism for an individual to dissent from popular or state sanctioned values. Confucius himself was a dissident. Likewise, QU Yuan, a famous dissident of the Chu state during the Spring and Autumn period has been highly regarded by the Confucian tradition. “If we do not pay adequate attention to this side [of Confucianism], and only emphasize social responsibilities of individuals and the spirit of serving the society, then we would be neglecting many important resources in Confucianism since the pre-Qin period with regard to individual self-determination [自主] and the spirit of resistance,” says TU Weiming (Tu, 74).

Obviously Li’s criticism is based on a central idea of liberalism, namely that individuals should have the right to accept or reject the communal values, and have their voices heard in the political arena, regardless of their specific roles or beliefs. Her view is philosophically challenging because an adequate answer to her criticism has to address the issue of whether the recognition of free choice of values entails a denial of the relatedness that Rosemont repeatedly emphasizes. Does a person have to be constrained by socially and culturally constructed values or can one make
autonomous decisions? The answer requires a reconciliation of the Confucian notion of contextualized persons with self-determination, which is equally recognized by Confucianism.

I do not think Rosemont intends to reject the view that a Confucian must recognize both a person’s ability and right to critically examine and even reject existing social values, and the moral imperative of exercising this ability and right. Indeed Rosemont is himself an active critic of the existing Western social values. What he means, I think, is that one cannot make choices out of nowhere. Choices must be situated within inclinations of the body, emotions of the heart, and social relationships of the community. I have argued elsewhere that the Confucian account of freedom is actually a very convincing alternative to the dominant Western notion of freedom (see Ni 2002b). Here I will summarize the relevant parts of that paper to answer Li’s challenge.

The Confucian account of freedom entails two major points: First, it denies the freedom of indifference, and second, it endorses the freedom of spontaneity. Not only is it impossible for anyone to be free from dispositions, but even if we assume that one could be totally indifferent to dispositions, such a person would be like Buridan’s ass, which starved to death between two equally good piles of hay because it could not find a reason to go to one pile and not the other. Some may take Buridan’s ass as an exceptional case, since people rarely confront alternatives that are exactly equal in goodness. But in every rational deliberation, if one does not have any inclination, how can one find reason to choose one alternative and not another? Furthermore, if freedom is indifference, the person should be indifferent to the choice she makes and be able to choose between making the choice and not making the choice. The person has to choose the choice, and for the same reason, she has to choose the choice to choose the choice. This regress will go backward infinitely. The result is obvious—the person will not be able to make any choice, unless, at some point she lets it go and simply chooses! Once when Confucius was asked whether a person should think three times before taking an action, Confucius said “twice is enough” (Analects, 5.20). Clearly Confucius was aware of the fact that too much deliberation is restrictive, and having to deliberate too much is a sign of lacking freedom. (Ni 2002b, 125)

For Kant, our desires and aversions reflect the natural aspect of ourselves. They are governed by causation and cannot govern themselves. Only pure reason, in John Rawls’ words, can be the “court of appeal concerning its own constitution and its principles and guidelines for directing its own activities” (Rawls 2000, 280). The Confucian would say, however,
that absolute spontaneity is still spontaneity—it is impossible for reason to appeal its own decisions endlessly. Secondly, if it makes sense to call absolute spontaneity a state of freedom, it makes more sense to speak of cultivated spontaneity as a state of freedom. In the Kantian absolute spontaneity, pure reason is not yet in harmony with inclinations, and is therefore endangered by predeterminism from the natural forces of desires and aversions. In Confucian cultivated spontaneity, the desires and aversions are attuned and are therefore no longer purely “natural” forces. They have been modified and purified by the subject and are therefore in harmony with moral reason. They become the embodiment or the materialization of moral reason. This harmony allows the individual’s moral actions to be more fully her own than the Kantian absolute spontaneity, in which the moral actions are still partially against the agent herself (Ni 2002b, 127).

Secondly, Confucian freedom entails relatedness. Even though Confucius never dealt with the issue of freedom directly, we can speculate that he would endorse the view that relatedness is a necessary condition for one to be free! Just as a person swimming freely in water must have a harmonious relation with the water, and water is the necessary condition for the swimmer to have such freedom, a person can have freedom in a society only by recognizing the necessity of her relatedness to other human beings. This relatedness does not downgrade an individual human being, to the contrary, it affirms the uniqueness of the individual. Ames and Hall say it better than I can:

A particular person is invested in personalized relationships: this son, this daughter, this father, this brother, …. In the absence of the performance of these roles, nothing constituting a coherent personality remains: no soul, no mind, no ego, not even an “I know not what.” (Hall and Ames, 209)

Shared ends are part of our relatedness. Without any shared ends with other members of the community, one has to either live apart from society, or use external force to fight against it. Democracy works only when there is a minimum set of values shared by all its participants.

Now it is clear that Rosemont’s emphasis on “agreed-upon ends” is again an intentionally chosen asymmetry – an emphasis on something that has not received adequate attention, in order to achieve the balance of the whole.
Having laid out the above analysis and arguments, it is now time to state my conclusion. Are Confucianism and democracy compatible? The answer from Rosemont is “yes” and “no.”

It is “no,” if we are speaking about the liberalist democracy of, by, and for autonomous rational individuals. Confucianism and this kind of democracy are more like fire and water than oil and water. They cannot co-exist peacefully together, as the insistence on autonomous individuals will inevitably damage the kind of human relationships that Confucians would like to build, and the Confucian ideals would inevitably require that one live as a responsible member of the community.

The answer would be “yes,” if we are speaking about the highest aims of democracy – human flourishing, a government of, by, and for the embodied and related people. Confucianism and this kind of democracy are like water and fish. Fish cannot survive without water, and water cannot become a meaningful habitat for fish without fish in it.

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Getting Rights Right

Herbert Fingarette

Introduction

In his essay, “Why Take Rights Seriously?” Henry Rosemont declares that, “The concept of [human] rights thoroughly permeates our moral and political thinking” (Rosemont 1988, 170). He adds that, however fallibly, our political reasoning and argument proceed within the framework of this doctrine when ultimate issues are at stake.

Although in one form or another the doctrine of human rights receives near universal and unreserved acclaim in the Europeanized Western world, there have been dissenting voices. Henry Rosemont is one of those who has been a powerful critic of human rights doctrine. He believes that “…the conceptual framework within which . . . rights-oriented theories find their place is fundamentally flawed…” (Rosemont 1991, 60; 1988). Until now I have been inclined to think along lines similar to his on some of the chief issues he raises. Although in my opinion he overstates his case, he has been a groundbreaker, and has inspired me to re-think the issues.

I now see the issues in a new light. My difference with Rosemont now is not so much with him in particular. It rests upon a very different view of what it means to have human rights. However, philosophical discussions of human rights have commonly centered on other questions.

1 Authoritative among these was the 1993 Bangkok Declaration by representatives of Asian government. The declaration professed commitment to universal human rights, but surrounded it with so many caveats as to render the doctrine toothless.

2 In my response to Rosemont’s essay on my work (Rosemont 1999, Fingarette 1991) I opened with the general statement, “Rosemont is correct when. . . he hypothesizes that I share his grave reservations about the concept of rights” (Fingarette 1991, 189). But in elaborating my position, I was more precise. I said, “And indeed I am quite prepared to attack the doctrine of individual rights – attack it at least to the extent of arguing that it is not so purely beneficent a doctrine as we tend to assume today. Along with its major benefits it has profound potential as a socially disruptive and anti-human force” (Fingarette 1991, 191).
The *Declaration of Independence* states that “among” our fundamental rights are the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But the qualifying term “among” leaves the door open for other such rights. *The French Declaration of the Rights of Man* opens the door wider and lists thirteen human rights. In our time, the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* proposed explicitly some 256 universal and inalienable rights. Each of these rights is in turn multiple, since each is to apply without regard to race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.3

Among the other issues commonly explored are the justification of the doctrine, its application, and its universality. The only one of these issues I will discuss is the universality of human rights. But before doing that, it is essential to indicate how human rights have been generally understood, and how, as I argue, they ought to be understood.

I will focus attention on the rights to life, liberty, and the specific liberty of free speech. These will serve for my purposes here since they are generally agreed to be among the human rights, and they appear in the principal documents.4

My concern here is to determine what it signifies to ascribe human rights to people, and more specifically what it means to say of a person, e.g., “You have the right to free speech.” With such understanding we can acquire a view of the social and intercultural significance of human rights doctrine that markedly differs from what is commonly assumed.

Another way to raise essentially the same issue is to ask, “What is the nature of a human right?” There have been some discussions of precisely this question. Some have held that human rights are minimum standards (Freeman 2000, 56). The *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* speaks of human rights as “a common standard of achievement.” Nickels proposes that human rights are “high priority” norms (Nickels, 36). Others have proposed that human rights are powers, or claims.

Before addressing these questions directly, it will pay to explore briefly the way the doctrine is usually understood, and particularly by critics such as Rosemont. Although his criticism may be disputed, the basic conception of what the doctrine means is shared by supporters and critics of it.

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3 Individual writers have proposed still other lists of basic human rights. Rawls, for example, proposes six basic human rights – the right to life and security, personal property, the rule of law, liberty of conscience, freedom of association, and emigration (Rawls, 68).

4 See Hohfeld; Jones.
This discussion can provide a background against which to appraise the conception that I propose.

**What’s Wrong with Human Rights Doctrine?**

For those raised in Western cultures, the virtues of the doctrine of universal and inalienable human rights need no belaboring. But its untoward consequences do, as Rosemont has so forcefully shown.

One dimension of criticism encompasses the impact of human rights doctrine within its native culture, i.e., Western culture. As Rosemont maintains, insofar as human rights doctrine is a moral basis of our culture, it defines our society as one that consists of individuals. Moreover, he says, the doctrine implies that we are each one a “freely choosing, autonomous individual” (Rosemont 1988, 167-68).

We might add that on such a view of human rights the rights to life and liberty amount to interpersonal barriers isolating individuals from one another. The right to liberty sends the message, “Keep off! Don’t get in my way.” It is like a fence around each individual, a fence that can only be opened by the owner of the fence, a fence that remains effective no matter where the individual chooses to go.

Of course this characterization of rights as barriers or fences is both metaphorical and over-simplified. For one thing, the barriers are not impenetrable. There are forms of interference which are compatible with the right to liberty. Conduct that violates the law is vulnerable to legitimate interference. It suffices for the moment that by and large, and in ways of great importance, the right to liberty is in effect a barrier to interference with what one chooses to do or say. This is a partial explanation for why Rosemont argues that our society’s deep commitment to thinking and arguing in terms of human rights is disastrous.

One effect of this understanding of the right to liberty is the widely noted trend in the U.S. to legalistic forms of confrontation in American society. When disagreements arise, they tend to be formulated in terms of violated rights, particularly legal rights. For all its virtues as a form of argumentation, legalistic argument is impersonal and formal. This constitutes another reason why rights doctrines alienate individuals. We have become a litigious society.\(^5\)

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5 Indeed Roger Ames says that “In fact reliance upon the application of law and human rights as an object of law... is fundamentally dehumanizing” (Ames 1998, 210).
His objection to our litigiousness and the alienating conflicts it causes is only one element in Rosemont’s broad ranging critique of the human rights doctrine. He places human rights doctrine at the heart of “virtually every moral and political conflict that is rending the American social fabric today.”

Human rights doctrine can also be a subversive weapon.” The history of European societies since the Enlightenment provides clear proof of the power of human rights doctrine in the shattering of the old regimes, and in the birth of new, democratic and more egalitarian societies.

On the other hand when conditions are viewed as beneficial, raising the banner of liberty rights in opposition will be viewed as subversive. We have seen examples of the subversive use of liberty rights to promote transition to dictatorial power or civil war in Latin America, in pre-Nazi Germany, and in our own Civil War. The appeal to liberty rights has in effect played an important role in the rejection of each older generation’s ways, and the familiar result that in recent times parents and offspring find difficulty in understanding each other.

Nevertheless, for those of us who see the rest of the world with so many areas of systematic oppression, long outmoded practices, and soul stultifying beliefs and values, the doctrine of universal human rights seems like a breath of fresh air. In Western eyes, the degree of acceptance of human rights is a crucial yardstick for measuring progress toward a truly humane life.

Yet enthusiastic support of human rights can easily ascribe to the human rights doctrine too much credit for Western virtues. After all, the human rights doctrine, though fundamental in the West, is not the only formative influence on customs and values. Other traditional Western value systems loom large as well. The Judeo-Christian traditions play a major role in shaping Western values and practices. This role is by no means limited to those who accept their associated theological doctrines and religious practices. For both better and worse, the merchant culture is likewise surely an important influence in shaping Western contemporary life.

In addition to the cultural influences, there are desirable social proclivities that are probably genetically transmitted in some degree. Among these are our attachments to parents, friends, spouses, children, and to

6 Rosemont 1998, 57. Rosemont asserts that “Whatever else it has done, the concept of civil and political rights has consistently served to protect wealth, power, and privilege” (Rosemont 1998, 62).

7 Referring to the political recognition of natural rights, George Herbert Mead said: “Revolution has been incorporated into the constituted form of government itself” (Mead, 141).
community symbols as well. It is because of these profoundly important attachments that we are connected in personal and communal ways. It is in virtue of these that the great part of our humanity is expressed. If the human rights doctrine has an alienating role, other important influences counteract this.

**A Confucian Alternative**

Thinking along these lines draws one toward Rosemont’s discussion of the classic Confucian picture of society and human nature as inherently communal rather than individualistic (Rosemont 1998, 63). Rosemont argues (and I agree) that rather than autonomous individuals, we are seen by Confucius as social role-bearers. Rosemont gives an illustrative Confucian analysis of his own identity. “I am a son, husband, father, grandfather, neighbor, colleague, student, teacher, citizen, friend.” As he says, “there can be no me in isolation ….I am the totality of roles I live” (Rosemont 1991, 90). He adds that he does not “perform” or “play” these roles; he is this complex of roles (90). These roles in turn interact with each other. Moreover these relationships are mediated by the culture, the traditions, rituals and customs of the society. Nonetheless, even on the Confucian view there does remain a personal will, and so I do influence my fate. The alternatives available to me, however, are to engage in these roles – the *li*—or to lack the will to do so. When my vital energy is shaped and directed in the ways of the culture, then my truly human identity comes into being. “[H]umanity exists solely within the bounds of community” (Ames, 210). This notion is a far cry from the freely choosing, autonomous individual that Rosemont sees from the standpoint of human rights oriented cultures. It likewise can seem incompatible with the idea of human equality (208).

The practical import of the issue Rosemont poses can be illustrated as follows. Suppose that in the U.S. an 18 year old son comes to feel that conforming to his father’s demands is stifling his deep aspirations and talents. The son decides to cease to obey, cease to conform, and to strike out in a direction disapproved by his father. From the human rights point of

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8 For the sake of brevity I will hereafter refer to the “classical Confucian” view, whose primary source is the *Analects*, as the Confucian view.

9 *Li* (ritual) is, as Ames well explains it, a concept that is “extremely broad, embracing everything from manners to mediums of communication to social and political institutions. It is the determinate fabric of Chinese culture and, further, defines sociopolitical order” (Ames, 199).
view the son has the right to do this, imprudent or rash though it might be. In the Confucian vision of society, however, the son’s relationship to his father is one that includes obedience and respect. These are part of his role as a son, and thus his very identity as a person.

The Master said: In serving his father and mother a man may gently re-
monstrate with them. But if he sees that he has failed to change their opinion, he should resume an attitude of deference and not thwart them. He may feel discouraged, but not resentful (Analects 4.18).

Any breakout from this proper relation can only be a breakdown. It has no place and no status. Confucius uses metaphor to make his points. He re-
marks of a certain Zai Yu that he used to sleep during the day. Of such be-
havior, so out of keeping with propriety,

The Master said: Rotten wood cannot be carved, nor a wall of dried dung trowelled. What use is there in my scolding him any more? (Ana-
lects 5.9)

While it seems that the Confucian view and the human rights view are incompatible, it might be argued that they are compatible on the follow-
ing basis. Confucians could hold to the propriety of the father-son relation, but could acknowledge that ultimately the human right to freedom should obtain. Thus it might seem that a son could acknowledge his duties to his father but be so unfortunate as to have an overly demanding or narrow-minded father. If so, he could resort to his ultimate right to choose freely, to secede from the relationship and to act according to his own best judg-
ment. The right to freedom would thus be a last resort, a “minimal stan-
dard” (Ames, 213; Freeman 2002, 56).

The difficulty with this approach is that, as has been noted, the Confucian son’s relation to the father is not extrinsic to his human identity. On the contrary, the more perfectly he enters into the proper socially pre-
scribed relationships, the more fully does his humanity establish itself and flourish. Entrance into these relationships is not conceived as a free choice. It is a matter of learning and then conforming to the rites (li). Indeed, Con-
fucius’ philosophy makes no significant use of the concept of choice (Fin-
garette 1972, 18-37). Thus the son’s very being as a person is crippled if that crucial father-son relationship, so fundamental to the li, is abandoned.

Our task, says Confucius, is to submit to the li. When asked what it means to submit to the li, the Master answers:

to look at nothing in defiance of li,
Thus this view that human rights are universal, the inalienable possession of an autonomous individual, does seem radically incompatible with Confucius' view of human nature.  

The foregoing considerations have their broader contemporary import. If we find Rosemont’s analysis persuasive, we are likely to generalize from the Confucian example to other non-Western cultures as well. The resistance of some non-Western cultures to the human rights doctrine becomes understandable, and from their point of view rational. In the West, on the other hand, the resistance by members of other cultures is commonly seen as simply unenlightened.

We are left with a dilemma. On the one hand, the human rights doctrine is valid for all human beings, and the subversion of cultures that do not recognize universal human rights is morally unacceptable. Or, on the other hand, human rights are not universal, and rejection of the doctrine is defensible. If the latter is true, then the doctrine is merely the value choice of the modern West. The doctrine would deserve no priority over the values of other cultures.

Rights as Duties

I believe that a correct understanding of the nature of a human right can resolve the dilemma developed above. We need to see that there is no content whatsoever to the conception of a human right except as a reference to certain duties.

For example, we can see that we capture the full meaning of “I have the right to free speech” if we replace it with “All others have the duty

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10 Rosemont has said that he believes there could be a reconciliation of the two outlooks, but that a conceptual solution is unavailable (Rosemont 1991, 94). This seems a more optimistic view than the view he expressed at a later time that the rights doctrine is a mere article of faith, not a rational belief based on evidence (Rosemont 1998, 60).

11 According to Jon Haldorsen, who gives a detailed analysis, the basic impulse of Islam is to a religion-based society, with sharia as the law, and God as the ruler. He finds it difficult to reconcile this with universal human rights as a minimum standard.

12 Rosemont expresses an attitude common among non-Westerners who resist the human rights doctrine. He says that insistence on the doctrine even in cultures where it is not recognized, “invites chauvinism, imperialism, and increasingly, irrelevance for the two billion people who do not share our culture” (Rosemont 1988, 168).
to refrain from interfering with my speech.” Of course we know that there
are exceptions to my freedom to speak, but this is merely another way to
say that there are exceptions to the duty of others to refrain from interfer-
ing with my speech. Although the expression in terms of rights is no more
than a reference to duties, the two forms of expression have different over-
tones, a topic I will discuss below.

The association of personal rights with the duties of others is not
in itself a novel proposal. There is a history of studies of rights that pro-
pose a strong connection between rights and duties. In some cases the con-
nection is asserted to hold only with certain rights and not others. But
when all categories of rights are associated with the duties of others, the
pattern of duties is often viewed as a consequence of having the right.

As Alan Gewirth says, “…to have a right to something X is to be
entitled to X and also for some other person or persons to have a correla-
tive duty…” (Gewirth 1978, 219). Alan White lists nine different terms that
are found in the literature that are supposed to express the relationship be-
 tween “right” and “duty.” They are: “resulting out of,” “springs,” “exits
from,” “rests on,” “whenever,” “based on,” “derived from,” “give rise to,”
“conditions” (White, 55). The right is in effect viewed as an independent
entity that establishes the duties.

Human rights themselves have been explained as powers, or as
claims. They are neither. When I am said to have the right to free speech,
no new power is ascribed to me. I normally have the power, i.e., the capa-
bility, to speak my mind as I wish, even without the right to do so. The
right is not a power of mine in addition to the power to speak my mind. My
right changes me in no way. What we speak of as my right is in fact some-

13 In his classic *Fundamental Legal Conceptions*, W. N. Hohfeld says that “…it is certain
that even those who use the word and the conception ‘right’ in the broadest possible way are
accustomed to think of duty as the invariable correlative” (38).
14 Peter Jones holds that liberty rights do not entail duties; they are the absence of any duty
to refrain (Jones, 17).
15 Jones expresses a position that holds “right” and “duty” not to be equivalents. He holds
that “correlative duty is part of the very definition of a claim-right” (Jones, 15, emphasis
added). Jones classifies human rights as “claim-rights.” White holds the relation between
“right” and “duty” to be contingent (White, 55). This is brought out in a different way by
G.H. Mead: “...in the state of nature as presented by Spinoza and Hobbes...men have
only powers, such as have the beasts of the field, but no rights” (Mead, 148).
16 Hohfeld (1919) makes the point clearly in the legal context. He says that one may have
the power to do something that affects the legal status of something, but one may not have
the right. One can add to this point of Hohfeld’s that one may have the right to do some-
thing but not the power. Rights are not powers.
thing that does make a difference to everyone else. Everyone else is under a duty not to interfere with me when I use my power of speech.

Nor is a right a claim.\(^\text{17}\) I make no claim when I am said to exercise my right. This language merely obscures the fact that I am just doing what I have the ability to do. I make no claim when I speak in public. I do not have to do that. I just speak. The human rights doctrine imposes a duty on others to allow me to do so.

One might argue that to say that a right is a claim need not imply an action on my part. It merely expresses an entitlement. However, this response takes us nowhere, but simply raises the question of what an entitlement is. Is it the right to something? Thus we come full circle: What is a right?

There are also good objections about the proposals that rights are standards of conduct. If the right to move about freely is said to amount to a social or legal standard, that standard does not bind me so far as my moving about is concerned. Rather, it is others who are under the obligation to abide by the standard which prohibits interference with the liberty of other human beings. Thus rights as standards are in substance standards that others should respect. In the upshot this translates into rights as duties. For example, let us say that there is a standard – Do not interfere with the speech of others. As a standard for all, all of us have a duty to conform to the standard. In regard to my “right to free speech,” this translates as “each person has a duty to refrain from interfering with the speech of others.” Instead of speaking of rights as standards, I shall speak of them as duties. The effect of either language is the same, but the concept of rights as duties avoids unnecessary complexity.

I do not see a good reason to make a distinction between such subcategories of human rights as “negative” versus “positive” rights, or “procedural” versus “distributive” rights. These are unnecessary because in the real world the division often does not hold.

A more ample and adequate analysis must recognize that the right to free speech is not simply the duty of others not to interfere. In practice there are not infrequently social obstacles in the way of my free speech. If I want to speak in a public space, perhaps in assembly with others of like mind, this may risk interference with legitimate but incompatible rights of others. It may be necessary for the police to provide conditions, such as a suitable time and place, and even protection if needed. Thus my right to free speech is not only the duty of others not to interfere, but under certain

\(^{17}\) See e.g., Freeman: “Rights are . . . just claims or entitlements. . . ” (Freeman 2002, 6).
conditions it is the duty of certain persons to provide assistance to me in exercising my right.

If I am by right entitled to a fair trial, others have a duty to provide this. If I have the right not to be enslaved – a liberty right – it will in practice also be the duty of the community to provide both legal and physical protection to prevent my being enslaved. In short, there is in real life no disentangling of negative and positive rights. In practice, the relevant elements of both arise jointly and apply inseparably.

In any case, my thesis here is more radical. I see no reason to ascribe any independent existence to rights of any sort. My point is that matters are simpler than that. All references to a person’s human rights have as their total connotation duties that others have toward that person.\(^{18}\)

**Human Rights and Human Community**

This shift of perspectives to seeing “inalienable rights” as connoting “inalienable duties” has extended significance. Earlier, I pointed out how rights doctrines can alienate each person from all others. It does so if one adopts the traditional view of rights. From this latter standpoint, my rights are in effect barriers against intrusion into my “space.” My right to speak is a “do not trespass” authority. From this point of view we form a collection of individuals, each with barriers to keep all others away.

Quite the contrary picture emerges if instead we view rights as duties that each human being has to all others. From the standpoint of rights as duties, the person is not an isolate. The human rights doctrine, so interpreted, affirms that each human being is bound by a complex of duties to all other human beings. Therefore it is universally true that each human being is inherently a social actor.\(^{19}\)

As in the Confucian vision, this interconnectedness is an ineradicable constitutive feature of personhood. Though the specific duties under the human rights doctrine differ from those to be found in the Confucian vision, the interconnectedness is of the same logical type.

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\(^{18}\) Ronald Dworkin says that to have a right to do X means that it would be wrong for anyone to interfere with your doing X. Here, as in the case of “standards,” I think this might work, but the term “duty” is more positive, and works better with “positive” rights such as the right to a fair trial, or to adequate health care.

\(^{19}\) “A right implies recognition…which cannot be found outside of an organised social group” (Mead, 148).
The Confucian son has a duty to respect and obey the father. In
turn, the rights doctrine places a duty on the father to refrain from interfer-
ing with the son’s liberty of action. The son may choose to act disobedi-
ently. This is wrong, a violation of his Confucian duty. The father’s duty not
to restrain the son in no way negates the wrongness of the act. Moreover,
the relation to the father being part of a Confucian son’s very identity, the
son’s act is injurious to himself. In short, the right to do so does not make it
the right thing to do.

The equality associated with rights doctrine still remains even if one
adopts the view I am presenting here. Under the doctrine, each of us is
bound by the same duties; none has a general advantage over others. All are
equal.

The new light in which I now see issues about rights brings into
view my difference with Rosemont. Rosemont says that the rights doctrine
rests on a conception of the individual as an autonomous actor, free and
rational. He contrasts this with the Confucian view, which is that the indi-
vidual is to be understood as the nexus of a web of social relationships. But
looking at the matter from the standpoint I have developed here, the differ-
ence Rosemont notices largely disappears.

It is true that the notion of universal human equality is not to be
found in Confucius’ thought. Still this need not function, as it does in the
West, as the touchstone property of each individual. While it would be ac-
cepted that we are all equal in regard to a set of duties that all have, it would
also remain true that we are not equal but especially role-related to others.

I would still be a son, a father, a husband, and so on. I would also
have certain duties that all of us would have, regardless of social role. The
rights doctrine I am sketching does not purport to offer a complete picture
of human personality as does the Confucian. It would simply provide an
additional set of binding relationships.20

One misunderstanding of the human rights doctrine is a source of
confusion in this context. An example may help bring this out. Suppose
that the Confucian son exercises the right to free speech. That is to say, he
speaks as he chooses, and others may not interfere. His right to speak im-

20 CHENG Chungying suggests something close to this idea when he argues that the Confu-
cian concept could be assimilated to the rights doctrine simply by looking at the Confucian
relationships as themselves rights and corresponding duties. The son’s filial duty correlates
with the father’s right to filial behavior by his son. Peerenbohm has a similar view. Unfor-
nately this will not really work. The Confucian relationships are generally much richer
than mere duties and rights. They include such things as emotions, attitudes, and aspirations
that are not naturally the object of duties.
poses no new duty upon him. On the other hand, his duty to respect his father remains unchanged. If he speaks disrespectfully, he is in violation of that duty.

In short, the right to free speech is not a license to be excused for violation of duty. The son’s liberty right provides no favorable moral support to his act. I think there is a failure to appreciate this. It leads, I think, to the fear that incorporating human rights into a Confucian type of society would provide justification for individuals to ignore their social duties. It would do no such thing.

Although a human right lends no moral support to an act, possession of the right can have a prudential significance. If the father’s duty not to interfere retains its priority over any Confucian duty, then the son knows he can do as he chooses with no fear of restraint. Such prudential reasoning may encourage the son in his decision. But it has no bearing on the moral quality of the fact that he has failed to act dutifully.

Furthermore, the inspiration for such improper conduct must come from other sources than the liberty to act without fear of restraint. It is only when sources extraneous to human rights are influential that the rights doctrine comes into play. For example, current Western customs and styles may have great appeal. The desire to adopt these may trigger the decision to take advantage of the right to liberty.

The point can be stated more generally. If the rights doctrine can be socially subversive, it is because it can add a prudential benefit when for other reasons the individual’s preference is a culturally subversive act.

The mistaken tendency to attribute a certain element of moral justification to the exercise of a right seems to make such conflict inevitable. For the son who rejects his father’s authority may think to himself (or say to others) “I have a right to do this; I’m a free man.” This is said in a certain tone of justification as if it implied that having the right makes it morally acceptable. The confusing element here arises from the fact that the word “right” has a variety of uses, among which are those that genuinely do imply justification. For example, I do mean to claim justification when I say, “This is the right thing to do.” There is also a claim of justification when I am facing difficulties, and am told not to worry. I reply adamantly, “I have a right to be worried; I’m facing a real challenge.”

Obviously, the preceding uses of “right” are not the same as when the word is used in connection with human rights. If exercising a human right was equivalent to acting rightly, i.e., with justification, then the liberty right would provide moral immunity no matter what one does.
Yet these ambiguities undoubtedly cause confusion which increases apprehension towards human rights doctrine in other cultures. It can seem that the liberty right makes the action morally right, and thereby negates all other normative claims of the culture.

What if the father’s Confucian duty requires interference with unfilial conduct? (I imagine this only hypothetically because it may well be so in other cultures, and I hope my argument is in effect general in application.)

In cases of conflict, the relevant fact is that the liberty-right is not absolute. If it conflicts with certain cultural norms, it may be that it can be justifiably curbed. This is intuitively obvious in the case of criminal activity. We do curb the liberty rights of the thief. On what basis is this done? It is plausible to answer that theft is against the law, and so is justifiably curbed. Yet this answer will not do because one of the notable features of the rights doctrine is the moral power it has lent to those who have struggled against certain laws. We admire the French and the colonial Americans for in effect violating the law. So again we have to ask: How do the laws that oppress the thief differ from the laws the French and Americans violated? That they are indeed different is intuitively evident.

I know of no way to derive the nature of this distinction from rights doctrine. It is considerations external to that doctrine that are essential for making this judgment. Those other considerations can be summarily expressed in such an oft-used formula as: One has a right to liberty so long as one does not harm others.\footnote{In the early classic of human rights, Locke’s Second Treatise, Locke sets the formula: “. . . reason, which is that [law of nature], teaches all mankind...that no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions...” (Chap. 2, par. 6).}

This formula must be interpreted broadly because in the present context the term “harm” always includes not only physical harm but also certain psychological, moral, and social harms. The thief need do no physical harm, he need only to do psychological, moral, or social harm. They are the kind of harms that strike at our fundamental moral values and economic institutions.

This answer reveals a hidden premise. Where human rights fly in the face of the economic foundations and moral axioms of a culture, those rights may justifiably be curbed. We have many such curbs in our own culture. The enormous and complex body of our laws contains innumerable restrictions on our liberties. These are generally acceptable in order to minimize harms of all sorts. There is nothing unusual about this. The relative priorities, and the compromises, are matters of practical judgment.
They are not deduced from the rights doctrine itself. It follows, of course, that when conditions change, the implementation of the human rights doctrine will change.

This analysis may seem to pull the teeth of the human rights doctrine. But this is not so. In all cases the denial or restriction of human rights has to be rooted in cultural values and the institutional context. A common sign of such depth of attitude is that the judgment is taken as self-evident (e.g., thievery is wrong).

George Herbert Mead saw the point long ago: “… we should not forget that the ultimate guarantee must be found in the reaction of men and women to a human situation so fully presented that their whole natures respond. However lacking rigidity and solidity this may seem, it is at bottom the only guarantee of a human right to which we can finally appeal.”

The same premise would apply in the case of non-Western cultures. For example, it is an obvious fact that in many Muslim communities the idea of a woman acting independently, or walking out alone in the street, is shocking psychologically, morally, and religiously. Lifting the restrictions on the liberties of Muslim women entails profoundly unsettling social consequences in family and public life. Hence, like theft in the West, the restrictions on Muslim women’s liberty can plausibly be argued as justifiable.

If, however, for some reason Muslim attitudes to women should become more like Western attitudes, then lifting restrictions on women’s liberty would be not only justified but required. Thus the extent of women’s liberties, as with the liberties of all of us, depends on the deepest and most ubiquitous values and practices in the culture.

Overall then, it seems that the integration of the Western rights doctrine into another culture such as the Confucian need raise no profound problems. If the culture is a strong and vital one, it should not be undermined. The rights doctrine could be culturally internalized, adding a new and valuable dimension to that culture.

Proof of the pudding is the fact that most of the European nations have incorporated human rights doctrine into their political-social outlook. Yet Spanish culture is different from the English, which is different from

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22 Mead, 155. Rorty (1993) takes the radical view that ultimately human rights, to be effectively adopted, must be rooted in the sentiments and attitudes of the society.

23 Weatherley points out that in most of East Asia it is a legitimate and religiously demanded rule that marriages be arranged. This seems incompatible with Western concepts of basic human rights, he says (Weatherley, 21).
the German, and from that of France. These cultures have retained their identity but have assimilated the doctrine.

Summary

The human rights doctrine is in fact a doctrine about human duties. It implies that all human beings, in virtue of their human nature, are embedded in a complex web of mutual duties toward each other. Adopted in a culture, the doctrine should amount to an addition to the extant cultural values and practices. It should not conflict with these in any fundamental way. Much of the concern that exists in non-Western cultures arises from a reading of the doctrine which is widespread and which makes it seem subversive of non-Western cultures. The correct reading of rights as duties reveals the doctrine as fundamentally communitarian. The French had it right: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

REFERENCES


The Virtue of Freedom

Mary I. Bockover

Introduction

The aim of this festschrift article in honor of the work of Henry Rosemont, Jr. is to offer a “Confucian” model of rights. The theoretical framework for this contemporary adaptation of thought is based on the idea that autonomy naturally develops into the social virtue of responsibility. Taking individual rights and social justice as necessarily opposed creates a false dichotomy that does not account for the true nature of the relation between them. In effect, the individual and social nature of persons is obscured. Before this framework can be given, though, the human relations that Confucius took to define persons must be contemporized, making them relevant for the twenty-first century.

Confucian Relations and the Contemporary World

Henry Rosemont, Jr., distinguished philosopher and social critic, has stressed that the five basic Confucian relations are not just roles that we “play”; they make us the persons who we are. I am a mother because I have children, a wife because I have a husband, a teacher because I have students, and so on (“because” here expressing true causal efficacy). Rosemont has frequently addressed the contrast between this relational concept of self

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1 Henry Rosemont, Jr. was my undergraduate teacher at St. Mary’s College of Maryland. In addition to being a distinguished scholar and social critic he is an excellent teacher, and inspired me to follow his path. I am indebted to him in a way that can’t be sufficiently repaid. I also want to thank Marthe Chandler for her excellent editing of this article, and both Chandler and Ronnie Littlejohn for editing this volume in honor of Henry Rosemont, Jr.

2 This will be a contemporary adaptation of Confucian principles; obviously the concept of rights did not exist in Ancient China and hardly exists in China today.
with the exclusively individualistic ones found in the West (see Rosemont 1991). But can the Confucian model of human relations be truly relevant today? Let me remind the reader that these basic relations, as found in the Analects, are as follows:

Father - son
Husband - wife
Older brother - younger brother
Ruler - subject
Benefactor (teacher) - beneficiary (student)

I will argue that these relations can be recast in a way that captures the spirit of Confucian thought, while discarding irrational, arbitrary, and unjustified features used to discriminate against people on irrelevant grounds. The most essential aspect of these relations is their interdependence. Another aspect, at least as found in the Analects, is the hierarchical structure of each relation. Those of us raised to value the principle of equality find this feature quite unattractive, but the contemporary model to be presented challenges the view that every relation requires a hierarchical structure and maintains that the Confucian person is essentially a relational, social being.

A central advantage of the relational picture of a person is its practical plausibility. It is easier to see one’s self as a parent, a child, a sister or brother, a teacher or student, than as a rational animal, a thing that thinks, or a self-legislating will. Not only are these Western concepts more abstract that the relational ones, more importantly, as they are presented, being a person requires no connection with others. Relational persons are mutually defining, while the Western person is exclusively independent: self-contained, defined in terms of intrinsic (cognitive) instead of extrinsic (social) properties. In a word, the Western concept of person is the paradigm case of being an individual.

Besides being mutually defining, Confucian relations can be thought of as fluid. I am a mother and the offspring of my parents at the same time. Children learn how to become parents through the example of parents who have gone before them. I am a teacher and student at once (and was led to this path by the example of teachers like Henry Rosemont). In some relations the ordinate-subordinate positions may not be as flexible as they are in others, and rightly so. Due to accumulated knowledge and experience, a teacher will occupy an ordinate position to students on the Confucian model even when taking for granted that he can still learn from
them. Teachers will have an authority over, and responsibility to students that is not mutually reciprocal. This hierarchal ordering is more respected in Asian countries embracing basic Confucian values than in the United States where people are conditioned to value personal freedom (e.g., of expression) and equality. For Americans these values, although admittedly abstract, have become so much a part of daily life, that they conflict with the fact that some roles are legitimately subordinate and so should carry less authority and responsibility than their ordinate correlates. On analysis, there is only a problem when this subordination is arbitrary. Unless we can find a good reason to maintain the structure of ordinate to subordinate person, it proves not to be an essential feature of the relation and should be rejected as elitist.

We only have to move forward a century and a half or so in ancient China to find a more egalitarian picture of a person. In the Mencius, the “benefactor - beneficiary” relation is often recast as “friend - friend”, and ren covers a greater range of humanity in Mencius than in the Analects. One might defend the earlier Confucian model in the Analects by claiming that equality is an abstraction which may have procedural value in the pursuit of justice, but does not apply to our more intimate and meaningful relations. These are characterized by what distinguishes us as persons, not what makes us the same. Our personal strengths and weaknesses will never be precisely the same as another person’s. People who occupy equivalent roles may have similar qualities or levels of authority, but this is as far as equality goes in the Analects: the same kind of roles engenders similar responsibilities. For instance, mothers will generally have like obligations to care for their children (e.g., to be compassionate). But more specific roles will differ depending upon one’s other social positions. The mother of a farming family will have different responsibilities to her children than the mother of a scholarly or ruling family. In other words, being a person is context dependent. One is not a mother without children, and will not know how to embrace her role as a mother without knowing the details of her social position. In any case, a mother on the traditional Confucian model always has a lower level of authority than her husband, and often has less authority than her eldest son. I think this sexism can be removed from the Confucian model because gender does not confer genuine personal authority on one in any social capacity. Those who believe that socially discriminating against

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3 Another clear case where a hierarchical structure would be appropriate would be parent to child, and in many cases official to citizen and older to younger person.

people on the grounds of gender is justified will have to make the argument.

The Confucian concept of a person can admit of more equality than it does in the *Analects* but only if the model becomes more abstract, and hence, more general. For example, in the *Mencius* the discussion of virtues starting as “seeds” or “sprouts” in the human heart contains an inner – outer distinction absent in the *Analects*. If not nurtured these sprouts (now specifically located on the inside) will fail to thrive and perhaps will even die; hence, deprivation and vice. These now internalized virtues led to a more theoretical approach to what it means to be a person, including a sharper distinction between self and other, and a more refined concept of a human individual.

Greater abstraction does not have to lead to less realism, however. Although a distinction is often made between something being abstract versus concrete – either theoretical or having a practical context or application, the distinction is misleading. Equality is an abstraction and an ideal that has never in fact been realized; but in being applied as a social principle, it has transformed the consciousness of people to view others as equal. For example, when I am in the train going from Vsenory to Prague, surrounded by Czechs and not Americans, I automatically regard the Czechs as having equal worth and deserving equal consideration. I recognize their humanity as demanding such equal consideration, without my having a close personal relationship with them, or without being like them in many ways. Even extremely immoral people maintain their status as persons, such that they should not be denied equal access to, or protection under, the law. The force of the abstract principle of equality is found in the ideas that shape our minds and our attitudes and actions toward others. It is both abstract and (becomes) real at once.

Let us now recast the five basic Confucian relations to reflect this appreciation of equality in order to help resolve the problem with hierarchical relations in a contemporary setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Contemporary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father - son</td>
<td>Parent - child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband - wife</td>
<td>Partner - partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older brother - younger brother</td>
<td>Elder - younger relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruler - subject</td>
<td>Official - citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefactor (teacher) - beneficiary (student)</td>
<td>Person - person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The concern for equality that made the contemporary model more abstract, and more general, is an advantage in a more complex society. The contemporary category of “person to person” that was “friend to friend” on the Mencian model, is required to cover a much wider range of possible relations, for instance, friends, colleagues, teachers, students, and in a commercial society, the relations of consumer to clerk, artisan, technician, etc. In fact this last category must be sufficiently broad to cover every relation that does not fall under the others, including many embedded in employer-employee relations.

“Official to citizen” would also have to include the vast range of positions needed to govern contemporary society: police and military forces, and various civil agencies, all with their own system of embedded hierarchies. On the train in the Czech Republic, there is a job for people who go from person to person to see if they have the proper tickets for passage. This “controller” has the authority over passengers to impose punishment for noncompliance. This job is important to maintaining a reliable and affordable public transportation system from ticket revenues. In the area around Prague people do not need, and often can’t afford cars and so transportation to schools, jobs, recreation, markets, post offices, and the like, depends on the just execution of jobs like that of controller.

A large part of the execution of this civil agency is in the relation of controller to passenger. People can predict that the controller will check tickets, and they also know that not having the proper ticket will lead to a standard penalty. The controller’s responsibility implies fairness (on the principle of equality). They are not to let friends or family members ride for free, for example, nor should they extort passengers for their own advantage or discriminate against them because of their gender, race, language, or apparent social standing. This is the case even though the controllers differ with respect to personal qualities like race and gender that do not directly relate to the job itself.

These considerations can be extended to the relation of partner to partner in a more intimate setting. Of course there will be differences of all sorts, but at least in contemporary North America and Europe, theordinate-subordinate hierarchy once characteristic of the traditional relation of husband to wife is becoming obsolete. Some have argued that since love and equality go hand in hand, feminists should embrace rather than “dump” love (see Solomon 1998). Love, if based on the principle of private equality, mitigates the sense of separation and inferiority that can plague relationships in which one person is considered subordinate to the other. Private equality promotes respect and responsibility that is mutually recog-
nized and responded to even when public roles are disparate. This is a function of consciousness – how one conceives of herself in relation to a fellow human being – in this case one’s most intimate life long partner. Notice also that I take this to apply to all people who commit to each other with the prospect of sharing a life together, same-sex couples as well as heterosexual ones. It seems easily argued that excluding same-sex couples from the clear privileges that marriage under law provides is as arbitrary as designating females to be socially inferior on the grounds of gender.

But surely Confucius was not a proponent of women’s and gay rights! What I am suggesting is that his relational model of a person, once all of the philosophically arbitrary features are removed, supports respect for women, gays and lesbians. The traditional Confucian model is clearly not a “rights” model, but it is consistent with the idea that legitimate authority is a good thing, and the more of it that we can nurture, the better.\footnote{The current conservative trend to ban same-sex marriages also has the unfortunate consequence of disallowing the greater social stability that results from supporting the institution of marriage in general. The state surely has an interest in promoting and regulating relationships of an indefinite duration. It would be up to those who oppose same-sex marriage to give good reasons for why gender is relevant grounds to keep state and society from supporting lifelong commitments between people.} It is only when we fail to recognize, respect and protect people that a rights theory is required to safeguard the interests of individuals who have been violated instead of supported by social relations.

As for sexism and elitism, Confucius, like most of us, did not always rise above the conditions of his time. We are able to evaluate him only with hindsight, and our evaluation is necessarily distorted. Ancient China, like the world in general, was largely a sexist and elitist place. The difficulty with moral evaluation of the past is that it is colored with present values, interests and perspectives. It is also important to consider that the deification of “Sages” and “Saints” may result from an exaggeration of the positive qualities of people who seem larger than life because they have been dead for such a long time. With hindsight we can criticize the social flaws we have succeeded in reforming, but we are also in danger of glossing over the details that would have cast Sages as revered teachers and Saints as political martyrs, rather than gods. Although much depends on one’s view of human nature, historical narratives, particularly of very ancient times, are always at risk of being distorted.

\footnote{It should be clear that illegitimate authority is a contradiction in terms (an oxymoron), and the removal of arbitrary features of hierarchical discrimination removes illegitimate discrimination.}
More Specious Dichotomies and the Self

I have written in other places that human consciousness – especially when increasing in levels of abstraction – creates a world of dichotomies that can be as questionable as they are useful (Bockover forthcoming). We have just considered how the abstraction of equality can be used progressively to shape our view of the world, even though equality is a mental construct not found to exist as an independent empirical fact. To the degree that “reality” is perspective-dependent, abstract ideas influence how things in the world take shape.7 But the dichotomous thinking upon which abstract thought depends leads to paradoxes or apparent contradictions. This World of Specious Dichotomies is misleading in making things and events appear to be more independent than they really are. It is also vital to examining different aspects of the world – as we perceive it – in more depth. The most extreme and typically deceptive case is when the dichotomy is expressed as an exclusive disjunction, with one thing being “opposed to” the other, or existing only in the absence of the other.

Rosemont’s work presents a critique of how such dichotomizing affects the concept of self. From a Chinese perspective there is no self versus other (selves), only a self in connection with others. It is wrong to think of self and other as independent when our personal – i.e., social – “nature” depends on our relation to others. But we would not be able to consider the nature of this interdependency without having made the distinction in the first place. Fingarette (1972) provides another example of a Specious Dichotomy when he argues that, from a Chinese perspective, “secular” is not distinct from what is considered sacred but is to be seen as sacred. And I have argued that the Western distinction between universals and particulars is also misleading. The two are actually mutually entailing: a “universal” is a particular (quality) generalized across all relevant cases. For example in a Chinese context, the “universal” spirit of humanity (ren) is always expressed in some “particular” form (of li) or other. Yet making the distinction draws our attention to the details of an inseparable union between spirit and form, a larger reality of harmonious human activity that has spiritual and social aspects. On a metaphysical level, although our universe is diverse, its attributes can be generalized under one concept to become a “universal”: the One Reality whose indeterminate variety can be distinguished by concepts

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7 This is not to say that reality is exclusively perception-dependent, or a complex function of perception. But our understanding of it will be unavoidably affected by how we perceive and think.
that produce a more precise, detailed and definitive view of the world. We develop a deeper understanding of the world this way, but we must be cautious since such dichotomizing can be deceptive – if we believe that it represents independent and objective empirical facts.  

I will now consider two related dichotomies that have allowed for a more complex understanding of the world, but that as conceptual artifacts distinguish between things that may be intimately connected. The first dichotomy between the inner-and-outer (person) is correlated with the distinction between individual-and-social. The interior world of the person consists of a detailed psychology typically distinguished from what is other than, or outside of, the person. Especially in the West, everything outside of one’s own immediate “subjectivity” is conceived of as contingent. This view can be sharply contrasted with the Confucian model. I do not think Confucius considered, and then rejected these distinctions. In the history of Chinese thought, these distinctions were not yet made and so I think they never entered his mind. The traditional Confucian self of the Analects was an exclusively social self. In the United States the view of self is so skewed in the opposite (extreme) direction that our social roles and responsibilities are taken to be mere contingencies rather than central to who we are as persons. Recall that even for Mencius the self was still essentially social. In the Mencius a person is more of an individual (with an interior world) than in the Analects, but the nature of this “individual” is necessarily shaped in a social context. As such, the hierarchy is softened but the picture of human development as a function of socialization, or civilization, is maintained. By way of contrast, the American self is independent and self-determining. We are distinguished from the social contexts in which we are embedded, but which are viewed as extraneous to our nature. The more extreme or exclusive views lead to more serious problems. In China there is a tendency to think that people who lack relations have less worth. In contrast, in the United States our main moral concern is often with our own freedom. But why not soften the more (extreme) views by seeing both inner

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8 How much this view can be generalized is debatable, and interestingly so. Much rests on the ambiguity of the word, “independent”. For example, in ancient Greece Aristotle conceived of body and soul as independent in being different in kind. Still, they were interdependent in that a living body required both; one (soul) could not exist without the other (body). Angus Graham argued that the Cheng brothers (11th century) had contrasting accounts of how the “metaphysical” relations (between principle and ether) were conceived. In general, things dichotomized can be: different in degree only (e.g., much of the cosmology of ancient China), different in kind but mutually entailing (e.g., the metaphysics of Aristotle), or different in kind and not (necessarily) interdependent (e.g., the metaphysics of Roman Catholic Natural Law theorists, such as Aquinas and Augustine).
and social aspects as necessary to account for selfhood? Both aspects would be needed for a more complete picture of a person to emerge, but neither would by itself be sufficient to provide such an account. China and the United States can both learn a lot from each other by taking both individual and social interests more seriously. Suggestions of a middle ground can be found in the *Mencius*. I will present my own view of the nature of the interdependency between autonomous self and social context in the sections that follow.

The Necessary Connection between Freedom and Responsibility

The stage is being set for a discussion of human rights consistent with social justice. Such a “rights theory” would seriously qualify the meaning of autonomy as applying to individuals qua interdependent persons, not qua independent persons – even though an appeal to rights may help people become independent from others when they need protection, vindication, or restitution. Autonomy makes us each separate individuals by making consciousness the locus and the starting point of personal and moral subjectivity. But this does not entail an exclusive notion of independence. The sense of independence morally connected with autonomy depends on our social nature. Indeed, it is sheer folly to think of persons anywhere in an exclusively independent sense. For autonomy, like any human capacity, requires development that must always take place in the social contexts in which people live. Autonomy requires social interdependency to grow into the virtue of responsibility that it naturally will become in the proper course of development. This process of moral maturation gives rise to a paradoxical notion of independence where one has the freedom to take on a larger sphere of personal and social roles. Morally, however, taking on these roles implies taking responsibility for them.

Although optimally, autonomous persons become responsible persons, this does not always occur. A mature moral person has the ability to think and feel rightly toward others, to be in “right relation” to them. This

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9 A middle ground may also be suggested in Aristotle, although the philosophy of ancient Greece, in contrast with ancient China, tended to employ distinctions of kind and not just degree. This is symptomatic of the dichotomous thinking that is the subject of this section. Where Aristotle distinguished soul and matter as different in kind, the general cosmology of the ancient Chinese took everything existing to be of, as well as continuous with, the same “source”, differing only in degrees of rarefaction. Hence, “things” were thought of more in terms of transformation and procession than essence and substance.
The Virtue of Freedom

is what responsibility is. While autonomy becomes responsibility when properly cultivated, it can become a vice if improperly socialized. If autonomy can develop into a virtue or vice through a process of socialization, why not think of it as conceptually linked with (social) interdependency? Autonomy grows into responsibility and increases one’s freedom to act morally in a larger number of social arenas. In effect, our social and moral natures are inextricably connected. Or even more accurately, the distinction simply draws our attention to different aspects of one unified human nature. It is therefore a fundamental mistake of Western ethics to think that any morally relevant sense of autonomy, “freedom” or “independence,” will be exclusively individualistic.

It is also wrong to think that merely having a capacity produces a right to use it. We have the capacity to reason but this does not give us the right to act on our reasons without restriction. In fact restrictions are put on actions motivated by poor thinking in virtually every human community. Why shouldn’t we use the principles of social justice to do the same for autonomy? In short, free will can be a good or a bad thing depending upon how it is developed and employed. Its mere existence as a capacity does not constitute grounds for thinking that we have a right to exercise it. Unlike the development of free will into responsibility, the mere capacity for free will is not self-justifying. I will add that the exercise of free will can sometimes be a good thing even when it causes separation. The kind of choice free will makes possible may indeed motivate us to move from one social situation to another. Whether this is justified is another question, and depends on whether it is done responsibly, with the primary aim of standing in right relation with others. Responsibility makes moral sense of freedom.

The Conflict between Individual Rights and Social Justice

Rights theory emerged out of deep concern for the protection of the life, liberty, and happiness (initially, of property) of individual persons (at first of white, land-owning males) who were being unjustly treated. But Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* only gave us a negative theory of rights, that is, of claims not to have life, liberty, and property interfered with in an unjustifiable manner.

Rosemont has focused in a number of places on the distinction between positive and negative rights. Negative, “first-generation” rights are claims to noninterference, while positive, “second-generation” rights are entitlements to things like education, housing, and employment with a wage
sufficient to provide such basic needs as health care. The later “positive” rights entail that certain human needs must be met for a truly healthy society to flourish. They entitle us to what we need to promote human well-being in general.

In “Individual Rights versus Social Justice: A Confucian Meditation,” Rosemont (2003) argues that positive and negative rights conflict on a theoretical level. The traditional Western concept of a person is simply inconsistent with the view that we have the social obligations implied in second-generation rights. First-generation rights from interference protect our own interests, but are not a part of an ethic that takes protecting the interests of our neighbors as primary, or even as important. Moreover, protecting our own interests can be done at the expense of promoting the general wellbeing of our fellow human being. Social justice requires that we see people as interdependently embedded in community working together to support one another instead of as standing over and against each other.

Rosemont presents a Confucian meditation revamping the way that we conceive of persons, and of the principles of social justice that flow from this. A just society must conceive of persons as relational beings, co-members of a human community instead of as rugged, independent and autonomous individuals. In the United States so much of life, including much of our foreign and domestic polity is extremely individualistic. This is why Rosemont’s Confucian meditation is so important: social justice has been sabotaged by a view of “person” and the “good life” that diminishes humanity instead of properly respecting it.

**Autonomy, Responsibility, and Valuing Others as Ourselves**

Confucian rituals are learned expressions of natural feeling that ground, and flow from, basic human relations. In this regard the Confucian view of persons-as-relations, guided by human feelings connected to human needs, is necessary, but not sufficient for a comprehensive vision of social justice. We need a view of humanity in which our social and autonomous aspects are compatible and conceived of as mutually entailing. Such a view begins by accepting that another person, simply in virtue of her humanity and unique ability to think, feel and act will value her life, and the lives of those related to her, as much as we value our own. It is through valuing others as ourselves that we assume that what is important to us – beloved family and friends, trusted neighbors, colleagues, larger community, nation and
world – will be every bit as important to others in their own contexts. They too are persons capable of having a meaningful life.

I will offer a Confucian adaptation of having a right that avoids the conflict between first and second generation rights. Just as I reject the traditional Western idea that we are exclusively individualistic, I reject the traditional Confucian idea that persons are exclusively relational. The distinction between individual rights versus social justice is a false dichotomy even though it contains some important insights. When one is conceived exclusively as autonomous and independent there seems to be no personal obligation to others. But the previous treatment of the Western concept of a person was somewhat overstated. Even in the United States people often believe their obligations to loved ones and others in their charge are as important as their own freedom. Indeed, what allows us to value others – whether or not they are directly related to us – is their humanity. More specifically, persons deserve the weightiest of moral respect exactly because they are autonomous.

Animals have a higher moral standing than beings who are not self-aware or who lack the capacity for “self-legislation.” Animals, for example, can avoid pains and pursue pleasures but, in general, we can kill and eat them and remain civilized human beings. To the degree that they are sentient or conscious, animals can respond to their world in complex ways. But they are not responsible in the way that human beings can be. Responsibility comes through the developed ability to stand in right relation to others, which depends on the capacity for autonomous thought. Autonomous thought entails self-awareness so that we can experience self and other as distinct but related, or more specifically, so we can experience ourselves as objects of our own experience, including how we are connected to others and the world around us. Autonomous and reflective (self) awareness confers ultimate moral standing by giving us the second-order ability to really care for the people we love, as well as for those who we do not know. While autonomy is the feature of human consciousness that makes

10 This is controversial, of course. Many animal rights proponents argue that meat eating may be traditional or customary but is still morally wrong.

11 One implication of this is that we can be conscious without being reflectively or explicitly aware of it. The form of a first-order belief, for example, would be this: W believes “X,” where the quoted X refers to what W believes. But a second-order articulation of this belief would be of this form: W is aware that “W (she herself) believes X,” where the quoted cognitive content includes W’s self-awareness that she has this belief (whatever X is). In this second-order case, and only in being a part of the objective content of her own experience, can W be aware that she believes something about something, whatever that may be. Second-order consciousness, in other words, is reflective (self) consciousness. Autonomous
moral agency possible, it allows us to acknowledge principles of social justice only when it has been properly cultivated into the virtue of responsibility. We can choose our own personal and moral destiny\textsuperscript{12} – but only by choosing to act out of deep concern for the relations we embody.

We can know that another deserves the weightiest moral consideration simply in virtue of her humanity.\textsuperscript{13} We can know to attribute the same moral value – equally and universally – to others that we would want for ourselves. And we can abstract from self to other in this way exactly because our will is autonomous. We do not think, feel, and act without reflection. We can deliberate, and choose to change things for the better. But this takes responsibility, or attention to the obligations basic to the relationships that make us who we are.

Based on such deliberation we found that sexism and elitism can be removed from the Confucian view of personal relations; discrimination has to be legitimate to be morally justifiable. Establishing what is just depends upon such deliberation. For example, returning to the principle of equality, a great many more females are now receiving a college education than in generations past. This social change was made possible, at least in part, by the recognition that gender has nothing to do with one’s ability to develop her mind. While gender is not a legitimate difference in this case, sexism has been and remains a part of the majority of social systems in the world. Perhaps then it is not so arbitrary after all? If we consider that social stability, as well the general wellbeing of children, are enhanced by having a parent stay home, then we can find a good reason for certain social practices. The typical division of labor grew out of the fact that women gestate and nurse the young, while men are less restricted in their physical and, by extension, social mobility. Men work outside of the home and women inside. An appeal to individual autonomy – what is the same in everyone of us instead of what distinguishes us – challenges this use of biological criterion to decide such things as who should be educated, who should work outside of the home, who should be the primary caregiver for children, and the like. This is why being physically challenged, or of a certain race or sexual orientation

\textsuperscript{12} This not to deny that many, if not most of the features of our personal lives are not chosen – like what family, time period, community, gender, race, ethnic group, we are born into. How we respond to these will be within the province of deliberate personal choice in many instances, however.

\textsuperscript{13} I am aware that this is simplified here: humanity implies “rational, free agency.”
can be considered unjust grounds for discriminating against people who simply want to live as people: that is, as rational, autonomous beings who care about themselves and others.

When individual autonomy is violated (as it is through sexism), social stability will have to be disturbed, with all of the attending difficulties. We must appeal to both negative rights to noninterference and positive rights to human flourishing in order not to unjustifiably maintain social stability at the expense of individuals, or groups of individuals, whose autonomy is violated. In fact negative and positive rights are necessarily connected in a true picture of social justice. Recognition of and respect for maintaining social stability justly must be determined in light of what is (individually) vital for one to thrive as a person. These features of the moral situation may conflict but they need not. More to the point, by making the social and individual features of our lives compatible we can eliminate the arbitrary features of our social and individual lives that do conflict with human wellbeing.

A Confucian Model of Rights: Reconciling Individual Rights with Social Justice

We are now in a position to see how a Confucian model of rights can come out of this. I will focus on the relation of parent to child, the most basic of the Confucian relations. This relation is conceived of as connected to feelings rooted in our humanity. Familial feelings, when properly cultivated, produce a strong sense of parental duty for the ordinate – read, responsible – person, and of trusting dependency for the child. In this sense, parents should “naturally” feel obliged to properly care for their children. Whether or not parents actually feel this, social justice demands that they are held accountable as parents, in virtue of their assuming the role. I think this can be said to generate a claim or “right” on the part of the child to have those obligations met. When those obligations are not met, for example, when children are abused or neglected, they have a right to be protected. This is regardless of what the delinquent parent herself may want. With respect to the official - citizen relation the state would have a duty, and the child a corresponding right to protective custody if no safe family relation is available to properly fulfill this role of caring for the child.14

14 I am aware of how complex the considerations will be in the pursuit of reconciling individual claims to free agency with matters of social justice. To offset some of these concerns, I will say that the state still has as great of a burden of protecting the rights and duties of its
Notice that the individualist treatment of autonomy in the United States has led to the presumption that more “ordinate” personal rights deserve greater protection. This has led to unjustly favoring parental rights. But on the Confucian model that I am suggesting, greater duties would fall to those who occupy a position of social authority, the more ordinate person of the relation, while greater rights would fall to those more vulnerable, dependent persons who are in need of care and protection.

Ordinate persons can legitimately shoulder greater duties exactly because their autonomy has developed into the irreducibly social and moral virtue of responsibility. Autonomy without responsibility is morally incomplete. Kant may have rightly thought that autonomy determines our will to be capable of moral agency, but why think that a right to execute this capacity must follow? The capacity for autonomous choice does not make choice good. Moreover, autonomy must develop into the virtue of responsibility for us not to fear it on moral grounds. The pursuit of personal freedom without responsibility has contributed to the fact that close to half of marriages in the United States break up, and to children who are undisciplined, unsupervised, and often uncared for. Notice that this situation is consistent with the belief that children should be raised in this (corrupt) spirit of freedom. It is not uncommon for parents in the United States to value their children’s “privacy” so much, for example, that children are left unsupervised before it is age appropriate to do so. These parents often believe that they have a “duty” to give children “independence” when they still need nurturing. Such values may lead children to a destructive path of alcohol, drugs, and promiscuity, a path of deprivation that mitigates their maturing into truly responsible persons. Only the seeds of true autonomy – of responsibility – are given in our nature. Responsibility is autonomy ma-

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15 We still have rights to noninterference, for example, to privacy. So this Confucian rights model may in theory reconcile individual rights with social justice, but in practice the dilemmas will remain difficult and would be adjudicated much like they are now. I think the main effect of adopting a relational model of rights such as this one would be to encourage greater reflection on the minimum criteria legitimizing authoritative conduct, as this is what demarcates what is just from what is unjust. Such reflection occurs from social movements that raise consciousness about what “genuine human flourishing” entails, and in turn, how unjust treatment of human beings can be identified (e.g., of minor children as well as those not yet born). It could also easily be extended (with some modification) to animals and the environment.
tured through a process of social development where we learn on a fundamental level how to value others as ourselves.

Autonomy then, is an individual capacity and social principle requiring interdependency to develop into the moral virtue of responsibility. Morality makes us concerned about how to think, feel, and act with respect to others. Kant’s account of autonomy is just too restrictive, because the will is conceived as being exclusively independent. The good will, in and of itself, needs only (reason and) freedom for Kant. Autonomy thus becomes a value in and of itself. But reason and freedom is not enough to make the will a good one. Autonomy gains moral worth only when it develops into responsibility: so that one wills to value others as oneself. This ability to value others on such a fundamental level also means valuing their status as role-bearing persons, and valuing the relations that fill and define the daily life of others. To value others as oneself, one must understand that the relations that are self-defining for others are as important to them as ours are to us.

Here, I must offer a point of clarification. On my account, being a person means being autonomous and communal. Thus personhood does not just amount to a nexus of roles. The more important question from a moral point of view is whether these roles have been embodied responsibly. My view conflicts with Kant’s then, because for him, autonomous agents are only obliged to consistently will freedom for every other free agent. Kant’s view will not tell us whether one is responsible in the sense that social justice demands, or whether one is a good parent, a good spouse, a good sibling, a good citizen, a good employee, or a good friend. In short, social justice depends on the ability to value others as oneself, or to think abstractly about human life so to imagine what it would be like to be another person in any of the basic relations they may embody. This is to “take the analogy from what is near.”\(^{16}\) It allows us to value – and evaluate – others as free individuals and as role-bearing persons.

So with respect to the question of rights: what if parents fail to take responsibly for their children? On my view they are morally accountable, and precisely for failing to do so. It should be clear, however, that given the web of personal relations, including the relation of husband to wife, things are more complex than they first seem to be. I would also argue that failure to meet one’s basic obligations – especially in cases involving the rights of dependents to be properly cared for – may well be moral grounds for a

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\(^{16}\) This is how Fingeratte (41) renders Analects 6.30. Ames and Rosemont (110) translate it “correlating one’s conduct with what is near.”
“ritual severance” of the relations. For example, a child who is raised abusively would have a right to be put in protective custody, a right to foster care, or even to be adopted into a permanent home. It may then become that child’s duty to psychologically “divorce” her former parents, at least to the degree that maturing into a responsible adult requires it. In any case, the child’s right to be nurtured by a new family will eventually come to rest on her duty to take responsibility for her own development. A person needing a ritual severance would have to realize, and even despite natural feelings to the contrary, that she is a separate person no longer defined by the original family. Divorce from marital partners requires a similar psychological transition, but not one that takes place in the context of a hierarchical relation. In cases like adoption natural feelings have to be redirected to parents defined not biologically, but socially, insofar as the parents are willing to fulfill the duties basic to the relation. Like the relation of “partner to partner,” biological factors such as gender and genetics are not (at least in any straightforward sense) essential to fulfilling the duties between parents and children. Responsibility is a relational, developmental achievement in any case: it must be both given and taken.

I will end by noting the importance of loving and being loved. To be sure, love – like freedom – is an enormously broad concept and reality. Like freedom, what makes love a virtue and not a vice is that one take’s responsibility for it. The form this will take will differ depending upon the relation involved. Healthy children’s form of love is trusting dependency; they should not be expected to love in a mature, autonomous way. This will grow out of their being loved deeply and appropriately by their parents; they are dependent upon parental love not only to be psychologically healthy children, but also to (learn how to) become good parents in their own turn, by the good example of their own parents. Without good parents, however, becoming a good parent oneself will require at some time in one’s own development a critique of what went wrong and reflection on how not to follow that path, as well as a recognition of what was good and to be legitimately embraced. It may in the extreme case even require a ritual sev-

17 The difference is that autonomy is the virtue of responsibility once properly developed. Love – like all other virtues – requires responsibility but is not to be identified with it.

18 Philosophers like Foucault and other “feminist” thinkers have argued the morally obscene view that children (and even very young ones) can consent to sex with adults and should not have their autonomy – and their right to adult-child sexual relations – violated by “moralists” who unjustly paternalize (parentalize) them in doing so. I believe that children should be “parentalized” exactly because they are (dependent and vulnerable) children, needing protection from such adults who would fail to value age-appropriate differences and the effect of activities that could stunt a child’s psychological, personal, moral, and social growth.
erance of feelings so they can be consciously redirected. One does not have to be defined by her family of origin.

Conceiving of love as virtue or vice also provides moral grounds for discouraging people from entering into adult relations until they can accept responsibility for them. Love is not a game to be played in the name of personal freedom, for example by self-absorbed adolescents in the effort to prove their maturity. Sadly, though, loving responsibly depends on being loved responsibly. Thus so many of our problems stem from deprivation and from parents not fulfilling this basic duty to their children. Love allows us to feel genuinely and deeply connected to others. If we mistake the vice of “love” for the authentic human(e) reality then these connections will end up being fickle, immature and selfish. Such selfishness should not be confused with autonomy.

So who has the main duty to promote social wellbeing and justice? The answer is: those who stand in an ordinate position to people dependent upon them for care. These persons must legitimately occupy their positions of authority, however, and this requires responsibility. The pathos so prevalent in the United States, I think, stems from conceiving of love, as well as other natural feelings and capacities, as an independent part of one’s own makeup – or as being internal and exclusively individualistic instead of as being a function of the most important relations that we can embody in the world. In short, love too is a social reality, and we are humanized to the degree that we take responsibility for it.

REFERENCES


Inspired by Confucius’ characterization of the learning of the ancient sages as “learning for the sake of the self” (Analects, 14.24) Neo-Confucian thinkers identified themselves as followers of the “learning for the sake of the self.” They interpreted this to mean “learning of the body and mind,” “learning of mind and human nature,” “learning of human nature and destiny, and “learning to be human.” The learning focusing on the self–body, mind, human nature, and destiny—was considered authentic, as contrasted with “learning for the sake of others” (Analects, 14.24, 15.21). They took seriously the instruction in The Great Learning: “From the emperor to the commoner, each, without exception, should regard self-cultivation as the root” (The Great Learning, chap. 1). They believed that only when the root is firmly planted can branches flourish; namely, without self-cultivation, regulation, governance of the state, and peace under The Great Learning cannot be attained (The Great Learning, chap. 1). This fundamental principle in Confucian learning seems to suggest that self-realization, rather than social service, is the core concern. Confucians strongly believe that authentic learning is embodied in our physical constitution, internalized in our heart-and-mind, embedded in our Heavenly endowed nature, and incorporated in our inner purpose of life.

Yet, undeniably, Confucian ethics is predominantly a social ethic. By choosing to be in the world, if not of the world, Confucius made it clear that caring for the other is essential for our existence. If filial duty to our parents and brotherly love toward our siblings are the ways of commencing our learning to become human (Analects, 1.2), it is inconceivable that in teaching we can relegate the recognition of the other to the background. The concrete living person here and now is inevitably intertwined in a net-

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1 The translations from the Analects and the Great Learning are my own. Translations from the Mencius are based on those of D. C. Lau.
work of human relations. I never exist as an isolated individual; I am my father and mother’s son, my siblings’ brother, my spouse’s husband, my children’s father, my colleagues’ colleague, and my friends’ friend. I become what I am through them. Herbert Mead’s distinction between “I” and “me” and the conversation between “I” and “me” with the social process as its logical antecedent is relevant here (Mead, 1913, 374-380). In this sense, the Confucian value-orientation is much closer to the communitarian insistence on the context and historicity in which a person is necessarily situated than the liberal assumption that we may philosophize from the viewpoint of an abstract individual, the state of nature, without any reference to his or her situatedness.

Herbert Fingarette, in his seminal interpretation of Confucian ritual propriety (li, civility), makes the strong claim that it is not only conceivable but also imperative to understand the Confucian person as a thorough social being to the extent that there is a total absence of interiority (inner dimension). He further claims that in Confucian thought existential choice (the image of the crossroad for example) is not even a rejected possibility. (Fingarette, 18-36.) Fingarette was so fascinated by the radical difference between Confucian communitarianism and modern American individualism that he believed that the language of psychology, not to mention the psychoanalytical vocabulary, is totally alien to the authentic self-expression of the Confucian person. Fingarette’s powerful and subtle argument for the idea and ideal of li is most appealing. For one thing, he has successfully integrated li into our contemporary conceptualization of the good life, as the “otherness” of ritual propriety is effortlessly and elegantly transformed into the civil and intimate sense of fruitful human interaction and the spirit of togetherness. Furthermore, his notion of “the secular as sacred” is so pleasing to the Confucian ear that it appears to be a definitive rejection of Max Weber’s characterization of the Confucian ethic as submission to the status quo of the existing political order, a kind of secular humanism diametrically opposed to the faith-generated Protestant ethic and thus devoid of the salvific potential for changing the world motivated by a transcendent vision (Weber, 235).

By relying exclusively on the language of sociology, Fingarette may have heuristically critiqued the common psychological obsession with the inner self in the modern West. But Confucian education—learning to be fully human—without reference to the psychodynamics of self-cultivation is unthinkable. Perhaps, as an unintended consequence, the most serious flaw in this interpretation is the failure to properly appreciate the core idea of humanity (ren) in classical Confucian thought. Fingarette’s attempt to account
for ren as a skillful implementation of ritual property is not convincing (Fingarette, 48-52). Instead of confronting the single most important Confucian virtue on its own terms, it seems to have been explained away as subsidiary to li. This is not the place to enter into a technical philological debate on a crucial passage in the Analects, namely “conquer yourself and return to propriety is humanity” (Analects, 12.1). Suffice it to say that to subsume ren under the category of ritual propriety is, at best, a minority opinion. Confucian humanism without ren as its core value easily degenerates into ritualism. Ironically, this is precisely the reason that scholars under the influence of the Weberian thesis criticize the Confucian tradition for its passive adjustment to the world.

Nevertheless, the appeal of defining the Confucian self in terms of social roles is obvious. It underscores the basic Confucian impulse that it is unnatural, if not impossible, to regard the self in isolation. Only by situating the self in a dyadic relationship can we understand how the self acts as a concrete living person in ordinary human existence. Common sense tells us that personal identity comes into being as the result of specific encounters with parents, siblings, relatives, and friends. The rich texture of human relations can hardly be captured by abstract universalism. It is in the “lived concreteness” that we experience immediately and intimately the world around us. We see ourselves in the presence of others. We find our proper niche in the world by referring to the network of human interaction that defines our social space. We may do things alone and imagine ourselves totally detached from the entanglements of social obligations. We may even engage ourselves in lonely quests for inner spirituality and, by deliberate choice, cut ourselves off from all social ties. But these are extraordinary cases executed by exceptional people for reasons beyond common human comprehension. The primary Confucian concern is how we live our ordinary lives in the world here and now.

In the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life, we rely upon the knowledge that we share with others to help us navigate the troubled waters of thought and action. Typically our self-reflection is occasioned by the attitude that the others exhibit toward us. Often, the other’s subjectivity is available to us through face-to-face communication whereby a maximum of sentiments help to disclose an inner life hitherto unbeknownst to us. This is perhaps the reason why Confucius described the method of humanity by the ability to take what is near at hand as an analogy (Analects, 6.30). In popular expression, this means to compare heart with heart. If I can empathize with the feelings of the other by retrospectively referring to my own feelings, I gain a measure of understanding of the other’s subjectivity in a
way that I can never obtain by remaining passively objective. This is a form of embodied knowing (tizhi), that is only realizable by a personal encounter with the other. Justifiably, following the Shuowen (Explanation of words, possibly the first Chinese dictionary), Sinologists appeal to etymology to define humanity (ren) as involving two persons. Peter Boodberg, an eminent scholar of Chinese studies persuasively argues in a philosophical essay that ren as humanity should be properly interpreted as co-humanity (Boodberg, 317-32). This clearly implies that individuality and sociality are inextricably intertwined and integrated and that homo sapiens is always in the same measure homo socius.

However, even if we accept the contention that phenomenologically as a matter of fact the self should always be taken as a constellation of social roles, our understanding of the Confucian self is still partial. If we further insist, as Fingarette does, that the “inner self” is totally irrelevant to the idea of the self in the Analects, we fail to account for the single most important virtue in Confucian humanism, namely ren and we thus commit a serious mistake. Of course, one may argue that the absence of the idea of the inner self is compatible with Xunzi’s, if not Mencius’, interpretation of the Confucian legacy. Even then, one takes a minority view, at variance with virtually all the major thinkers in Neo-Confucianism. Suggestively, the graphic ren, in the recently discovered Guodian material attributed to the first generation of Confucius’ disciples, is invariably depicted as the vertical combination of shenxin (body and mind). Although we may dismiss the implication by arguing that the graphic is no more than phonetic, as several Mainland scholars maintain, since in classical Chinese all phonetic symbols carry semantic meanings, we cannot easily explain away its significance.

The paradox we face here is the reconciliation of sociality (human relations) and individuality (inner self) in Confucian humanism. My preliminary attempt to deal with this predicament is to envision the self as a center of relationships (Tu, 1989, 27, 95, 110 and passim). As a center, the self is unique and irreducible to its sociality, no matter how broadly it is encompassed, and as relationships, the self must be located in a network of social roles and it can never be hermetically sealed from the world. Richard Rorty, from his ironist postmodern perspective, argues for the incompatibility of self-realization and social service (Rorty, 96-121). If Rorty were right, the Confucian project would necessarily fail. It seems counterintuitive that we must choose between “center” and “relations.” Our everyday experience tells us that our self-awareness, far from being a private matter, is the result of constant interaction with the other. The existence of the other is necessary and desirable for our self-awareness. Our sense of personal worth is
predicated on recognition of the other. Self-cultivation is profoundly personal but not inevitably private. Conceptually and experientially, it is a serious flaw to confuse the personal with the private. Although the personal is a matter of the heart, it can be made publicly accountable. Often, we are willing, and sometimes anxious, to share our strong personal feelings. Through sharing, our feelings either can be properly channeled or substantially enriched (Tu 1989, 20). Feelings shared are attuned to a social rhythm that can be observed and appreciated by an ever-expanding network of sympathetic participants. In contrast, privacy is a concealed space deliberately carved out to protect ourselves from outside intrusion. Self as a center of relations can be personally experienced, although it is at odds with those who believe that sociality is unavoidably a threat to privacy.

A critic of the Confucian claim that harmony between sociality and individuality is attainable can simply consign Confucian ethics to a remote time and place irrelevant to the complex modern world wherein we assume a vicissitude of social roles unimaginable in traditional societies. Hans-Georg Moeller’s Luhmannian analysis of the Confucian semantics of individuality is significant in this connection. In Niklas Luhmann’s terminology, in a society of “stratified differentiation,” individuality means – in accordance with its literal meaning – “indivisibility,” and thus it does not yet mean “uniqueness” or “singularity.” The individual is not yet characterized by its specific particularity, but rather by possessing – through birth, rank and status – a specific non-destructible and non-changeable identity. The social positioning grants an inviolable individuality in the sense of a fixed social status. Luhmann uses the term “inclusion” to denote individuality under the conditions of stratified differentiation (Moeller, 31).

In modern functionally differentiated societies, Luhmann continues, multiple subsystems, such as economics, politics, voluntary associations, universities, and the professions, emerged. They replaced the family (the household) to become the institutions dominating the social scene. The boundaries between these subsystems, rather than the boundaries between social strata, mark the primary social differentiations. The individual in traditional societies is an integral part of the whole, in actual experience, inseparable from the inclusive differentiation, whereas in modern societies “[w]hatever the individual makes of itself and however society contributes to this: it has its standpoint in itself and outside of society” (Moeller, 32). The implicit change in the semantics of individuality, from inclusion to exclusion, fundamentally transforms the indivisible into a unique person. Notwithstanding Luhmann’s diagnostic assessment of the predication of the modern individual – caught between fragmented selfhood and “imita-
tional man” (*homo copie*) (33), the unique person can never recover the premodern sense of interconnectedness between self and society. In light of Luhmann’s insight as interpreted by Moeller, the challenge to the Confucian ideal of an “organic unity that underlies the person, the community, and the transcendent” is obvious. However, it is not difficult to imagine that, through self-cultivation (a Confucian form of spiritual exercise), we can practically integrate ourselves into the community and experientially communicate with the transcendent. The Christian idea of the indestructibility of the soul which enables the individual to have direct access to the divine or the Buddhist notion of selflessness that empowers the individual to rise above the mundane world is not merely an imagined possibility but a lived reality. Although Confucians do not tap transcendental symbolic resources and do not practice other-worldly asceticism, they are deeply concerned about the ultimate meaning of life. It is not inconceivable that while in contemporary social life we cannot but divide ourselves into multiple social roles, we can still cherish the vision of “organic unity” as a source of inspiration for our personal identity. The democratic spirit may have an “elective affinity” with “[f]unctional differentiation based on the non-hierarchical co-existence of multiple social systems” (Moeller, 37), but it can also be realized in a Confucian community with an emphasis on family ethics. We can very well reject exclusive individuality in favor of an inclusive personality without losing sight of the intractable reality of the compartmentalization in our lifeworld. We can also maintain that the persistent effort to integrate ourselves in a holistic environment is more congenial to human flourishing than the uncritical acceptance of the assertion that self-realization is relentlessly private, subjective, and unsocial. But a persuasive argument for an alternative to exclusive individuality as a way of human flourishing requires a much more complex analysis.

It is vitally important to ask the critical question of whether or not the vision of “organismic unity” is practicable in our lifeworld today. If we can only show that it is imaginable but “simply structurally impossible” as a practical idea in our ordinary daily existence, it has merely historical rather than contemporary significance. Luhmann seems to argue that a disenchanted moment, the idea of indivisibility, namely the medieval Christian concept of the indestructibility of the soul, may become problematical, but the belief in the inseparability of the self and society is definitely shattered. Luhmann’s thesis implies that in a social order characterized by functional, rather than stratified, differentiation, a unique individual is no longer an integral part of a whole, but “a variety of new partial inclusions” (32) in a society that is unavoidably objectified as the other. Surely, there is a meas-
ure of truth in Luhmann’s diagnostic reading of “the relation between the semantics of individuality and the structures of society” in the contemporary world, but the story of the human condition is yet to be told and the Luhmannian observation is, at best, one-sided. This is not the place to offer a Confucian critique of the Enlightenment mentality. Suffice it to note that, by grounding his interpretive enterprise on the legacy of nineteenth-century German Idealism, Luhmann may have overlooked the persuasive power of the ecological, feminist, communitarian, postmodernist, indigenous, Asian philosophical, comparative religious, and Axial-Age civilizational discourses that emerged in the twentieth century as responses to the predominant ideology of the modern West. New Confucian humanism, informed by these critical reflections on the human condition, is a local knowledge that is strategically well-positioned to become nationally, regionally, and globally significant.

Globalization enhances regional, national, and local identities. Even though thinkers under the influence of modernization theories are still attracted to the concept of convergence, the thesis of homogenization is increasingly difficult to defend. The wishful thinking that the emergence of a “global village” automatically transformed the world into a mutually dependent and beneficial community never materialized. The hypothesis that economic globalization, like the rising water table lifting up all boats, would benefit all (for example, the rich would become richer, but the poor might not become poorer) was empirically disproved. Instead, on the international scene, as a result of globalization the world has become more fragmented and bewildering. Even the idea of the new world order evokes a sense of chaotic disorganization. If we can somehow envision our increasingly interconnected and interdependent world as an “imagined community,” we will discover that its defining characteristics are difference, differentiation, and outright discrimination, rather than integration.

Nevertheless, undeniably, the internationalization of trade, finance, capital, tourism, migration, drugs, crime, and terrorism has overwhelmed every corner of the world to the extent that no place is immune to their impact. Science, especially information technology, has so fundamentally restructured our ordinary existence that the routines of everyday life are forever disrupted in a way that has never been imagined in human history. In this unanticipated brave new world, the rules of the game are no longer predictable and the human condition must be reconfigured to reflect a virtual reality that is incomprehensible to most of us. The veil of ignorance is so thick that, no matter how conscious and reflective we are, we cannot be sure that what we do can automatically bring about positive consequences.
Ironically, despite the loss of unity and cohesion, the imagined human community as a whole suffers from grave dangers that are sharable making the idea of the planet “lifeboat” a common experience.

In light of grave dangers, such as the threat of terrorism, social disintegration, the depletion of natural resources, and environmental degradation, the dilemma of self-realization and social service or between the multi or imitational self seems secondary and less compelling. What we actually face is the very viability of the human species, let alone human flourishing in any shape or form. An elemental reformation of the human condition is in order. We are desperately in need of an all-embracing humanistic vision to enable us to situate in the cosmos and to empower us to cultivate a sense of direction so as to lead a meaningful life in the world.

In a comparative philosophical perspective, the “anthropocosmic” vision in Confucian humanism is a conceptual resource that offers a way of thinking about this unprecedented situation. The vision presupposes a unity between anthropological and cosmological perceptions on the human condition. In the social context, unity so conceived, is not uniformity. If this were the case, it could not transcend the idea of “universal brotherhood,” a romantic affirmation of human-relatedness hardly relevant in our age of exclusive individuality. However, “great unity” presupposes the harmonization of differences. In the classical Confucian formulation, the profound person opts for harmony (he) rather than sameness (tong) (*Analects*, 13.23). In this sense, the unity, or rather the “great unity,” celebrates differences and works toward overlapping consensuses as a point of departure for harmonizing divergent trends. While harmony recognizes conflict and contradiction, it seeks to transform destructive tension into creative tension so that a stressful relation can be energized to reach a higher synthesis. In the language of the *Book of Change*, the cosmos is never a static structure but rather is a dynamic process. In its constant unfolding, it always generates new realities by creatively transforming the existing order, laden with inconsistencies, into an ever-innovating congruent process.

By implication, self-cultivation, a form of spiritual exercise, emulates Heaven’s creativity. It is open, dynamic, transformative, and unceasing. Whether we came into being by the mysterious design of a transcendent reality, the “wholly other,” or through a persistent evolutionary process, we find an intimate niche in the cosmos as our ultimate source and meaning of life. We are here not as mere creatures passively submitting to an absolutely incomprehensible and radically transcendent divinity, but as co-creators endowed with the intelligence and wisdom of apprehending Heaven as creativity in itself. We are entrusted, individually and communally, with the
duty to realize, through self-cultivation, both our aesthetic ability to appreciate the wonderful presentation of Heaven’s resourcefulness and our moral power to actively continue Heaven’s great work. The ancient Chinese saying, “Heaven engenders; human completes” (tiansheng rencheng), accurately represents the spirit of this “anthropocosmic” vision.

Heaven so conceived is omnipresent and omniscient, but not omnipotent. To insist on Heaven’s omnipotence is to accord the cosmic process an all-embracing power of self-adjustment without any reference to the centrality of human participation. An unintended negative consequence of this is the abdication of human responsibility in the maintenance of universal order. Human beings, through their own personal cultivation, actively take part in Heaven’s creativity. They are also capable of committing grave mistakes contrary to the Heavenly virtue of generativity and vitality, damaging to themselves and detrimental to the environment around them. Human beings can survive all natural catastrophes, but they may be destroyed by their own doing. The contemporary significance of this line of thinking is obvious: man-made disasters, beyond Heaven’s power to prevent them, are the real reason for raising doubts about the viability of the human species.

Human nature, like all other modalities of being, is endowed by Heaven. Yet the uniqueness of being human is our inner ability to learn to follow the Way. We are capable of educating ourselves to become worthy partners of the cosmic process. This is predicated on the assumptive reason that we are empowered to apprehend Heaven through our self-knowledge. As Mencius avowed, if we can realize the full measure of our heart-and-mind, we will know our nature; if we know our nature, we will know Heaven. Surely existentially we cannot fully realize our heart-and-mind, thus, in practical terms, it is unlikely that we will ever know our nature in itself and, by inference, it is unlikely we will ever know Heaven in its entirety. But, in theory and, to a certain extent in practice, we can be attuned to the Way of Heaven; specifically a sympathetic resonance with the cosmic process (“the flowing agency of the great transformation”) is realizable through our persistent self-cultivation. This involves not only cognitional recognition of the mind but also experiential embodiment of the heart.

Understandably, the highest manifestation of Confucian self-realization is the “unity of Heaven and humanity” (tianren heyi). The authentic possibility of mutual responsiveness between the human heart-and-mind and the Way of Heaven is implied in such a unity. It is vitally important to acknowledge the asymmetry in the Heaven-human relationship. Although Heaven is creativity in itself, human beings learn to be creative
through self-effort. Heaven’s genuineness is naturally brilliant, whereas human beings at their best struggle to become true to themselves by means of their knowledge and wisdom. Nevertheless, as co-creators human beings can on behalf of Heaven carry the Way in the world. They are obligated, by nature, to realize the Way in their lifeworld. In so doing, the Way is no longer out there as mere transcendence with no intimate relationship to the human existence here and now. Rather, it is embodied in the common experience of everyday life, making ordinary people, without necessarily being aware of its far-reaching implication, personally connected with Heaven. Of course, there is a transcendent dimension of Heaven beyond human comprehension, but Heaven is also immanent in human nature, as not only a laden potential but also as a lived reality. Indeed, human beings can assist in the transforming and nourishing functions of the cosmic process (Tu 1989, 77) and, by implication, help the Heavenly Way prevail in human affairs. This may explain why Confucius affirmed that “human beings can make the Way great; the Way cannot make human beings great!” (Analects, 15.29)

Nevertheless, the godlike power of the human implicit in this intriguing statement entails neither anthropocentrism nor anthropomorphism. Although Confucian discourse regards humans as preeminent, it does not view the cosmos exclusively from the human point of view, nor does it attribute human characteristics or behavior to nonhuman things. Humans are supposed to emulate Heaven and to learn from heavenly patterns for the sake of self-realization. Notwithstanding that the rich endowment of human nature and the Way is accessible to all human beings, the task is painfully difficult. Only with awe-inspiring effort can one truly bear witness to the Way. Mencius made this explicit:

Shun rose from the field; Fu Yüeh was raised to office from among the builders; Chiao Ke from amidst the fish and salt; Kuan Chung from the hands of the prison officer; Sun Shu-ao from the sea and Po-li Hsi from the market. That is why Heaven, when it is about to place a great burden on a man, always first tests his resolution, exhausts his frame and makes him suffer starvation and hardship, frustrates his efforts so as to shake him from his mental lassitude, toughen his nature and make good his deficiencies. As a rule, man can mend his ways only after he has made mistakes. It is only when a man frustrated in mind and in his deliberations that he is able to innovate. It is only when his intensions become visible on his countenance and audible in his tone of voice that others can understand him. As a rule, a state without law-abiding families and reliable Gentlemen on the one hand, and, on the other, without the threat of foreign invasion, will perish. Only then do we learn the lesson that we survive in adversity and perish in ease and comfort. (Mencius, 6B15, 181)
Since the realization of humanity has cosmological as well as anthropological significance, it is never an easy task. Human aspiration for uniting with Heaven is not a demonstration of hubris. Nor is the human hope for Heaven’s responsiveness a justification for self-aggrandizement. The promise that humanity in its all-embracing fullness is realizable prompts sense of mission, requiring a total commitment:

…the profound person cannot but be broadminded and resolute, for the burden is heavy and the way is long. He takes humanity as his personal vocation, how can we say that burden is not heavy? He does not let go until he dies, how can we say that the road is not long? (Analects, 8.7)

The paradox is that, on the one hand, Heaven is the ultimate authority for human worth and the primary source of human life and, on the other, the active participation of the human is essential for the completion of Heaven’s great work. One can certainly contend that this “human, all too human” concept of Heaven is inescapably anthropocentric and anthropomorphic. In the last analysis, however, anthropological characterization, no matter how sophisticated, is inadequate to capture the cosmic dimension in the Confucian sense of humanity. The Classic of Change is primarily a cosmological text, but it is also a book of wisdom profoundly meaningful to those who put into practice in their lives its insightful observations about “the design of heaven and the pattern of earth” (tianwen dili). This “anthropocosmic” vision seems no more than a variation of Luhmann’s psychology and ethics of inclusion. Nonetheless, it may help the exclusive individuality overcome the fragmentation and imitation that Luhmann’s analysis has diagnosed.

Moeller’s perception of the Confucian self as an inclusive individuality fixed in birth, rank, and status is definitely incapable of responding to the highly differentiated social roles that a modern person habitually assumes to lead in a normal life in a postindustrial, if not postmodern, society. The idea of the self as “a specific un-destructive and non-changeable identity” (Moeller, 31) is outmoded, but the quest for personal integration and authenticity has reemerged as a crucial issue in philosophical reflection. In the twenty-first century, a most significant development in professional philosophical circles may very well be the spiritual turn, not a departure from the world but a return to the planet earth, with a broad humanist vision embodying both Heaven and nature.
Learning for the sake of the self involves a deepening as well as a broadening process. The self is not only body and mind but also soul and spirit. Self-cultivation, simply put, is the embodiment of mind, soul, and spirit. The depth of self-knowledge is unreachable by social praxis alone. No matter how subtle and expansive our social involvement is, there is a dimension of the self that can never be fully comprehended by referring to human relations. In a sense, the singularity and uniqueness of the individual is not alien to the Confucian idea of the self. As a center of relationships, its centrality is accessible only by “vigilant solitariness.” The body itself offers an excellent example. It is not a given, but an attainment. As an attainment, it is not merely the result of sociality but also of persistent conscious effort. Actually, its individuality is profoundly personal, although it is empirically visible and publicly accountable. As Eliot Deutsch insists, we do not own our body, we become our body. Mencius offered a classical articulation of this insight: “Our body and complexion are given to us by Heaven. Only a sage can give his body completion” (Mencius, 7A:38). Thus the way to sagehood can be perceived as a process of authenticating our body so that our mind, soul, and spirit can also become refined manifestation of selfhood. Again, Mencius made it explicit:

The desirable is called “good.”
To have it in oneself is called “true.”
To possess it fully in oneself is called “beautiful.”
To shine forth with this full possession is called “great.”
To be great and be transformed by this greatness is called “sage.”
To be sage and to transcend the understanding is called “spiritual.”
(Mencius, 7B:25)

What is the contemporary relevance of this meditation on the self? I have already mentioned that globalization enhances localization and that the “global village,” even as an imagined community, is characterized by difference. At the individual level, virtually all primordial ties — ethnicity, gender, age, language, land, class, and faith — have become sites of contention. Economic globalization may give the impression of homogenization, but it is only part of the story. Cultural globalization indicates not only convergence but also divergence. Actually, diversity in the contemporary world compels us to conceptualize globalization in terms of “many globalizations” (Berger and Huntington, 2002) and modernization in terms of “multiple modernities” (Tu, 2000). Since I have discussed this issue elsewhere, suffice it to note here that precisely because social disintegration occurs at all levels, the need for reintegration globally, regionally, nationally, and locally is urgent. Simplistic dichotomies, such as modern/tradition, global/local, and the
West/the rest, are no longer adequate. The “either-or” mode of thinking is ineffective in this complex situation. What happens globally invariably has an impact on the local scene, but seemingly indigenized conditions may also have international repercussions. The prominence of identity politics throughout the world is a case in point. Accordingly, a major challenge confronting the human community is to harmonize, and respect difference at all levels.

Strictly speaking, the dialogical relationship between Heaven and humanity is exemplified by harmony as well as unity. It provides the root metaphor for all dyadic relationships in Confucianism. To reiterate an earlier point, harmonization of differences, far from being uniformity, is synchronization of divergent agencies. A pre-Confucian reference to Chinese cuisine elegantly captures this spirit:

The Marquis of Qi had returned from a hunt, and was being attended by Aster Yan at the Chuan Pavilion when Ran Qui came galloping up to them at full speed. The Marquis remarked, it is only Ran Qui who harmonizes with me. Master Yan replied, certainly Ran Qui agrees with you, but how can you say that he harmonizes with you? The Marquis asked, is there a difference between agreeing and harmonizing? Master Yan answered, there is a difference. Harmonizing is like cooking soup. You have water, fire, vinegar, pickle, salt, and plums with which to cook fish and meat. You heat it by means of firewood, and then the cook harmonizes the ingredients, balancing the various flavors, strengthening the taste of whatever is lacking and moderating the taste of whatever is excessive. Then the gentleman eats it, and it serves to relax his heart. Now, Ran Qui is not like this. What his lord declares acceptable, he also declares acceptable; what his lord declares wrong, he also declares wrong. This is like trying to season water with more water who would be willing to eat it? It is like playing nothing but a single note on the zither who would want to listen to it? (Zuozhuan, 684, Duke Zhao, Year 20.)

Harmony, so conceived, takes differences as its point of departure. In Confucian humanism, harmony between Heaven and humanity is normally mediated through a variety of intermediary structures: neighborhood, society, nation, world, globe, and cosmos. The texture of harmony is interwoven with three mutually beneficial relationships. They are, in addition to rapport between Heaven and humanity, fruitful interaction between self and community and sustainable connection between human species and nature.

These four inseparable dimensions - self, community, nature, and Heaven – define the parameters of the Confucian project, the project of becoming fully human. As a complex, dynamic, and open process, it involves transcending, sequentially, egoism, nepotism, parochialism, ethnocentrism,
and chauvinistic nationalism, and anthropocentrism. At the same time, as a manifestation of lived concreteness rather than abstract universalism, it is firmly rooted in oneself. This sense of rootedness is never lost when it expands to include successively one’s family, one’s face-to-face community, one’s nation, all humanity, all living beings, and the cosmos. Confucian humanism is inclusive rather than exclusive. It is neither de-spirited nor de-natured. It is both naturalistic and spiritual. This “anthropocosmic” vision entails that humanity in its all-embracing fullness “forms one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things” (CHENG Hao, vol. 2A, 4).

Harmony tolerates, recognizes, and respects difference. Indeed, it celebrates difference. It maintains that through difference we can benefit from mutual reference and mutual learning. Moral and social goods can only result from fruitful interaction among different agents, like the five flavors that produce the good taste and the five sounds that produce the good music. By harmonizing conflicts and contradictions, much creative energy is generated. This is what Confucian thinkers perceive how Heaven, “the great transformation,” actually works. As the *yin-yang* model clearly specifies, male and female complementarities are attainable only by a dialogical interchange between contrasting forces.

In classical Confucian thought, the ideal society is referred to as the “great unity.” It is a utopian vision, an imagined fiduciary community infused with public-spiritedness. By implication, it also symbolizes a most cherished form of life in which self and community, despite the inevitable danger of alienation and the intractable realities of compartmentalization are not irreconcilable opposites. Indeed, for the survival and flourishing of the human community it is vitally important to harmonize the relationship between human species and nature. Confucian humanism further claims that, as an ultimate concern, the human heart-and-mind can, through self-cultivation, acquire an experiential understanding of the Way of Heaven. With a view toward the future, the chances of realizing any of these dyadic relationships are remote, but the “anthropocosmic” vision is not only imaginable but also practicable. Although the possibility of this vision becoming an integral part of Chinese philosophers’ corporate critical self-consciousness is slim, it is likely to be publicly evoked by the Chinese elite as a defining characteristic of China’s cultural identity. By inference, it may very well be a thought-provoking idea for the global thinkers as well.
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PART III
On the Natural Theology of the Chinese

Fred Dallmayr

The vision of Leibniz for a close understanding and communication between China and the West has not yet come to realization. The growth of knowledge of Chinese culture in the United States and Europe has not been matched by a similar growth in its dissemination, especially at the public level; and the respectability of narrow specialization in the academic disciplines provides a ready-made excuse for all but China scholars to professionally ignore the world’s oldest continuous culture, inherited by one quarter of the human race. (Cook and Rosemont, 10).

Not long ago, at the annual meeting of one of the largest American social science associations, I attended a panel featuring some distinguished experts in the field of international relations and politics. One of these experts, a renowned professor from Chicago, after alerting listeners to the deep frictions troubling our world, began to hold forth on America’s need to be prepared for a coming war with China, spelling out in detail the steps required to meet this challenge. Listening to the speaker, I grew increasingly alarmed and dismayed; looking around, I expected to find a similar dismay among the rest of the audience. To my consternation this was not the case: most people listened passively or complacently, with some occasionally nodding their heads in approval. Seeking solace in my distress, I left the room and went to a nearby panel dealing with political theory or philosophy (which happens to be my academic home). To my added chagrin, I found panelists completely aloof from contemporary problems, entertaining themselves instead with postmodern wordplays and recondite paradoxes. It was at this point that I remembered the lines penned (or co-authored) by Henry Rosemont some ten years ago and cited above. I also recalled discussions I had with him when he deplored the enormous distance—or else naiveté—separating much of American academia from the world in which we live today.

When I was asked to contribute a paper to a volume planned in honor of Rosemont, I considered it an opportunity to reflect at greater length on the disjuncture prevailing between much of Western intellectual
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life and the rest of the world—a disjuncture fraught with grave perils. As it seems to me, the distance is likely to lead to two equally dismal outcomes: either to unreflective hegemonic ventures seeking to eradicate difference; or else to modes of parochial retreat unable to cope with global challenges. To my delight, I encountered in Henry Rosemont one of those rare individuals willing to swim against the tide. He is a professional specializing in Chinese thought and thus able to correlate Western and Chinese traditions of philosophy. Likewise, he is a public intellectual committed to building bridges between East and West and thus to foster a more peaceful and harmonious global order. As I came to realize, it was this oppositional stance, and especially the commitment to global peace, which led him early on in his career to the writings of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, that rare philosopher of the Age of Enlightenment who was keenly devoted to improving relations between Europe and China as a gateway to more peaceful relations between societies and cultures around the globe. In the following I want to do three things. I shall first sketch Rosemont’s approach to Leibniz and his perception of the latter’s philosophical and political role in his period. Next, I shall briefly recapitulate some main arguments in Leibniz’s writings on China and especially his famous “Discourse on the National Theology of the Chinese.” Finally, I shall offer some afterthoughts on the prospects of a global ecumenism as envisaged by Leibniz and Rosemont (as well as Hans-Georg Gadamer).

Rosemont and Leibniz

“If Erasmus of Rotterdam was the ‘Universal Man’ of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was a major candidate for the title two hundred years later” (Cook and Rosemont, 1). With these words and Rosemont open their study of Leibniz’s writings on China. These words are entirely apt. Like Erasmus before him, Leibniz was a Renaissance man combining in his person an incredible range of talents and competences: philosopher, scientist, mathematician, diplomat, public official, and indefatigable writer of letters. No one approaching his oeuvre can avoid being awe-struck by both the amplitude of his interests and the depth of his insights. Yet, something more seems needed to explain Rosemont’s particular fascination. Surely, as a student of Chinese thought, he could have confined himself to the translation, re-editing, and explication of ancient Chinese texts, or else to the exploration of the changes introduced in Chinese traditional thought by neo-Confucianism and later by the influx of
Western liberal and revolutionary ideas. Although not averse to any of these enterprises, Rosemont chose for himself a different path, one which distinguishes him (in my view) from other China scholars.

Basically, his fascination with Leibniz seems traceable to a number of—overt or more recessed—elective affinities. For one thing, like the German thinker before him, Rosemont is steeped in the tradition of Western philosophy and brings this tradition to bear on his study and interrogation of Chinese texts. In this manner, he is able to negotiate or mediate between different intellectual frameworks—something academic Sinologists and other area specialists are rarely able to do. More importantly, one can detect both intellectual and political parallels between our time and that of the German thinker. Intellectually and philosophically, our time is in large part prey to an overbearing scientism and instrumental-technological rationalism bent on sidelining if not erasing humanistic and ethical concerns. To this extent, our time is heir to the Cartesian worldview with its dualism of subject and object, spirit and matter, and its predilection for treating the entire world (outside the internalized subject) as a causal mechanism amenable to technological control. It was this worldview, inspired by Descartes, Bacon, and others, which in time became the backbone of much of Enlightenment philosophy, and still later the harbinger of nineteenth and twentieth-century scientism and empiricism. It was also this outlook against which Leibniz remonstrated in many of his writings—after having been attracted to it in his youth because of its promised escape from the blinders of medieval scholasticism.

Leibniz’s opposition to Descartes is well known. As he wrote pointedly to his contemporary, the French philosopher Malebranche:

In my view, one can impossibly assume that a substance marked by pure extension without thought [matter or res extensa] could relate to and act upon a substance construed as pure thought without extension [mind or res cogitans].” (Holz, 21-22).

In his letter, Leibniz asked his French colleague to dispel his doubts especially regarding the following (Cartesian) propositions: “that matter and spatial extension are one and the same; and that mind/spirit can subsist without any connection with a body.” In view of the incongruence of these propositions, the conclusion for Leibniz was clear and demonstrable, namely, that “matter is more than mere extension”—specifically, that it is both mass and “living force” or “Kraft” (a conception in many ways recapturing the Aristotelian notion of “entelechy”). While critical of Cartesian dualism, this counter-position did not simply embrace a unitary substance
without differentiation (in the manner of Spinoza). Rosemont and Cook perceptively pinpoint the gist of this metaphysical or ontological perspective. “Rejecting the dualism of Descartes and the monism of Spinoza,” they write, “Leibniz instead stressed plurality, diversity, harmony, and higher-order unity that could be grasped by reason” (Cook and Rosemont, 2). Whereas, in opposing Descartes, Spinoza concluded that “there could therefore be only a single substance,” Leibniz instead argued for an “indefinitely large number” of substances called “monads” which, while basically self-continued, could “all dance to the same tune played in a pre-established harmony composed by God.” As Rosemont and Cook add, this perspective was “original with Leibniz”—although parts of it can be traced to Giordano Bruno and Nicholas Cusanus—and in many ways “bears a close resemblance to the Chinese metaphysical view of the world.”

The indefinite multiplicity of individual substances, in Leibniz’s opinion, was not equivalent to fragmentation or chaotic dispersal. Such dispersal was prevented by the fact that all monads are connected and embroiled with each other in a shared world, differently phrased: that all interact with each other, not in a cause-effect nexus, but in the manner of a mirror cabinet where each part mirrors all others and the world. Given this basic correlation, monads for Leibniz did not require “windows.” In the lucid account of Hans Heinz Holz: “The individual element is always already a manifestation of the whole. Therefore, no windows are needed to relate one monad to others; each is itself the others—though only in a mirroring sense” (Holz, 49-50). Every mirror, he adds, “carries the mirrored in itself” without the need of special openings: “its whole being is mirroring.”

Friends and students of Rosemont know how much his own work has been concerned with mirroring. One of his most probing and revealing publications is titled *A Chinese Mirror: Moral Reflections on Political Economy and Society* (1991). As he writes there:

> The more openly and deeply we look into another culture the more it becomes a mirror of our own, and my reflections of and on China are given here in the hope that the American Dream will one day be replaced by a more universal dream, one that can be shared by all peoples, holding their humanity in common. (7)

In large measure, *A Chinese Mirror* constitutes an endorsement of Leibniz’s interactionist or relational view of the world; by the same token, it is also a critical rebuke of the Cartesian mind/body, spirit/nature bifurcation. In the latter respect, the book inserts itself into a broader post-Cartesian or anti-Cartesian philosophical trend—a trend stretching from Nietzsche to Hei-
degger and beyond. In another context, *Rationality and Religious Experience*, Rosemont addresses the issue frontally, stating: “The ancient Chinese did not have Cartesian bodies; they did not have Cartesian minds either. Unlike the numerous Chinese graphs that may be translated as ‘body’ on occasion, there is only one rendered as ‘mind’: *xin*—but there is a catch,” because “*xin* equally reasons, reflects, hopes, fears, and desires” thus bypassing a “sharp cognitive/affective split” (a corollary of the mind/body ontology) (Rosemont 2001, 78).

Apart from philosophical affinities and convergences, there are also notable political parallels connecting our time with the age of Leibniz, especially parallels having to do with warfare and violence. Leibniz was born in 1646, two years before the Peace of Westphalia had concluded the Thirty Years War which had devastated Europe and nearly decimated its population. Far from pacifying the situation, the Westphalian settlement ominously set the stage for new conflicts: its governing principle of “*cuius regio eius religio*” unified religion and politics in a perilous fashion, thus preparing the way for new and intensified religious and nationalist rivalries. In addition, some dynastic regimes—especially Spain/Habsburg—had not yet abandoned broader imperial ambitions, designs viewed with intense suspicion by their neighbors. We hardly need to be reminded of the continuous violence tarnishing our own age, an age marked by two World Wars, a Cold War, and subsequently by the onset of an indefinite period of global “terror wars” carried forward under the aegis of a global superpower. In this situation, the example of Leibniz can provide helpful inspiration, given that his intellectual and political efforts were always directed toward peace-making and mutual reconciliation. In the words of Rosemont and Cook: “He wished to reconcile Catholics and Protestants, and to halt the internecine strife plaguing the European states of his day” by concentrating on the common bond between confessions. Moreover, he believed that China could become part of a global mutuality through a further differentiation between basic beliefs and dogmatic or doctrinaire accretions. From the vantage of the former, doctrines in dispute between Catholics and Protestants, as well as between Christians and Chinese, could be seen “as relatively unimportant in the larger scheme of things” and be “adjudicated to the satisfaction of all on the basis of [non-Cartesian] reason”—“with a resultant international peace and harmony among and between all of the world’s peoples” (Cook and Rosemont, 3).

With regard to China, these hopes were complicated, and ultimately frustrated, by a number of prominent doctrinal or ideological disputes—disputes in which religious-theological and power-political motives were
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curiously (or perhaps predictably) linked. Theologically, the chief bone of contention was how Christian religion could, or should, best be disseminated among the Chinese people. Two issues demanded primary attention in this respect: one terminological, the other more practical. Concerning the first issue, the question was whether the Chinese language provided a suitable equivalent to the Christian notion of “God.” The second question was whether some quasi-religious customs or rituals performed by the Chinese were compatible or incompatible with the practice of Christian faith. On both questions, Matteo Ricci—the Jesuit founder of Christian missions in China—had adopted a conciliatory or “accommodationist” position. A man deeply conversant with the Chinese language, Ricci held that this language did indeed offer equivalents or at least reasonable analogues to the concept of God. Regarding customs and rituals, he found them to be mostly civic or social in character, and hence not in conflict with Christian practices. While Ricci’s views were adopted by many or most Jesuits who followed him to China, his “accommodationist” stance was fiercely opposed by Franciscan and Dominican missionaries—as well as by religious and political authorities back in Europe. For the anti-Ricci faction, the Chinese were basically heathens and atheists, and moreover attached to a gross materialism devoid of spiritual qualities. Given this lack of spirituality, their language made no room for the divine, while their rituals and customs were simply idolatrous and an affront to Christian doctrine. The sternest and most uncompromising assault on “accommodationism” was mounted by theologians at the University of Paris. Radically Augustinian (or else Jansenist) in outlook, these theologians insisted on the utter “fallenness” of human nature (especially Chinese nature), a condition which could only be remedied through the redemptive intervention of divine grace—in China through the intervention of Christian missionaries from Europe.

The last point indicates already the conflation (perhaps inevitable conflation) of theological and political considerations. The linkage was further underscored by the collusion between religious motivations and intra-European dynastic rivalries. Rosemont and Cook mention the “curious” fact that accommodationist missionaries mostly hailed from lesser European countries, while anti-Ricci forces received powerful support from the Spanish crown which, at that time, still hankered for a “universal” Catholic empire. As they point out, Jesuit missionaries tended to come from a “variety of ethnic backgrounds” and worked in China “under the general jurisdiction of the Portuguese.” On the other hand, more hard-line missionaries tended to be “under the patronage of the Spanish crown” and entered the country mostly from the Philippines. “China,” they conclude, “thus became
contested territory for evangelistic efforts, because where missionaries go, merchants will follow, and colonies can be established, all of which can enlarge the coffers of the imperial court” (Cook and Rosemont, 4). Perhaps one should add—and Rosemont would probably agree—that where missionaries and merchants go, soldiers and armies are likely to follow—a fact amply demonstrated by the Spanish conquest of the Americas where missionary endeavors to spread the “good news” among the Indians were accompanied by military subjugation which was pursued often with incredible brutality and resulting in what today we would call genocide. To be sure, at the time of Leibniz, a Spanish expansion to Asia was highly unlikely, as it would have severely disrupted the post-Westphalian balance of power. Moreover, at that juncture, China was still too far removed for viable military expeditions, even from the vantage of ambitious empire-builders. Today, however, things may be different. In our rapidly shrinking globe, far-flung ventures previously dismissed may have become strategically possible—as indicated by the comments of the Chicago professor mentioned at the beginning.

“On the Natural Theology of the Chinese”

In the conflict between Ricci and the anti-Riccians, Leibniz on the whole favored the accommodationist position—for religious, but probably also for political reasons. Rosemont, in turn, follows both Ricci and Leibniz—and again for both reasons. The conciliatory attitude is prevalent in all of Leibniz’s writings on China which Rosemont and Cook have translated and collected, and on which they comment with erudition and sympathy. The collected writings are four. First, there is an early piece written as a “Preface” to a journal of Chinese studies (Novissima Sinica). Next, there is another short piece dating roughly from the same time (1700) on the “Religious Cult of Confucius.” Thirdly, there is a somewhat later paper on “Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion;” and finally, a longer treatise composed shortly before Leibniz’s death (1716) “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese.” All four writings aim to defend certain good and valuable qualities in Chinese culture which Europeans (including missionaries) should not rashly dismiss but might sometimes embrace to their benefit. Chief among these qualities are a basic moral goodness and decency, an ingrained civility, and a loyalty toward fellow-beings and ancestors—all of which might be summed up under the label of “natural religion or religiosity.” In the struggle against the anti-Ricciens, this emphasis on natural relig-
ion or goodness was a central point. For if (following the Jansenists) one assumed that Chinese nature was basically corrupt and devoid of all religious sentiment, it followed that Christian faith could only be imposed on them from the outside by force if necessary. On the other hand, on the assumption of an indigenous goodness among the Chinese, Christian faith could be readily accommodated with Chinese natural religion or else be added as a supplement to the latter.

With regard to the positive qualities of Chinese culture, the comments in Leibniz’s “Preface” are most outspoken—and probably grated on the sentiments of Eurocentric Christians at the time, just as they are likely to grate on some Western sentiments today. The Preface offered a comparison of the respective merits of European and Chinese culture, a comparison which was not very flattering to Europeans. To be sure, as a renowned scientist, Leibniz did not ignore European accomplishments in that area. Basically, for him, Europeans were superior in the domains of logic, mathematics, and other “theoretical” disciplines: “We excel by far in the understanding of concepts which are abstracted by the mind from the material, that is, in things mathematical” (Cook and Rosemont, 46). In addition, Europeans excelled over the Chinese in “military science”—which was due not so much to Chinese ignorance as to deliberate choice: “For they despise everything which creates or nourishes ferocity in men.” Once the focus was shifted, however, from logic and mathematics to praxis and civility, a very different picture emerged. In Leibniz’s words: “Certainly they surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy, that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and use of mortals” (46-48). In these domains, the Chinese certainly have “attained a higher standard” and “in a vast multitude of people” have virtually “accomplished more than the founders of religious orders among us have achieved within their own narrow ranks.” The Preface is replete with praise for Chinese virtuous behavior: the reverence shown toward elders, the almost “religious” conduct of children toward their parents—carried to the point that “for children to contrive anything violent against their parents, even by word, is almost unheard of,” the willing performance of duties, and the respect and civility shown among equals. Leibniz does not hesitate to rub the difference in, saying that Chinese rarely show evidence of hatred, wrath, or excitement, whereas with us respect and courtesy last only for a short while quickly to be followed by contempt, backbiting, anger, and enmity.

If such was the relation between European and Chinese cultures, one could legitimately ask what benefit European missionary activity could
produce. Undaunted, Leibniz boldly and even provocatively remolded the missionary project into a one of reciprocal learning. Given Chinese excellence in civil matters, he writes, “it is desirable that they in turn teach us those things which are especially in our interest: the greatest use of practical philosophy and a more perfect manner of living, to say nothing now of their other arts” (51). Such reciprocity was urgently needed for Europe’s own benefit and improvement; for given “the condition of our affairs, slipping as we are into ever greater corruption,” it was obvious that “we need missionaries from the Chinese who might teach us the use and practice of natural religion, just as we have sent them teachers of revealed theology.” On the part of Europeans great care needed to be taken so that evangelization does not become predatory or domineering nor too reticent or self-effacing. Similar points were made in the paper on “The Religious Cult of Confucius” and in “Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion.” Regarding the matter of Chinese rituals, Leibniz urged the need for caution and prudent judgment. For after all, “worship depends not so much on rites as on feelings” and sincere dispositions; hence it was necessary to weigh carefully “in what spirit the Chinese worshipped their ancestors or those of great merit” (70-71). The general rule to be followed with respect to customs or rituals was to ponder their deeper meaning, rather than cling to outward and perhaps corrupted forms. Adopting the legal rule “in dubio pro reo,” Leibniz offered this maxim: “Nothing prevents us from thinking well of the ancient doctrines until we are compelled to proceed otherwise. At least their most venerable precepts of life hold out the strong hope of actually being doctrines of a religion of salvation” (71).

The longest of the collected writings is Leibniz’s “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese.” Based on extensive studies and steadily deepened reflections, the Discourse presents the opinions of the aged philosopher on a great number of topics ranging from Chinese conceptions of God to their views of spiritual substances, the nature of the soul, its immortality, and similar issues. In the present context, the briefest glimpses must suffice. Rosemont and Cook single out four main parts or topical areas in the text (Cook and Rosemont, 7-8): a first section dealing with the question of Chinese analogues to the Christian notion of God and spiritual substances; a second part affirming a parallel between the Chinese view of “material” or embodied spirits and the Christian conception of angels; a third part asserting the compatibility of Chinese and Christian concepts of the human soul and its immortality; and a fourth section or appendix exploring the correspondence between Leibniz’s own binary arithmetic and ancient Chinese teachings (as set forth especially in the Yi Jing or Book of
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Changes). The accommodationist approach coupled with Leibniz’s admiration of Chinese religion is evident throughout. Regarding Chinese culture in general, we read early on in the text:

There is in China a public morality admirable in certain regards, con-
joined to a philosophical doctrine, or rather a natural theology, vener-
able by its antiquity, established and authorized for about 3,000 years,
long before the philosophy of the Greeks. (Cook and Rosemont, 78)

Given this ancient pedigree, the text adds, it would be “highly foolish and
presumptuous on our part, having newly arrived compared with them, and
scarcely out of barbarism,” to dismiss or condemn their teachings simply
because of an initial impression of strangeness. On the philosophical level,
Leibniz discovered in Chinese thought a highest principle called $li$ which, in
his view (79-81), was comparable to Aristotle’s “prime mover” or $entelechy$
and which, moreover, combined “summary unity” with “perfect multiplic-
ity” ($unum omnia$). On the religious or theological level, Leibniz joined Ricci
in detecting an analogue to “God” in the Chinese term “Xangiš” (Lord of
Heaven) who was said to govern heaven and earth. “For me,” he concluded

I find all this quite excellent and quite in accord with natural theology….
It is pure Christianity, insofar as it renews the natural law inscribed in
our hearts—except for what revelation and grace add to it to improve
our nature. (105)

Toward a Global Ecumenism?

In his writings on China, Leibniz treaded a difficult and precarious path,
both philosophically and theologically, and managed to mediate or bridge
perspectives which many or most people (in the West) carefully try to keep
apart. Perhaps the most difficult, nearly vertiginal, path was the one he tried
to steer between natural theology and revealed theology, between a creator
God and a world principle, or between immanence and transcendence. The
complexities of this in-between path are clearly manifest in the “Discourse
on the Natural Theology of the Chinese;” but they can be shown to per-
vade and overshadow Leibniz’s entire oeuvre. Rosemont at one point cap-
tures the issue very correctly when he writes:

Leibniz wrote the Natural Theology of the Chinese and the Theodicy, as
well as he Monadology; but he wrote the latter for very different reasons
than the wrote the former, both of which metaphysically require a
Christian transcendental realm in a way the Monadology does not. (Rosemont 2001, 55)

As he elaborates: “While God is decidedly important for the Monadology, He is not necessary” (101, note 33). On the other hand, “no atheist could write the Theodicy, and the Discourse was written largely in defense of the Riccian ‘accommodationist’ view of how Chinese conversion to the One True Faith could best be effected.” As has been shown above, however, even the “Discourse” did not opt decisively for one perspective, but displayed in its arguments the same complexity and ambivalence.

Although I believe there are also philosophical reasons for undecidability, one factor helping Leibniz to pursue his precarious path was practical or pragmatic. I refer to his tendency to prioritize practical philosophy over Cartesian abstractions, or what today we call “orthopraxis” over “orthodoxy.” In his Rationality and Religious Experience, Rosemont fully joins himself to Leibniz in this respect. After discussing some theological quandaries he observes: “But I want to go further in deemphasizing the importance of the specific metaphysical and theological underpinnings of each of the world’s religions when studying their sacred texts and narratives” (80). In this context, Rosemont turns attention particularly to the bifurcation between transcendence and immanence—a bifurcation which in large measure coincides with the distinction between revealed and natural theology, and still more broadly with the difference between Western and Asian religiosity. “Consider again,” he writes, “the transcendental realm, central to the Abrahamic heritage.” By focusing on this realm “as a reality wholly other than the reality we experience in our daily lives,” we emphasize and celebrate “the radical otherness of God, and the divinity of Christ” on whose grace alone redemption depends. Although honoring God’s incomparable majesty, the focus on the transcendental realm simultaneously devalues our world and worldly engagement as “merely” mundane or immanent. From the angle of such a metaphysics, the text continues, it will be difficult to appreciate certain kinds of worldly-religious experiences, such as “the experience of belonging, of at-onement or attunement, in and with the world of our everyday lives” (80-81). Equally and still more importantly: “a preoccupation with the transcendental realm makes it extremely difficult to appreciate what the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ actually signifies: God is in, and of, the world He created.”

From a philosophical or epistemological angle, focusing on the “transcendental realm” also means looking at the world from a transcendental or radically “universal” perspective—from which all worldly phenomena are dwarfed into mere “particularities.” As it happens, such a uni-
universalism has been the preferred option of much of Western metaphysics and social-political theory—an option which has tended to abet (though not to justify) the expansion of self-styled “universal” regimes over merely particular populations. In the case of the conquest of the Americas, the Spanish monarchy presented itself as the embodiment of a “universal” mission: the mission to evangelize the entire world in the name of Catholic Christianity. In our time, the objective and content of the mission have changed, but not the global trajectory: the place of the Christian “good news” is now largely taken over by neo-liberal principles of the market. The problem of every universalism—no matter how purely or transcendentally conceived—is that every attempt to “universalize” embroils it in the historical and social particularities of the world and thus contaminates its purity with “immanent” concerns. This contamination was obvious in the case of the Spanish empire where gold and plunder played a central role eclipsing that played by the “good news.” It was also manifest when French revolutionary ideas were disseminated by Napoleon’s armies. This means that—without opposing pure principles as such—friends of humanity or of a global ecumenism need to be wary of political agendas advertised as universal or universalizing programs. Rosemont has a healthy distrust of such programs promulgated today, especially the panacea of a new “world order” based on the market, the Internet, and consumerism. Commenting on global ecumenism, he remarks at one point:

> It would be foolish to believe that a capitalist economic system and communications advances could make it a reality. Not only is wealth distributed grossly inequitably today, the gap between rich and poor is widening, not narrowing. (Rosemont 2001, 3)

In the same spirit, he stresses the value of religious and humanist legacies because they

> can guide us back from the abyss of meaninglessness that is becoming increasingly characteristic of contemporary life, an altogether material life in which many of us are obliged to take jobs we do not like or find satisfying in order to buy things we do not need and that do not satisfy us either, all the while destroying our natural and social environments as we do so. (10)

Without completely dismissing transcendentalism, despite strong and well-grounded apprehensions, Rosemont—together with Leibniz—reminds us of the importance of natural theology or an “immanent” religiosity, reflected in the “Abrahamic” context in the incarnation and passion
of Christ. Commenting on the Chinese “rites controversy,” Cook and Rosemont borrowed from David Mungello to characterize the accommodationist and anti-Jansenist position in these words: “The Jesuits interpreted the Bible as a spiritual guide to completing God’s work in the world rather than as a book which told a story of salvation whose geographical and cultural limits had already been reached” (Cook and Rosemont, 5). More pointedly *Rationality and Religious Experience* cites, with at least partial approval, these lines of Alexander Pope: “Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;/The proper study of mankind [humankind] is man” (Rosemont 2001, 61). However, the closest approximation of Rosemont’s own kind of “religious experience” can be found in Confucianism, especially among the early Confucians who—in Herbert Fingarette’s marvelous phrase—were able to treat “the secular as sacred.” Turning to the “spiritual discipline” of the early Confucians, Rosemont describes it as “a path that integrates the aesthetic, the moral, and the socio-political with the religious”—a path that is worthy of our emulation:

As we follow that path, we will be led to see ourselves less as free, autonomous, unchanging selves/souls, less as altogether distinct from the physical world, and more as co-members of a multiplicity of communities, who, through sustained effort, are increasingly integrated into an ever-larger community, something larger than ourselves. We must come to see and feel ourselves as fundamentally, not accidentally, inter-generationally bound to our ancestors, contemporaries, and descendants. (89)

To be sure, Rosemont’s sensibilities are not limited to early Confucian texts nor to Asian teachings in general. His entire opus, as it stands presently, is a testimonial of his commitment to global harmony or a global ecumenism. At the end of *Rationality and Religious Experience*—which was initially presented as the first Master Hsüan Hua Memorial Lecture at Berkeley—this commitment is eloquently expressed in these terms.

I commend the sacred texts and narratives of the world’s religions to your careful attention and study. Reread, and read in conjunction with the texts of other traditions, each tradition can be renewed, and come to be seen as collaborative rather than competitive with the others, and thereby, as conducive to lessening the distance between “us” and “them.” (34)

These lines, in my view, also capture admirably the irenic and conciliatory outlook of Leibniz, especially Leibniz’s key notion of the “compossibility” of differences. In 1946, at the time of the three-hundredth anniversary of
his birth, several German philosophers paid tribute to the German thinker as a “peace-maker” (*Friedensstifter*) devoted to the overcoming of religious, ethnic, as well as economic class differences in a “compossible” ecumenism. Among others, Hans-Georg Gadamer praised Leibniz as an intellectual mentor who, at the end of the Thirty Years War, devoted the energies of his entire life to the reduction and possible elimination of warfare and destruction. Fifty years later, in 1996, at another anniversary celebration, Gadamer linked Leibniz with contemporary European philosophy, stating,

> There is really no more hermeneutic exemplar in the history of philosophy than Leibniz, who himself maintained the inherent connection and reciprocal relatedness of alternative viewpoints and alternating perspectives ultimately for the structure of truth itself. (qtd. in Grondin, 250)

As it seems to me, these words, as well as Rosemont’s comments above, resonate well with the concluding passage in Leibniz’s “Preface” written three hundred years ago: “May God provide that our joys be solid and lasting, undisturbed by imprudent zeal, by internecine conflicts among the men traveling on apostolic duties, or by our own unworthy example.”

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Nouns, Verbs and Eventful Language*

Zhiming Bao

In the philosophical interpretation of The Analects put forth recently by the philosophers Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont (Ames and Rosemont 1998; henceforth, AR), two notions play a central role. Both notions relate to the conception of the world and of the language that describes it. The first notion has to do with correlative thinking in Chinese antiquity, which stands in sharp contrast to the essentialist thinking in the Western philosophical tradition. In the correlative conception, an object is seen as the totality of the relations it has with regard to other objects. These relations are intrinsic to and constitutive of that object; the question about the essence of the object does not arise. The nature of the object changes as the relations change. A world of correlations is dynamic in this sense.

The dynamic world is correlated with a dynamic language—this is the second notion that underpins AR's philosophical exegesis of Confucius. The correlative thinking mode in Chinese antiquity has been discussed quite extensively in the Western exegetical literature, see, for example, Munro (1969), Hansen (1983, 1992), and Graham (1986). What is important in AR's work is that the notion of relationality is extended to language—things in the world are relational; so are the words that describe them. In such dynamic language, AR write, “nominal expressions default to verbal expressions, ‘things’ default to ‘events,’ underscoring the primacy of process over form…” (Ames and Rosemont 1998, 29). Given the lack of inflection and the terseness of syntax in classical Chinese, the philosophical significance of which has been amply discussed in Rosemont’s early work (Rosemont 1974), it makes good methodological sense to bring a dynamic and relational perspective to bear on the functionality of words.

In this paper, I wish to take up these two notions from the point of

*I would like to thank Chad Hansen and Henry Rosemont for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of the paper. Errors that remain are my own.
view of a linguist. From the linguistic perspective, the dynamic nature of language is reflected not so much in the relative order of words that make up a sentence, as AR have suggested, but in the processes of word-formation which are productive in pre-Qin Chinese. I will examine the syntax and semantics of two such processes, namely conversion, which is productive in Confucius’ time, and compounding, which becomes productive by the time of the Warring States (Guo 1997). I will argue two points. First, the “eventfulness” of language is encoded in the rule of conversion, which turns a word from one lexical category (say noun) into another (say verb). Second, relationality is encoded in the rule of compounding, which produces what may be called relational compounds by combining two monosyllabic words with the same or opposite meanings—related in the sense to be explored later. Relational compounds are among the first disyllabic compounds to emerge in the history of Chinese, and upon careful analysis reveal conceptual and cognitive predispositions towards words and word formation in pre-Qin China. These two rules help us understand pre-Qin language and some of the key philosophical concepts expressed therein.

**Converted Verbs**

Conversion is one of the most productive word-formation processes in the world’s extant languages. The most common type of conversion involves nouns and verbs, exemplified in the two English specimens below:

- to lock the door
- to hammer the nail

The interpretive strategy of conversion is this: if a verb V is derived from a noun N, then V means to perform the action characteristic of what N means. So locking refers to an action which is characteristic of locks, and hammering to an action characteristic of hammers. This interpretative strategy, however, crucially depends on the speaker’s knowledge of how the world operates. Powdering the aspirin reduces the aspirin to powder, but powdering the face does not produce the same effect. And sexing chicks is not the same action as sexing up war intelligence. Although word-formation processes, such as derivation and compounding, are not absolutely compositional, conversion is especially dependent on world knowledge and on context of use for the precise meaning or meanings of the converted word.

Although the matter is still controversial in the historical Chinese
linguistics circle, Zhou Chinese is probably monosyllabic, and conversion is the most productive word-formation process (Wang 1980, Guo 1997). Not surprisingly, converted verbs—verbs which are derived from words of some other lexical category—are the most common type. There are many meanings associated with the converted verb; here we will consider the meanings seen in the examples below (PART, particle):

(1) 使人也, 器之

"In employing others, they use them according to their abilities." (Analects 13.25)

(2) 登太山而小天下

"Summit at Mount Tai, and the world is small." (Jin Xin A, The Mencius)

(3) 老吾老, 以及人之老; 幼吾幼, 以及人之幼

"Act appropriately towards my elderly, and other people’s elderly; act appropriately towards my young, and other people’s young." (Liang Hui Wang A, The Mencius)¹

Syntactically, the three converted verbs are transitive, each taking a nominal as its grammatical object. Semantically, they exemplify three distinct meanings common in Old Chinese. In (1), the expression qi zhi “instrument them” can be interpreted as causing people, the antecedent of the pronoun zhi “them,” to be instruments, i.e. employing people according to their

¹ In this paper, the English translation of passages from The Analects is due to AR.
abilities or skills. In (2), "small sky down" does not mean cause the world to be small; rather, it means the world is considered small. Wang (1980) refers to (1) and (2) as CAUSATIVE and NOTIONAL, respectively. The third type, exemplified in (3), has escaped the attention of linguists. (3) is neither causative nor notional; "old my old" does not mean causing my elderly to be elderly, analogous to (1), nor does it mean considering my elderly as elderly, analogous to (2). It means acting towards one’s elderly in a manner which is appropriate for them. I will call this type ACTIVE. It is the ACTIVE meaning of the converted verb that makes language dynamic.

The syntax and semantics of the three types of converted verbs may be specified as follows (OBJ, grammatical object):

(4) Suppose that verb V is derived from noun N or adjective A through conversion,

   a. CAUSATIVE
      Syntactic frame: \( V \ OBJ \)
      Semantic feature: CAUSE OBJ to be N or A.

   b. NOTIONAL
      Syntactic frame: \( V \ OBJ \)
      Semantic feature: CONSIDER OBJ as N or A.

   c. ACTIVE
      Syntactic frame: \( V \ OBJ \)
      Semantic feature: ACT towards OBJ in a manner appropriate for N.

The three meanings of conversion are expressed by the same syntactic frame; textual and philosophical context helps resolve the inherent ambiguity. Of course, conversion yields more meanings than these three; here we will focus on the ACTIVE meaning (4c), which is uniquely productive in the literary language of pre-Qin China. In the ACTIVE use, the meanings of converted verbs include some sense of appropriateness associated with the meanings of the nouns from which they are derived. But the notion of appropriateness is relative to some domain of interpretation. In the case of "old" and "young" in (3), it is defined against the socially-sanctioned code of conduct, i.e. "ritual propriety"—treating one’s elderly and young in a socially and morally acceptable manner. The ethically-loaded
reading of the converted verbs in (3) is justifiable in the context of *The Mencius.*

The conception of language as eventful predisposes one to interpret dynamically sentences which are otherwise ambiguous. Consider the four statements in (5).

(5) 君君，臣臣，父父，子子

*jun jun, chen chen, fu fu, zi zi*

ruler-ruler, minister-minister, father-father, son-son

“The ruler must rule, the minister minister, the father father, and the son son.” (*Analects* 12.11)

Each statement consists of two tokens of the same character. Syntactically, the two tokens can be parsed as N-N, with a missing copula, as V-N, with the first token converting to verb, or as N-V, with the second token converting to verb. The fourth logically possible parse, V-V, with both Ns converting to verb, is not interpretable in classical Chinese; we will therefore exclude it from our consideration. The N-N parse provides the structural basis for a nondynamic reading of the statements in (5), which reduces them to equative statements: “rulers are rulers, ministers are ministers, fathers are fathers, and sons are sons.” Both the V-N and N-V parses force a dynamic reading. In the V-N parse, the V can be interpreted with any one of the three meanings specified in (4). In the *ACTIVE* reading, for example, *jun* *jun* means acting towards the king (*jun*) in a manner appropriate for a king (the nominal base of *jun*). We will see shortly that the immediate linguistic context rules out V-N as a probable parse. Under the N-V parse, rulers must act as rulers in accordance with an appropriate code of conduct governing rulers, and ministers act in accordance with an appropriate code of conduct governing ministers. Similarly for fathers and sons. In other words, a *jun* rules and a *chen* ministers, and so on, in a manner sanctified by *li* “ritual propriety.” It is impossible for the proposition *jun* *jun* “rulers rule” to be true if the ruler rules and transgresses upon the boundary of propriety. To assert *jun* *jun* is to assert that the ruler not only rules but rules justly.

As shown in (4c), the *ACTIVE* frame of a converted verb is paired with two elements of meaning, *ACTIVE*ness and appropriateness. When an *ACTIVE* converted verb appears in a negative sentence, the force of negation applies to appropriateness, not to *ACTIVE*ness, nor to the nominal base from which the verb is derived in the first place. This can be seen in (6), which follows (5) in *The Analects*:
Incidentally, the presence of the negator forces us to parse the statements in (6) as instances of N-not-V, with V converted from the second token of N. Syntactic parallelism is a favored rhetorical device in classical Chinese. The positive statements in (5) can only be parsed as N-V, in parallel to the negative statements in (6).

What is interesting here is the force or scope of negation. The negator bu negates appropriateness in the meaning of the derived verbs: bu jun means acting inappropriately as ruler, bu chen “not-minister” acting inappropriately as minister, and so on. The converted verb jun below has the same meaning:

(7) 晉靈公不君  
Jin Lin Gong bu jun  
Jin-Lin-Gong-not-ruler  
“Jin Lin Gong acts inappropriately as a ruler.” (Xuan Gong 2, Zuo Zhuan)

The nominal subject and ACTIVEness remain unaffected by negation—the statement remains dynamic, like those in (6). Seen against this background, even though it retains the syntactic and dynamic flavor of the Chinese original, AR’s English translation of (5) and (6) is not as rich in lexical meaning and moral implication—(4c) is not part of the grammar of English. This is especially evident in the negative statements in (6). In the English translations, the negation applies to ruling, so when the ruler does not rule, he truly does not rule. Translation has shifted the scope of negation.

Relational Compounds

Chinese has a large number of disyllabic compounds composed of two monosyllabic characters which are themselves loosely defined synonyms or antonyms. The three specimens below are cited from The Mencius:
(8) a. 國家
   “country”
   guó-jia
   country-home
b. 輕重
   “weight”
   qīn zhòng
   light-heavy
c. 富貴
   “prosperity”
   fù guì
   rich-precious

The first nominal is composed of words which refer to representative units of society, the second nominal, of two antonyms, and the third, of two synonyms. These are referred to as parallel compounds in Chinese linguistics (Wang 1962, Zhou 1962). For reasons which will become clear shortly, I will call them relational compounds. They differ from what is called endocentric compounds, in which one component serves as the head, and the other as its modifier. In Chinese, as in English, the second component is the head, the first the modifier (war intelligence, black market). A relational compound has no head, and the two components contribute as equals to the meaning of the whole compound. The meanings of the components, however, must be related in some sense. We can see synonymy and antonymy as occupying the opposite ends of the same cline of relatedness which is definable with respect to some common semantic space—one would see rich as related to prosperous (synonymity) or to poor (antonymity), but not to large. We can specify the process of forming relational compounds as follows:

(9) Given two words $W_A$ and $W_B$, the compound $W_A-W_B$ is a well-formed relational compound if and only if $W_A$ and $W_B$ are related with respect to a common semantic space. This semantic space is the meaning of $W_A-W_B$.

Given (9), the meanings of the compounds in (8) are self-explanatory. More specimens follow, all cited from The Mencius; see Zhou (1962):
Relatedness is a cover term for a wide range of meaning relations. In (9), the monosyllabic components are related by being complementary (a), antonymous (b), synonymous (c), and representative (d). An exhaustive search through the pre-Qin texts will undoubtedly reveal more relations. For the purpose of our argument, the small sample in (9) is sufficient. It gives us some idea of what it means to be related.

The language of The Book of Poetry and The Analects is largely monosyllabic. Although disyllables are found in these texts, they are either phrases or reduplicates. Only a small number of what can be analyzed as relational compounds are attested in The Book of Poetry. Non-reduplicated disyllabic words began to emerge in abundance at around 300 BCE, in texts such as The Mencius, The Xunzi, The Liji, and The Zhuangzi (Wang 1962, Zhou 1962). When compounding becomes a dominant word-formation process, relational compounds figure prominently among newly-coined disyllables. This is significant. It strongly suggests that the relationality mode of thinking in pre-Qin China facilitates, if not directly causes, the emergence of relational compounds as pre-Qin Chinese starts the transition from monosyllabicity to disyllabicity. AR explain the notion of relationality in pre-Qin worldview in terms of overlapping diagrams:
In AR’s account, A and B are objects in the world, and their relatedness is intrinsic to and constitutive of the two objects, rather than external to them. This diagram can be given a linguistic interpretation, as follows. Take two monosyllabic words, $W_A$ and $W_B$, which refer to the objects A and B, respectively. $W_A$ and $W_B$ are related semantically by virtue of the fact that A and B are related as objects in the world. In other words, $W_A$ maps onto A, $W_B$ onto B, and $W_A$-$W_B$ onto the spaces occupied by A and B. Diagrammatically, we have:

\[ (12) \quad A \quad \quad B \]

\[ W_A \quad W_B \]

The single arrow indicates mapping of monosyllabic words and the double-arrow that of the relational compound. Diagram (12) can be re-written as (13), which serves well as a definition of the meaning potential of the relational compound:

\[ (13) \quad \text{Given that } W_A \rightarrow A \text{ and } W_B \rightarrow B, \text{ we have:} \]

- **Type I:** $W_A$-$W_B$ $\Rightarrow$ $A \lor B$  \hspace{1cm} (cf. (8a))
- **Type II:** $W_A$-$W_B$ $\Rightarrow$ $A \cup B$  \hspace{1cm} (cf. (8b))
- **Type III:** $W_A$-$W_B$ $\Rightarrow$ $A \cap B$  \hspace{1cm} (cf. (8c))

The double-arrow mapping, i.e. the meaning of the compound, is constrained to yield only three types of meaning. A close examination of the relational compounds Zhou (1962) collected from *The Mencius* reveals precisely these three types of meaning: the meaning of $W_A$-$W_B$ may be the meaning of either $W_A$ or $W_B$ (Type I), the union of $W_A$ and $W_B$ (Type II), or the intersection of $W_A$ and $W_B$ (Type III). Unfortunately, the precise meaning of a given relational compound cannot be predicted on the basis of the nature of the relation that obtains between the two components. Guo-jia (8c) and *cao-mu* (10d) exhibit similar relationality between their respective components, but they belong to different types. The former compound has the same meaning as the first component (Type I), while the latter refers to the entire semantic space of which *cao* “grass” and *mu* “wood” are representative—the union of grass and wood (Type II). The set-theoretic exposition of the meaning potential of the relational compound allows us to argue that relational compounding is another instance of the language-world isomorphism that has been documented in Bao (1990).
We can see relational compounds as linguistic fossils that freeze the conception of relatedness when they are first coined. Suppose \( W_A-W_B \) is a relational compound. We expect the meanings of the monosyllabic components \( W_A \) and \( W_B \) to be related in the sense just outlined. \( W_A \) and \( W_B \) must be interpreted as belonging to the same semantic space, allowing them to compound into \( W_A-W_B \). Rule (9) is a useful philological tool to guide our interpretation of key philosophical concepts.

It is well-known that in *The Analects* and *The Laozi*, the key terms *dao* “road,” *de* “virtue, excellence,” *ren* “authoritative conduct” and *yi* “duty, appropriate” are used independently and separately. In *The Zhuangzi* and *The Mencius*, however, *dao-de* and *ren-yi* appear as relational compounds. The usage profile of these terms in five pre-Qin texts is displayed in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Laozi</th>
<th>Lunyu</th>
<th>Mengzi</th>
<th>Xunzi</th>
<th>Zhuangzi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ren</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dao</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ren-yi</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dao-de</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, not all tokens of *ren-yi* or *dao-de* are bona fide compounds. The table above counts all instances, regardless of their morphosyntactic status.

If our exposition of the semantics and morphosyntax of relational compounds is correct, we can conclude that the pre-Qin sages see *ren* as sharing the same semantic space with *yi*, and *dao* with *de*, but neither does with the other terms. In other words, *ren-dao*, *ren-de*, *dao-ren* and *dao-yi* are ill-formed as relational compounds. (They can be potential endocentric compounds, which do not require that the components be related in the same way relational compounds do.) Although they are independent concepts, our interpretation needs to show sensitivity to this linguistic fact. AR’s explication of *ren* as authoritative conduct and *yi* as appropriate action is consistent with their non-essentialist, behavior-centric interpretative strategy; it also puts the two concepts in the same semantic space that makes it possible for them to compound into *ren-yi*. *Dao-de* may be a tougher nut to crack. It is not readily obvious how to reconcile the path
metaphor of dao—a dynamic interpretation—with what appears to be an essentialist, nondynamic interpretation of de as that which one has.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages we have demonstrated that the pre-Qin conception of the world is intimately tied up with the rules of conversion and compounding, which are the main word-formation processes in human languages, pre-Qin Chinese included. The formal detail of the rules varies from language to language, and from one historical stage of a given language to another. In modern Chinese, for example, the three frames of conversion shown in (4) are no longer productive, and relational compounds form a small subset of compounds (Lu 1957). Nevertheless, we can attribute the unique semantic properties of the word-formation rules at the time when they first entered productive service in pre-Qin Chinese to the cognitive predispositions of its speakers. We have established a clear convergence between dynamic language and ACTIVE noun-to-verb conversion on the one hand, and between relationality and relational compounding on the other. However, we must acknowledge that convergence is different from causality. We have not produced linguistic evidence to support a causal relationship between the cognitive and philosophical presuppositions of the speakers of a language and the properties of its morphosyntactic processes. Hansen (1983, 1992) advocates the mass-noun hypothesis, according to which pre-Qin ontological presuppositions compel the development of the classifier system in Chinese. We are reasonably positive that mass-noun morphosyntax, ACTIVE verbal conversion and relational compounding are three instances of the isomorphism between worldview and language that permeates the pre-Qin discourse on language.

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Did Kongzi Teach Us How To Become Gods?

Ronnie Littlejohn

There is a text, “…describing a path that can lead to spiritual experience; a path that may commend itself to people with a wide range of metaphysical or theological views and beliefs, or who have none at all, a path that dichotomizes neither the lived from a transcendental world, nor minds and bodies, nor ourselves from others, or from the lived world. My text is the Analects of Confucius.” (Rosemont 2001, 82)

Introduction

In April of 2000, Henry Rosemont, Jr. delivered the first Hsuan Hua Memorial Lecture at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley. The following year, this lecture originally entitled, “Whither the World’s Religions?” was published along with a discussion led by Huston Smith and Rosemont’s responses under the title Rationality and Religious Experience: The Continuing Relevance of the World’s Spiritual Tradition (Rosemont 2001). This work represents Rosemont’s most deliberate and thorough statement on the question of religious experience.¹

In his commentary on Rosemont’s lecture, Smith suggests that some religious language refers to a transcendent region, meaning that its concepts point to objects in a dimension of reality that is beyond the nets

¹ In this paper I extend and modify remarks I have made before on Rosemont’s views on religious experience. See “It's Not That Ghosts Really Lose Their Numinous Qualities: Rosemont on Religious Experience” (Littlejohn 2003) and my review of Rationality and Religious Experience for Philosophy East and West (Littlejohn 2004b). I want to express my appreciation to the following friends and colleagues who read earlier versions of this paper and offered criticisms and corrections. My thanks go to Roger Ames, Erin Cline, Jeff Dippmann, Eric Hutton, P.J. Ivanhoe, Li Qingjun, Tom Michael, Jeffrey Richey, and Robin Wang.
of science (40). In his replies, Rosemont holds that the concepts in religious language do not refer to objects in a transcendent realm (43).

He says,

No such metaphysical claims invest Buddhist, Confucian, or Daoist texts as I read them, and while these latter religions, and all others, have supernatural entities described in their oral or written canons, these entities remain altogether linked to the world. (43)

Rosemont’s reaction to Smith is very important for two reasons. 1) It marks his effort to redirect the question of religious experience away from the presupposition of the sort of Western transcendent dualistic realmism which he believes to be alien to the Chinese philosophical tradition and discredited by science in the West. 2) It puts him on record as rejecting referential uses of religious language, even though he makes it unmistakably clear that he believes there is a space for religious experience apart from the traditional Western metaphysic of transcendent dualistic realmism.

Dualistic realmism as I use it in this paper is an identifiable metaphysic that conceives of reality as divided into two realms—the one natural, material, tangible, and in process; the other transcendent, immaterial, spiritual and fixed. Under this model, objects in one realm are thought of as quite distinct from those in the other. In dualistic realmism religious experience derives its cause from the transcendent realm, usually as some transcendent agent intrudes into the realm of ordinary lived experience and acts in the material world or encounters human beings. This two realms worldview is the basis for Western religious language about nature/supernature, immanence/transcendence, and physics/metaphysics.

It is just this sort of construction of reality into radically different realms that Rosemont finds problematic in the general philosophical sense, and totally absent from the Analects Lun Yu specifically. Rosemont believes that the Analects’ approach to spirituality has nothing to do with the metaphysical claims of what I call dualistic realmism (73). Indeed, it is precisely the absence from the Analects of this way of thinking about the

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2 Rosemont says, the tian 天 of the Confucians and dao 道 of the Daoists both have religious connotations, but they do not refer to a realm conceptually separate from the world of human experience and effort (Rosemont 2001, 43-44).

3 Rosemont mentions that some other metaphysical views are also troubling to him (Rosemont 2001, 81).

4 Roger Ames thinks the neologism dualistic realmism is confusing and he may be right. But I do not necessarily mean to limit this ontology to the familiar Platonic two world view, although certainly I consider Platonism to be a type of dualistic realmism. Yet, there are many other versions (e.g., Cartesianism, Thomism).
nature and subjects of religious experience that underscores for Rosemont the importance of its vision for humans in the contemporary world.

In Rosemont’s view, what matters is the nonmetaphysical truth in the sacred texts of the world’s religions. This truth consists in the teachings and practices that enable humans to make a move in being that is tantamount to a developmental extension of the breadth and intensity of human life; one that eventuates in a novel and unique being.\(^5\) In his “Epilogue” to *Rationality and Religious Experience*, Rosemont calls this developmental program the *path of spiritual progress*, and as the opening quote of this paper indicates, he locates this path within the Chinese tradition principally in the *Analects*.

In this paper, I interpret the goal of what Rosemont calls the *path of spiritual progress* as human euhemerization, or the transformation of human beings into gods. However, I emphatically do not mean “gods” here in the sense of an eternal, wholly other, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent sort of being characteristically associated with the Abrahamic traditions. Instead, I mean “gods” in the sense of the novel type of being known in the *Analects* as *shengren* 聖人.\(^7\) I will take the position that a unique kind of physic (I intentionally do not say “metaphysic”) lay in the background of this spiritual progress toward euhemerization and of the religious experiences important to this transformation as reported by Kongzi. Kongzi’s view of spiritual progress was nested inside this physic and it was in the background of what he had to say about his religious experiences and their contribution to his spiritual progress toward becoming a *shengren*. I will claim that Rosemont acknowledges the importance of this physic to an understanding of several philosophical problems, but that he does not use it in his responses to Smith and he seems not to appreciate its implications for religious language. I conclude that giving attention to this physic provides

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\(^5\) Here we should be very careful. As Roger Ames, Rosemont’s long time collaborator has reminded me, the result of this spiritual development is not a “jump to something totally new” from out of nowhere.

\(^6\) *Rationality and Religious Experience* is not the only work in which Rosemont has made deliberate and extended remarks on religion, religious experience, and the path of spiritual progress which he associates with Confucian spirituality. See Rosemont 1986; 2002; Ames and Rosemont, 1998; Rosemont’s 1996 response to Balagangadhara; Rosemont’s 1989 lecture given at the Fudan Conference on Confucianism; and the Cook and Rosemont 1977 translation of Leibniz’s *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*.

\(^7\) In this connection, Rosemont and Roger Ames say they agree with Sarah Allen (1979) and Emily Ahern (1981) that Chinese gods are, by and large, dead people (Ames and Rosemont, 47). Rosemont says, “The many gods and goddesses described and venerated in the Chinese tradition all share the quality of being deceased human beings, ancestors or otherwise” (Rosemont 2001, 44).
resources for constructing a fruitful model for conceptualizing the encounter with numinal reality which Kongzi indicates is fundamental to his own spiritual progress.

The Path of Spiritual Progress in Kongzi’s Teachings

Rosemont says there is a horizontal hierarchy in three categories of persons presented in the Analects: shi士, junzi君子, and shengren.8 He says,

And at the upper end of this continuum are the sheng. In addition to possessing all of the qualities of the junzi, the sheng appear to see and feel customs, rituals and –the li—holistically, as defining and integrating the whole of human society, and as defining and integrating as well the human societies of the past and of the future. This seeing and feeling can only be described in our terms (not Confucius’) as transcendent understanding…. (Rosemont 2002, 192)

Admittedly, the concept of “horizontal hierarchy” may be confusing. But I think that Rosemont means that all of these types of persons are still of the same ontological sort. We shall see that shifts in the way language is used are evidence that shengren are indeed theomorphized in the Analects.

The goal toward which the shi is striving is to become a junzi. What the shi does, the junzi is. In the Analects, the junzi is described, not instructed or taught, presumably because he does not need instruction.

He has traveled a goodly distance along the way, and lives a goodly number of roles. A benefactor to many, he is still a beneficiary of others like himself. While he is still capable of anger in the presence of inappropriateness and concomitant injustice, he is in his person tranquil. He knows many rituals and much music, and performs all of his functions not only with skill, but also with grace, dignity, and beauty, and he takes delight in the performance. He is still filial toward his parents and elders, but now takes all under tian as his dwelling. While real enough to be still capable of the occasional lapse in his otherwise exemplary conduct (14.6), he is resolutely proper in the conduct of his roles—conduct which is not forced, but rather effortless, spontaneous, creative. There is, in sum, a very strong aesthetic and ethical dimension to his life; he has reauthorized the li, and is therefore a respected author for the dao of humankind. (Ames and Rosemont, 62)

8 In 1986, Rosemont published “Kierkegaard and Confucius: On Finding the Way” in which he compares and contrasts Kierkegaard’s stages with the shi/junzi/sheng progression (Rosemont, 1986).
While the junzi is the highest level to which most of us can aspire, there is a loftier ideal in the Analects. It is to become a shengren. Rosemont thinks this is made clear in the Analects because the shengren are portrayed as possessing all the traits and abilities of the junzi, but the junzi hold them in honor. Kongzi said, “Junzi hold three things in awe: the propensities of tianming, persons in high station, and the words of the shengren” (Analects, 16.8).

According to Rosemont, in the Analects, all shengren are junzi, and all junzi were formerly shi, but the converse does not hold. More precisely, shi are relatively speaking, fairly numerous, junzi are more scarce, and shengren are very few and rare. In Analects 7.26, Kongzi said, “. . . ‘I will never get to meet a shengren—I would be content to meet a junzi.’” Likewise, he rejects the appellation of shengren when others use it of him (Analects 9.6), even though he certainly makes it clear that becoming a shengren is a desirable ideal worthy of his striving after. In 7.34, “The Master said, ‘How would I dare to consider myself sheng or ren仁? What can be said about me is simply that I continue my studies without respite and instruct others without growing weary.’”

In Kongzi’s thought, the shengren are moral exemplars, but never merely moral exemplars. The shengren are broadly generous with the people and they help the multitude (Analects, 6.30). They have wide skills in life (Analects, 9.6). They walk the dao every step from start to finish (Analects, 19.12). The shengren is a complete person, a person of moral goodness, yes, undoubtedly. But also one who embodies culture itself, in its totality, not just in its morality.

My interpretation of Rosemont’s remarks about shengren is that these persons have ratcheted up humanity to a new level. They pave the dao and write tian. Shengren become venerated exemplars by the force of their lives, not because they are measured against some other standard such as transcendent perfection or moral law. Indeed, they become the standard. Not even li is a rule by which to test them. They are the creators of li. The rites and rituals of human interaction embodied in li are actually the patterns and practices lived by shengren. Rosemont concludes,

The culture that finds its focus in this rare person elevates the human experience to heights of profound aesthetic, moral, and religious refinement, making the human being a worthy partner with the heavens and the earth. The model of the shengren shines across generations and

9 Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Analects are taken from Ames and Rosemont, 1998.
across geographical boundaries as a light that not only stabilizes and secures the human world, but that also serves humankind as a source of cultural nourishment and inspiration. It is the *shengren* who leads the way of the human being (*ren dao*) into a more certain future. (Rosemont 2001, 88)

We see in this path of spiritual progress a system that creates its ideals and names them at the same time. Accordingly, Kongzi does not offer a criterion by which to say one is or is not *shengren*. Neither does the Confucian tradition of *shengren* have an abstract spiritual limit. There are specific human examples of *shengren* of the past. There is Yao, Wu, Wen, and Shun, but these are not lives offered as the highest abstractions of which humans are capable. Nevertheless, of Yao, Kongzi says in the *Analects*:

The master said, “How great indeed was Yao as ruler! How majestic! … How expansive was he—the people could not find the words adequate to praise him. How majestic was he in his accomplishments, and how brilliant was he in his cultural achievements” (8.19).

As Rosemont says, the language used of *shengren* in the *Analects* is celestial and cosmic. Persons such as Yao and Shun have been theomorphized, just as some later student did for Kongzi in *Analects* 19.24: “Confucius is the sun and moon which no one can climb beyond.”

What Rosemont has described as a *path of spiritual progress* I call the way of self-divinization. In characterizing things in this manner, I must say that I feel virtually certain that Rosemont would not agree with my use of this concept because in spite of what he says about Chinese gods being dead (i.e., transformed *hua* [華]) persons, he still seems to worry a great deal about the tendency of Western interpreters to confuse “gods” and “God” whenever the issue of the ultimate goal of Confucian spirituality comes up. If we take “divine” or “gods” in the sense of the Western Abrahamic religions or as some being that is not of the same kind as all other humans, then surely my reading of humans becoming gods in Confucianism would be wrong. But I do not intend either of these meanings. If we take “gods” on the analogy of Yao and Shun, as indeed I do, then I think my use of self-divinization as a characterization of this process seems defensible.

In using the concept of self-divination, I am borrowing from the work of Michael Puett. Puett has argued that during the Warring States period, intellectual streams he calls *self-divinization movements* emerged and
instead of anthropomorphizing the divine, these movements promoted the idea that humans could become like spirits (Puett, 80-121).

More precisely, these articulations were attempts to reduce the distinction between humans and spirits and to argue that, through proper practices, one can attain powers comparable to those possessed by spirits and that one could dispense with divination and sacrifices. Instead of anthropomorphizing the divine, humans, through self-cultivation, could themselves become ru shen “like spirits.”

Puett thinks that Kongzi’s context was one in which an important transition from earlier religious beliefs had already been made. The notion of spirits entering humans that was so prominent in early Chinese shamanism had been replaced by the idea of human transformation resulting in part from interaction with natural numinous forces. In this respect, Puett’s position is similar to that of A. C. Graham on the teachings of the Neiye: Graham says, “Man himself can aspire, not indeed to omniscience (since Chinese thinking does not deal in absolutes), but to that supremely lucid awareness which excites a shudder of numinous awe” (Graham 1989, 101). This new understanding of the transformation of the human being arose both as a critique of and a substitute for the earlier religious practices and beliefs directed toward the control and appeasement of particular spirits of nature, place, and ancestry. It is this understanding of transformation which I associate with what Rosemont calls the path of spiritual progress in the Analects.

Kongzi on the Role of Religious Experience and Practice in Spiritual Progress

10 In his comments on this paper, Thomas Michael expressed reservations about identifying Puett’s “gods” and the shengren which stands at the end of the path of spiritual progress in the Analects. I agree with him if only because I am not altogether confident in my understanding of Puett’s notion of gods. What I am doing here is making use of Puett’s concept of “self-divinization.” I am not saying that shengren in the Analects are equivalent to Puett’s notion of gods. Another possible way of talking about the process of humans becoming gods was suggested to me by Jeffrey Richey. He called my attention to Nicholas Gier’s work on spiritual titanism. By spiritual titan Gier means an extreme form of humanism in which human beings take on divine attributes and prerogatives (Gier 2000). However, I do not wish to say that this is exactly what the Analects is describing either.

11 Puett’s is a general description of self-divination movements. However, there were many such lineages and Kongzi’s is only one of them. They did not all share exactly the same interests.

12 A fine survey of early Chinese religious practices which shows how their primary concern was with the welfare of person, family, and community is Poo 1998.
We should not think of Kongzi’s lineage of self-divinization as an attack on superstition and a turn to rationalism, and I do not think we should read Rosemont as believing this either. The matter is not as simple as saying that Kongzi was a philosopher and he turned away from the religious beliefs of his day because he thought they were superstitious. Kongzi’s views on religious experience are not in any obvious way reductionistic or demythologizing in the ways in which we have seen this happen in Western intellectual reflection on religion in the last two hundred years. Neither is Kongzi interested in making any argument to prove that there is only one ontological realm and not two. The physics he had in his head and which provided the world view of his culture did not even invite such a problem to arise. His talk about religious experience is clear within its context.

It is true that Rosemont wants to carve out an understanding of religious experience that is consistent with the pronouncements of modern science, because so much of the long story of the Abrahamic traditions has contradicted scientific learning. But such worries arise because of Rosemont’s context. In contrast, Kongzi’s comments on his religious experiences must be understood within the context of the physics in which he thinks. His uses of religious language to talk about his spiritual experiences are not meant directly to address the problems posed to dualistic realmism by modern science, because he simply did not think about reality in a dualistic way. With respect to questions of referentiality, transcendence and the like, the Analects stand outside of our debates and set of questions.

If we fail to notice this difference in contexts between that of the Analects and that of Rosemont, then we might be led into some interpretative mistakes. For example, H. G. Creel spoke of Analects 6.22 as having “rise to the belief that Confucius was agnostic” (Creel 1932, 82).

To devote yourself to what is appropriate yi for the people, and to show respect for the ghosts and spirits while keeping them at a distance can be called wisdom.

Admittedly, an interpreter who is disenchanted with dualistic realmism as a way of understanding religious experience may take this passage to mean that to be wise means not really assigning any significance to a belief in ghosts and spirits (i.e., religious entities) because one really cannot know anything about them, or even whether they exist. But it seems ill-advised to conclude from this passage that Kongzi held this kind of agnostic view on numinal entities. Kongzi is not expressing doubts that spirits exist in this passage. To read him in this way is to impose our doubt and skepticism
arising from a dualistic realism on his context. Likewise, it fails to understand what Kongzi meant in his context. Kongzi is reminding his listeners that there is a li for relating to spirits and it calls for a measure of distance between human beings and spirits. He is teaching his students to be respectful toward spirits and not to seek too much familiarity with them. In the Confucian tradition, such li is appropriate for our behavior toward those of greater power in general (e.g., the ruler or even one’s father) and not only for numinal entities.\(^\text{13}\)

If we look for direct comments by Kongzi on his religious experiences and its relation to the path of spiritual progress in the Analects, an appropriate beginning is Analects 3.12.

The expression “sacrifice as though present” is taken to mean “sacrifice to the spirits as though the spirits are present.” But the Master said: “If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is as though I have not sacrificed at all.”

Kongzi is giving his endorsement to the statement, “sacrifice as though the spirits are present.” But he is not counseling his students to go through the motions of doing the rituals although there are no such things as spirits. This is a psychologizing of religious experience that arose largely in modernity as we became suspicious about the nature of what was encountered or experienced in a religious ritual. This is not an issue for Kongzi. And Kongzi in no place advocates that we act with any duplicity or sham. It seems overwhelmingly unlikely to me that he would counsel anyone to perform a ritual if he thought the ritual was empty.\(^\text{14}\) Kongzi makes a sharp

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\(^{13}\) See Louden 2002 for a similar argument.

\(^{14}\) Robin Weng has encouraged me to notice the way in which Kang Yongwei (1858-1927) employs the Confucian concept of sincerity cheng 誠 when interpreting 3.12. According to Kang, Kongzi’s point is that if one has sincerity there will be a spirit, if one does not have sincerity, there will be no spirit (Kang, 37). While I value the effort of Kang in this interpretation, nevertheless, as I show in the text above, I think the force of this passage lies in Kongzi’s point about the necessity of his own personal participation in the ritual to his sense that a religious experience has occurred. On the other hand, while agreeing with me that Kongzi probably did believe in spirits, Eric Hutton has reminded me that as the case of Xunzi shows, it is possible to believe that they do not communicate with spirits, and still not regard the rituals as empty. So, Hutton does not think my appeal to Kongzi’s aversion to duplicity can necessarily rule out reading the comment “sacrifice as though the spirits are present” as implying that one should go through the motions even though there are no spirits. But in spite of what we take Xunzi to be saying, I think we must remember Kongzi’s caution against “pretending” in Analects 11.21. Putting all of this aside, I want to stress again that I think the major thrust of this passage is to be found in Kongzi’s insistence that religious gain comes only by direct
distinction between being sincere and pretending. He warns against the latter (see 11.21). Likewise, when commenting on filiality, Kongzi is emphatic that mere action alone is not filiality. A son who merely goes through the motions is only pretending to be filial (*Analects*, 2.7). There is actually little else in this statement that we should “sacrifice to the spirits as though the spirits are present” other than Kongzi’s stress that one should sacrifice with respect and reverence.

Of much more interest is the second part of 3.12 in which Kongzi observes: “If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is as though I have not sacrificed at all.” Often, no notice is taken of this part of 3.12. One reading of this comment is simply that Kongzi felt he should be physically present at a sacrifice rather than sending a specialist to perform the ritual on his behalf. And this reading seems right as far as it goes. The practice of using a ritual specialist, although widely done in the time of Kongzi, was not approved of by him. In fact, it is in this passage that Kongzi is making a critique of the practice of engaging such a specialist to perform sacrifices (Puett, 98). Speaking of the period prior to Kongzi’s teaching, the *Guoyu* (4th century BCE) seems to join Kongzi’s critique by calling that time a period of decline in which the

> People made their own offerings, and each family had a ritual specialist (wu) and a scribe…. The people exhausted themselves in sacrifices and yet knew no good fortune. They made offerings without proper moderation. The people and the spirits occupied the same position. …There was neither respect nor reverence. ¹⁵ (*Guoyu*, the Chu Yu, Xia chapter, 18.22)

As I said earlier, this interpretation of 3.12 seems right so far as it goes. But there is something more to this passage than a critique of employing ritual specialists. We must also notice that Kongzi is not denying that something takes place in ritual. Quite the opposite, he is affirming that something significant does take place in religious activity. The text confirms in a straightforward way that Kongzi values the religious or spiritual experience he has when he “participates” in the sacrifice. ¹⁶

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¹⁵ All translations from the *Guoyu* are from Puett 2002.

¹⁶ Here we might also take note of 10.14: “When his fellow villagers were performing the *nuo* ritual to exorcise hungry ghost, dressing in his court robes he would stand in attendance as host at the eastern stair.”
Of course, the rejection of ritual specialists and Kongzi’s personal embracing of ritual observance are not mutually exclusive. Kongzi is simply making the recommendation that persons perform the rituals for themselves because he is bearing witness to the fact that the experience he had when doing the rituals contributed to the process of his own spiritual change.

I would like to pause in my survey of Kongzi’s talk about religious experience in the Analects to call attention to one tradition that merits our attention with respect to the importance Kongzi attached to religious ritual, even though it is not in the Analects. According to the Book of Rites, Laozi (Lao Dan) was an expert on mourning rituals with whom Kongzi studied. The Rites says that on four occasions, Kongzi, is reported to have responded to questions by appealing to answers given to him by Laozi. The records even go so far as to say that Kongzi once assisted him in a burial service. It is possible that this tradition may have originated in Confucian circles as a way to show that Kongzi was willing to learn from anyone.17 If we take this as a reasonable explanation of the source for this account, then it is all the more instructive that what is reported of Kongzi is that he sought instruction in ritual practice. If subsequent followers of Kongzi created this tradition, they must have thought that those who heard it would find it believable that Kongzi valued participation in religious ritual enough to study its performance. It is unlikely that he would have done so if he thought that religious ritual consisted in going through the motions as though spirits were present, when he really thought they were not.

To return now to the Analects, a passage that is important to any complete picture of Kongzi’s view of religious experience is Analects 7.21: “The Master had nothing to say about strange happenings, the use of force, disorder, or the spirits.” One way to read this passage is to infer that Kongzi did not talk about such spirits because he did not believe in them and that he lacked any experience of a numinal sort when he participated in religious acts. And yet, from the statement that Kongzi did not speak of certain topics, we cannot conclude whether he believed or did not believe in the things of which he did not speak. Based on our previous discussion of Analects 3.12 it seems Kongzi did have a significant experience when doing

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17 Angus Graham begins his exploration of the origin of the tradition that Kongzi studied ritual practice under Laozi this way: “How did the story originate? As Taoist propaganda against Confucianism or as a Confucian moral tale of the Master’s willingness to submit himself to an insignificant teacher of the rites, of which Taoists later took advantage?” (Graham 1998, 27)
rituals. And, in light of 6.22, we might simply conclude that the silence of 7.21 records an example of his respect and reverence for such things.

*Analects* 11.12 has sometimes been understood as an example of a passage showing that Kongzi had no sense of interaction with spiritual realities. The passage says,

Zilu asked how to serve the spirits and the gods. The Master replied, “Not yet being able to serve other people, how would you be able to serve the spirits?” Zilu said, “May I ask about death?” The Master replied, “Not yet understanding life, how could you understand death?”

However, again, we must be careful in our interpretation of the text. Kongzi’s refusal in this context to speculate about the service of spirits does not mean that he thought they were nonexistent. In fact, I suggest this passage is not really about spirits in any way. After all, he refuses to discuss death with Zilu as well. This passage says much more about his instruction of Zilu than it does about any of Kongzi’s personal views about spiritual realities or death. As is well known, in *The Analects*, Kongzi often postpones or deflects inquiries from a student whom he believes is not ready to discuss the issue raised (e.g., 5.10; 5.12; 6.12; 8.12; 11.26; 14.43). I suggest this text indicates to us that Kongzi did not believe Zilu was ready to talk about such matters as the spirits, gods, and death. It does not mean that Kongzi was denying the reality of spirits or persons interactions with them.  

We might wonder how Kongzi talked about his religious experiences if he did not speak of *shen* 神 (*Analects* 7.21). To say Kongzi did not speak of *shen* is different from the claim that he did not speak of religious experiences. This distinction must always be laid before us. Kongzi does talk about his religious experiences and he has much to say about their contribution to his progress. The point is that the passages in which he talks about these experiences typically make use of the concept of *tian* 天 and not *shen*.  

Benjamin Schwartz felt that *tian* was the central religious term of the *Analects* (Schwartz, 122). And Creel wrote, “If we look for a firm and

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18 In his fine essay on death and dying in the *Analects*, Ivanhoe argues that what he calls “the atheistic reading” is not characteristic of the commentaries on this passage. In fact, he points out that Cheng Yi understood this passage in a way that supports a belief in the spirits. The idea is that one serves the spirits *only* by being the right kind of person (Ivanhoe 2003).
19 I am indebted to Eric Hutton for calling my attention to this important distinction.
frankly stated conviction on the part of Confucius as to things religious, we shall find it most clearly in connection with *tian*, Heaven” (Creel 1949, 116). Rosemont also realizes the centrality of the *tian* passages and he recognizes that *tian* has a use in what we might call a religious language game (Rosemont 2001, 43-44). Daniel Cook and Rosemont made clear their understanding of the importance of *tian* in their translation of Leibniz’s writings on China.

Theologically there were two burning questions which divided the missionaries to China, and the divisions quickly spread back to Europe. The first of these was whether the Chinese language did or did not contain a close lexical equivalent for the Christian “God.” If not, it must follow that the Chinese were all atheists. The Jesuit founder of the mission in China, Matteo Ricci, allowed two terms from the Chinese: *Shang Di* [上帝]— “Supreme Ancestor”— and *Tian*— “Heaven”— as equivalents for “God.”20 (Cook and Rosemont 1994, 3)

With respect to trying to arrive at one single English lexical item to translate *tian* Rosemont and Ames say,

> *Tian* is a term that we have chosen not to translate, largely because we believe its normal English rendering as “Heaven” cannot but conjure up images derived from the Judeo-Christian tradition that are not to be found in China; and “Nature” will not work either. (Ames and Rosemont, 46)

There are many uses for *tian* in Chinese thought.21 In the *Analects*, *tian* is sometimes used for “nature,” sometimes for “sky,” sometimes as “heaven and earth.” *Tian* has more than one language game home, and we should not confuse these or try to reduce them to one single privileged or definitive meaning. This is the reason why Rosemont and Ames cannot find

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20 As Robert Louden and others have shown, the presumption that in order to have a belief in God one needs one or another discrete word for God seems clearly false. A belief can be constructed by means of a combination of many different words (See Louden 2002, 89). Additionally, in Chinese, as in other natural languages, words often have multiple uses and this is certainly true of *tian*. Some of the most helpful discussions of *tian* are: Lau, 27-30; Hall and Ames 1987, 201-216 and, of course, Robert Eno’s book length study, 1990.

21 In what follows, I am heavily dependent on Ivanhoe’s work on *tian*. He provides an excellent summary of the history of the use of *tian* up to and including Kongzi. He writes specifically about uses of *tian* in early Confucianism, but he also takes note of its use in some later traditions as well. “In the writings of Mozi (fl. 479-438 BCE) and his followers, Heaven is a very active agent in the human realm, employing ghosts and spirits in order to ensure strict justice throughout the world. In the writings of Xunzi (c. 310-219 BCE), Heaven is described as the impersonal processes of nature” (Ivanhoe 2006, 2-4).
a single “equivalent” for tian in English. Even today, a Chinese person may simply say, “tian a!” This is used in situations and contexts like when English speakers say “Oh, God.” In both cases these are expressive statements, not referential ones. In English one can say, “Heaven only knows!” and be using this expression to indicate that no one knows. In Chinese, contemporary speakers may use, “Tian zhidao 天知道 to mean “Tian knows (what you did or what you are thinking).” Currently Chinese persons still use common sayings, “Lao tian ye zhidao 老天爷知道 to mean “Old grandfather tian knows what you did or what you think” and “Cangtian you yan 蒼天有眼 to mean “Spacious tian has a watchful eye to record what persons do and punish them accordingly.”

And perhaps Mengzi has Kongzi in mind when he writes, “Tian, when endowing a person with a great mission, will always first torture the person’s will, exhaust his veins and bones, starve his body, empty his body thoroughly, and mess up the things he tries to do in his confident efforts.”

Of those cases in which Rosemont acknowledges that tian is used by Kongzi to talk about religious experience, he makes the generalization that tian

…allowed for the conflation of the culturally sophisticated Shang dynasty’s di 帝 (ancestor spirits) with the notion of tian…In the absence of some transcendent creator deity…tian would seem to stand for a cumulative and continuing cultural legacy focused in the spirits of those who have come before…persons such as the Duke of Zhou and Confucius—are “theomorphized” to become tian, and tian is itself made anthropomorphic and determinate in their persons. (Ames and Rosemont, 47)

Robert Louden has done a study of the tian passages. He divides the texts having religious uses of tian into three groups: those related to Kongzi’s sense of having a mission from tian; those in which Kongzi desairs over achieving his goals, even while nevertheless continuing to follow tian’s intention; and those in which tian is presented as offering moral guidance for humankind (Louden, 81). Ivanhoe’s reading of the Analects’ use of tian in a religious way complements that of Louden. He summarizes Kongzi’s religious use of the term in this way.

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22 I am grateful to my colleague Li Qingjun for calling these uses of tian to my attention.

23 天將降大任於斯人也，必先苦其心志，勞其筋骨，餓其體肤，空乏其身，行拂亂其所， translation by Li Qingjun (Mengzi, 6B:15).
Kongzi believed that Heaven has a plan for human beings—their proper end is a just, peaceful, harmonious, and flourishing society—and that Heaven chose him to play a special role in the realization of this plan—to preserve, codify, and propagate the dao or Way that enables human beings to achieve this end. (Ivanhoe 2006, 5)

I wish to categorize Kongzi’s uses of tian as a religious term in the following manner.

1. In Analects, 2.4, Kongzi speaks of tian as though tian directs reality and has a plan for his life.

From fifteen, my heart-and-mind was set upon learning; from thirty I took my stance; from forty I was no longer doubtful; from fifty I realized the propensities of tian (tianming); from sixty my ear was attuned; from seventy I could give my heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries. (Analects 2.4)

In this spiritual autobiography, Kongzi says that by the age of fifty, he understood tianming 天命, which Ames and Rosemont translate as “propensities of tian,” although these characters are usually rendered as tian’s mandate or decree. In Analects 16.8, Kongzi teaches that junzi “stand in awe” of tianming, while petty people do not understand it. This passage goes well with 2.4 in which Kongzi seems to suggest that as one progresses spiritually, one realizes or enacts the decrees of tian.

2. Kongzi affirms that one can know the movement of tian, and he speaks boldly about his own sense of having a special place in tianming in Analects 9.5.

When the Master was surrounded in Kuang, he said, “With King Wen 文 long dead, does not our cultural heritage 文 reside here in us? If tian 天 were going to destroy this legacy, we latecomers would not have had access to it. If tian is not going to destroy this culture, what can the people of Kuang do to me!”

We cannot simply remove tian from this statement and interpret it to mean, “if this legacy were going to be destroyed....” Tian is used as an agent in this passage. Kongzi is not saying that what is at stake here is whether the legacy will survive or not, but what tian will do to insure or bring down the legacy.

3. Although Zigong tells the Grand Minister that tian has set Kongzi on the path to become a shengren (9.6), Kongzi feels that only tian truly understands the sort of person he is (14.35). This implies that Kongzi believed that no human really knew him, although tian did.
4. In *Analects* 3.13, we can infer first that Kongzi prayed to *tian*, and also that he thought others should do so.

Wang-sun Jia inquired of Confucius, quoting the saying: “It is better to pay homage to the spirit of the stove than to the spirits of the household shrine. What does this mean?”

The Master replied: “It is not so. A person who offends against *tian* has nowhere else to pray.”

Kongzi here affirms that *tian* is aware of what people say and do, what is in their hearts, and that *tian* may be offended or pleased according to what *tian* knows.

5. Kongzi felt that *tian* watched him and judged him, and that he could not fool *tian*. When rebuked by Zilu for visiting Nanzi, a woman of ill-repute, Kongzi says that if he has done anything wrong, *tian* will punish him (6.28). Kongzi believed in the certainty of *tian*’s watchful eye because in 9.12 he affirms that *tian* cannot be fooled.

6. In *Analects* 7.23, Kongzi leaves no doubt that he feels that *tian* gave him life and from it he has developed the power of virtue *de* 德.

7. In *Analects* 8.19, he says the lives of shengren and their communion with *tian* are interwoven. Kongzi believed that following *tian*’s model contributed to one’s being able to be shengren.

The master said, “How great indeed was Yao as ruler! How majestic! Only *tian* 天 is truly great, and only Yao took it as his model. How expansive was he—the people could not find the words adequate to praise him. How majestic was he in his accomplishments, and how brilliant was he in his cultural achievements.

8. In *Analects* 17.19, Kongzi makes it clear that *tian* communicates to him, even if it is not in words.

A few of these passages could be woven into a reading according to which Kongzi is portrayed as expressing awe at the process of reality, its propensities and even how things eventually right themselves, all in a manner totally independent of agencies other than the currently existing human beings in our sensory field. This is the reading I think Rosemont favors.

But in some of these passages *tian* is used in a way that does not easily fit into such an interpretive scheme. For example, when Kongzi says that only *tian* understands him, he is using *tian* in a manner requiring that *tian* possess intentionality and rationality (see 14.35). Furthermore, he insists that *tian* can be offended because *tian* knows what we do and *tian* cannot be fooled. Kongzi certainly prays to *tian* and he expects *tian* to act.
And he says that *tian* speaks to him. These passages are loaded with predicates of agency and intentionality.

If we start from these passages and allow them to guide us in interpreting those passages that Rosemont takes to mean that *tian* is the people collectively or simply a term for the world’s process, then a much different picture of *tian* emerges from the one so carefully embedded in the Rosemont and Ames translation of terms such as *tianming*. In contrast, we have gained instead a view of *tian* as volitional, watching over persons, taking actions (some of which are inscrutable to us) and as incapable of being fooled about the hearts of man. Kongzi’s religious uses of *tian* in the *Analects* require that we take *tian* as an agent with intentional and cognitive predication.

However, this is not to say that we should identify *tian* with the concept of a personal God such as one finds in the Abrahamic traditions of the West, or as an independent transcendent, foundational source of truth, beauty and goodness. It is only to say that in trying to avoid doing this, we should not blur the way in which *tian* is used by the Kongzi of the *Analects*. Our options are not limited merely to either the Abrahamic model of dualistic realism that Rosemont rejects totally, or the elimination of cognitive and emotive predication for *tian* that characterizes Rosemont’s views. A third option is to take note of Kongzi’s many ways of using the term and not discount any of them.

It seems, then, that we are at this point. Based on what Kongzi says about his religious experiences, and on his uses of *tian*, we cannot find evidence for thinking of Kongzi as a-religious. Instead, we must conclude that religious experience was an essential part of his teaching about the path to becoming *shengren*. His religious experiences are not transcendent supernatural ones if we understand this on the model of dualistic realism. But they are extraordinary numinal experiences sometimes associated with Kongzi’s participation in ritual and prayer. Our reading of 3.12 shows that Kongzi values religious practice and actually derives some of the understanding necessary to becoming *shengren* from his religious experience (Rosemont 2002, 192). At the end of his own journey, Kongzi has come to

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24 I cannot go into the intricacies of the way these characters are translated at this time, but the translation made by Ames and Rosemont stands in contrast to the usual pattern of rendering this conjunction of characters as *tian*’s will or *tian*’s command, of even *tian*’s mandate. Ames and Rosemont render it “the propensities of *tian*.” And yet, elsewhere in their translation, they render *ming* as command or order. It is only when *ming* occurs with *tian* that they use the English “propensity.” Each of these translations implies a volitional and intentional agent that the Ames and Rosemont translation eliminates.
know tianming and he is attuned to it, so much so that he can give his heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping tian’s boundaries (*Analects* 2.4). It is no wonder, then, that in spite of his modest claim not to be shengren (7.34), the euhemerization is complete and the writer of *Analects* 19.24 exalts, “Confucius is the sun and moon which no one can climb beyond.” The writer of 19.24 does for Kongzi what Kongzi does for Yao (8.19).

**Concluding Remarks**

As philosophers, we must distinguish between Smith’s worry about the referentiality of religious language and the metaphysical dualistic realmism that Rosemont rejects. I fear that Rosemont fails to take this difference seriously enough. While he rightly rejects dualistic realmism as relevant to the spirituality of the *Analects*, he seems to believe that this move requires the elimination of agency, intentionality, and cognitive predication from his translation and account of Kongzi’s talk about his religious experiences. My view is that we should reject dualistic realmism when interpreting what Kongzi reports of his religious experiences. But we should not do this because of the alleged correctness of modern science. Rather we should set dualistic realmism aside because it is completely alien to the world view of the period of the *Analects*.

Rosemont has applied the physics of the *Analects* period to show that consciousness and selfhood can be thought of in Chinese philosophy without resorting to mind/body dualism in a Cartesian sense (Rosemont 2001, 74-78). Relying on this same Chinese worldview, he observes, “I do not see the distinction between the secular and the sacred as an ontological one” (58). Rosemont makes use of this rich physics in Chinese philosophy because he thinks it is helpful in setting aside the distinction between transcendence and immanence that is so fundamental to the West, but alien from the Chinese world view.\(^{25}\)

The critical contribution made by the *Analects*’ portrayal of religious experience and its role in spiritual progress must be understood in relation to the physics that underwrites Kongzi’s remarks. This is the physics that evolved into what was later called five phase wu xing physics by the time of the Han dynasty. We may think of this world view as an extended

\(^{25}\) For my attempt to appeal to the later development of this physics in the five phase model with respect to the work of Roger Ames and David Hall, see Littlejohn 2005.
empiricism. I speak of extended empiricism only to highlight something even Western ontologists know quite well. If we had a different sense apparatus, or if our senses received data in a wider range, then our experience of reality would be altered. Perhaps we could hear sounds that dogs hear, but which are not presently in our auditory range even though they are very real. Consider that just because we do not see ultra violet rays this does not mean they do not exist; it signifies only a restriction in our sensory capacity to perceive them. We hear radio programs and see T.V. shows by the alteration of wave lengths and frequencies that bring them into our sensory range. There is nothing transcendent or supernatural about these processes or about the waves. They are not in another realm, even though we do not see them without a device to transduce them.

A brief illustration of how ancient Chinese physics was thought to work may be helpful in making my point. In their translation of the Zhongyong, Hall and Ames provide an illustration of the physics they associate with the period of the formation of the Analects by using a quote from the Zhuangzi.

Before long, Master Lai fell ill. Wheezing and panting, he was on the brink of death. His wife and children gathered about him and wept. Master Li, having gone to inquire after him, scolded them, saying, “Get away! Don’t impede his transformations!”

Leaning against the door, Master Li talked with him saying: “Extraordinary, these transformations! What are you going to be made into next?

Of course, I do not mean anything like British Empiricism. Of the later development of this physics, Laurence Thompson says, “There were five hsing, given in the Hung Fan chapter of Shu Ching as water, fire, wood, metal, and earth (their order and mutual reactions differ in other texts)” (Thompson, 2). A good source on the five element physics that evolved out of understandings prevalent in Kongzi’s period is Po Hu T’ung: The Comprehensive Discussions in the White Tiger Hall by Pan Ku (Som 1988). Wu xing means five phases or moving elements (xing). But we should not overburden the concept of xing with our rigid notion of a fixed and stable element. In Chinese physics everything is in process, not merely every so-called object, but every element which gives it its being. An object is always in some kind of combination of the five phases. Wu xing is actually the short form of Wu zhong liu xing zhi chi or “the five types of qi dominating at different times.” Unlike the Western and other systems of five elements, the Chinese system focuses on energy and its transformations, not on form and substance. Stephen Bokenkamp writes that the Chinese did not seek after the smallest stable particle, but for the lineaments of the system as a whole. As a result, they came to represent transformations of qi in terms of recurring cycles, marked off in terms of yin, yang, the five phases, or the eight trigrams (Bokenkamp, 16).
Where are you going to be sent? Will you be made into a rat’s liver? Or will you be made into an insect’s arm? 27

This physics is a process cosmology of transforming objects 28 and it reflects a deep sense of the contemporaneous, co-existence of multiple beings and phenomena. 29 It allows for objects and beings that are real, although not always within phase to fall within our sensory range. Clearly this understanding of the fluid nature of objects and our experience of them offers us a very different model from that of dualistic realism. It is an ontology that would require a revision in any prevailing Western theory of reference because it includes entities and objects not in proper phase to fall into our sense perception, but which are nonetheless real. It holds many possibilities for understanding the religious experiences Kongzi reports. On the one hand, perhaps what the ancient Chinese reported in religious experiences were phenomena in a different phase (not in a different realm). On the other hand, perhaps the advance along the path of spiritual progress was accompanied by an increasing ability to be aware of these phenomena.

In a much later time period the implications of this physics for understanding such things as spirits is deliberately spelled out. In his Conversations of Master Zhu, ZHU XI (1130-1200) says that all beings including spirit beings **gui shen** 鬼神 are made of the same substance **qi** 氣, and that there is only a difference in the configuration of the five phases **wu xing** 五行 which characterize them at any given time. 30 Since all objects are of the same substance, there is no sense speaking of any of them as “wholly other” as is done in Western dualistic realism. Speaking of the difference between the

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28 I am aware of the extensive discussion of the concept of object in Chinese physics and I recommend a study of the reconstruction of object theory under the notion of “foci” as done by Hall and Ames 1998, 23-77.
30 The **Yi Jing** says that qi coalesces in so as to produce five phases to constitute things, that what we call spirits and souls are changes in human **wu xing** forms. These forms do not differ in kind from physical foci (objects), they differ only in their combination of phase elements. Some of these combinations are not in our visible, tactile, or auditory or sensory fields.
experience of physical and numinal phenomenon such as spirits, ZHU Xi says it only amounts to the difference between what people ordinarily see and do not think strange, and those things they consider strange (Gardner 1996, 113). Likewise, Stephen Bokenkamp says of the Daoist belief in spiritual beings, that also relies on this physics, that there is not a chasm between beings, but a chain of beings in various phase configurations, extending from nonsentient life forms to the highest reaches of the empyrean (Bokenkamp, 22).

I suspect that Rosemont will have several reservations about my arguments in this paper. While I believe that he will agree with me that transcendent dualistic realism is the principal sort of metaphysics he wants to reject, he will probably recoil from the other two moves I have made. 1) I have held that the path of spiritual progress in the Analects which leads to becoming shengren may also be thought of as becoming a god in the sense of shen. But I am not saying that Kongzi necessarily had becoming a god as his intended goal, only that such an end was the result of becoming shengren as the language used of such persons by their follower indicates. I think Rosemont will not accept “becoming a god” as the goal of the path of spiritual progress, even if some of his own statements that gods in China are dead (i.e., transformed) human beings seem to make this identification justifiable. 2) I have argued that some of Kongzi’s religious uses of tian employ cognitive and agency predicates and that they appear to be referential. However, I do not mean that what is referred to is the Western Christian God. I suspect that Rosemont will reject this reading by taking some passages about tian as though they were about the way things move in life, and reading others of them as exclusively expressive. But I have argued that my view on both of these counts is more cogent than Rosemont’s, not so much to say he is wrong as to entice my dear teacher to examine again these passages and continue the conversation with me on the spiritual progress so very important to us all.

REFERENCES


31 The empyrean is not another “realm!”


Littlejohn


Feeling Safe in the Danger-Net of Emergence:
Atonement in Henry Rosemont,
James, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Bataille

David L. Jones

In defense of religion and religious spirituality, Henry Rosemont begins his *Rationality and Religious Experience* with these words:

We are at the dawn not only of a new century, but a new millennium. It is becoming commonplace—perhaps too common—that in both economics and communications we are on the cusp of becoming a “global village.” Normally, however, the term “village” conjures up a vision of a fairly small, cohesive community whose members share at least roughly a common conception of the good, where wealth is not too inequitably distributed, with fresh air and clean water in abundance, and where ethnic distrust and dislike is rare, and violence at a minimum. (3)

For Rosemont, religious atonement will invariably necessitate economic, social, and political justice. In what follows, I suggest several pathways through the intersubjectivity found in continental philosophy, the turn of contemporary science toward complexity, and a homecoming of the lost emergent religious sensibilities of human nature as ways of extending Henry Rosemont’s insightful contributions in making our world a more just and religious place.

The question of economic, social, and political justice is not divorced from human spirituality. In fact, this type of justice is part and parcel of and endemic to Rosemont’s conception of spirituality and what it means to learn from the great spiritual traditions of the world. Although these lessons of justice will also be found in the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the tradition that best serves his purposes is Confucianism, especially the root derivation of that tradition in the originary thinking of Confucius. Although Rosemont’s philosophical approach is clearly from the analytic tradition of philosophy, an excursion into Continental Philosophy, especially phenomenology, actually brings the underpinnings of his thinking into clearer light. Phenomenology is, in many ways, a practice of doing philosophical thinking and presupposes an analysis of the
psychological. Although Rosemont’s work is not overtly psychological in method or focus, the psychological dimension is nevertheless crucial for the success of his social, political, and spiritual quest for justice. First and foremost, phenomenology begins with the *epoche*. An ancient Greek term, *epoche* refers to a theoretical moment where a complete skepticism is affirmed—the existence of the material world as we see in Descartes, the illusion of all action in the real world as we see in Parmenides and Zeno, and even the consciousness of the subject itself is suspended and brought into suspicion much like the veil of ignorance requirement in the original position of John Rawls. It is, of course, Husserl whose notion of the phenomenological *epoche* is most influential in providing a firmer grounding for the consciousness once the analysis locates the presuppositions of experience so we can turn again to the robustness of our lived human experiences in our life-worlds. The *epoche* will provide us with the originary intuition that is waiting to presence itself (or *Evidenz* in German), the givenness of our experience constitutive of being human, and the conceptual clarification of our intentionality in this world, that is, our intentionality of what it means to be human and live the good and just life. And it is to the life-world that Rosemont wishes to turn for his spirituality.

Rosemont will, however, seek his conceptual clarification more through the role of concepts of language, Chinese and English, and less on the givenness of self-evident insights of intuition given by the practice of *epoche*. But I want to suggest that he does indeed, if one were first to be psychological, and then phenomenological, come to the conclusion that he must have this dimension present in his thinking and experience of the religious as he outlines it in the Confucian context. His work gives, as does the philosophical practice and method of phenomenology, an objectivity to subjectivity. The subjectivity of the subject and its communal intersubjectivity is given more presence than Rosemont’s religious philosophy reveals at first glance.

A major criticism of his *Rationality and Religious Experience* is that his position lacks any theological metaphysical moorings and leaves his work afloat without metaphysical anchor. Rosemont’s response to this charge is philosophically understandable and justifiable, especially since if any tradition has fought the tug of lure and hook of metaphysics and its impoverishment of the human condition, it is that of China. Rosemont offers a practical response to this charge of being metaphysically and theologically adrift, by rejoining that he can get the same level of spirituality from the emphasis on social ritual without metaphysics and theological underpinnings. And indeed this is correct, and William James’ idea of self-
authenticating experience is Rosemont’s anti-metaphysical mooring for this starting point. For James, our originary experiences as a subject are objective, and as he says in *The Principles of Psychology*, “only as reflection becomes developed do we become aware of an inner world at all” (James 1981, 679). To enter into this inner-world is to come to the place and moment of self-authenticating experience. According to James, this domain is inaccessible to science and is only accessible by the human subject.

It is at this point Rosemont departs from Huston Smith who seeks his atonement with God. Rosemont will have nothing of this. His atonement is not an at-one-ment with God however defined. For Rosemont, atonement is intimately connected to the self-authenticating experience James endorses. For Rosemont, at-one-ment is not concerned with some mystical union with God, although in many ways this is what James’ religious philosophy is about. Rather, for Rosemont, it is the at-one-ment that occurs in ritual; and it is here he moves away from religious ritual and moves toward social ritual, which is for him, nonetheless unmistakably religious. Rituals in the Confucian tradition bind and bond individuals with their peers because performance in them, and their elucidation to future generations, creates kinship, a belonging attunement that makes them feel “absolutely safe.” Rosemont’s appeal here is more to Wittgenstein than James, but James does conclude in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, “An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections” (James 1963, 484) is one of the main characteristics of the religious life. Rosemont quotes Ray Monk, Wittgenstein’s biographer, that after watching a play by Ludwig Anzengruber, Wittgenstein “For the rest of his life . . . continued to regard the feeling of being ‘absolutely safe’ as paradigmatic of religious experience” (Rosemont 2001, 98). And it is to this characteristic of absolute safety, Rosemont makes his utmost appeal to living a religious life.

Seen vis-à-vis the Abrahamic traditions where communion with the holy is the bread (wheat) and wine (grape) of earth is understood and lived as an expression of the presencing of God with us and how this is cannibalistically transformed later in Christianity into the body and blood of the God as Other, Confucianism, will offer us a world where all theology hinders religious experience. In other words, Confucianism opens the religious experience to human beings and the natural world in which we find ourselves. Rosemont’s take on Confucianism is that it promotes ecumenical dialogue without allowing the possibility of theology and metaphysics of getting in the way of the self-authenticating experience that transcends the reaches of science and philosophy and that constitutes the very nature of
religious experience itself. Even if *tian* has some kind of agency resembling the Christian heaven, it still takes part in this world; it is not viewed as a realm of wholly otherness.

What Confucianism shares with the other religions of the world is the absolute necessity to remove the ego from the path of human engagement. This takes many forms—the intellectual, psychological, spiritual, social, economic, and political—and the ego always gets in the way. By removing the ego and its penchant for dominion opens a clearing for intercultural understanding and mutuality. This clearing allows for compassion, more of a Buddhist goal than Confucian, but nevertheless still present in the Confucian project, especially Neo-Confucianism. The religious experience is recognized most fully in its extreme form in mystical experience and is always culturally specific. Jesus simply does not appear to Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, or Jains, but invariably only to Christians. And it is only through Confucianism, without any need for “strange happenings, the use of force, disorder, or the spirits” (7.21) that an ecumenical dialogue is possible. Such dialogue is possible for there is no metaphysics or theology present in it. It is not necessary to speak a theology, to give a theology presence in a language for it is theology that has given rise to the ego and its quest for eternal life; it is theology that has fostered exclusionary politics and its social, political, and economic injustices. The theological ego has given us the language of chink, nigger, spic, dago, pollock, and so forth; it has given us the language of self-indulgence and hatred. Ultimately, this hatred is the hatred of the very self that perpetuates itself in its self-indulgence.

The term “religious experience” was never much used before William James began employing it in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902. James uses this term for a reason. It focuses on the subjective experience and circumnavigates all the philosophical questions about the veridical nature of mystical experience where such an experience is valuable only if new information about the way things are, or are not, is provided to the experiencer through the experience. But does James go far enough toward the goal of the spirituality of social, political, and economic justice that Rosemont needs? Does James appreciate and affirm the question of subjectivity at the deep level that phenomenologists do? I think not.

When James talks about religious experience, he seems to have a certain sense of what constitutes a religious experience that seems much different from the one Rosemont gives us from the Confucian tradition. It seems phenomenology will actually help Rosemont more than James’ pragmatism. Where James and the Confucian project come together is in what is constitutive of the religious life. As James writes in *The Varieties of*
Religious Experience, “Religious life consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto” (James 1963, 53). But even in this most thoughtful conclusion, James seems to miss the dynamic edge of an emergent set of harmonious relations that arise from interactions through the coursing of time. Confucius was acutely aware—more so than James it seems—that rituals are an acquired past performance that must be constantly reinterpreted, practiced, and performed with contemporary peers with the intention of a bonding kinship with those absent, present, and yet-to-be. The intergenerationality, so crucial to Rosemont’s sense of at-one-ment, is missing in James’ notion of safety or in Wittgenstein’s feeling of being “absolutely safe.” We also see a mystical, and perhaps even a transcendent tendency in Wittgenstein’s notion of feeling absolutely safe when he writes in his Lecture on Ethics, “For all I wanted to do with . . . [ethical judgments] was just to go beyond the world . . . . My whole tendency and I believe the tendency of all men who ever tried to write or talk Ethics or Religion was to run against the boundaries of language . . . . Ethics so far as it springs from the desire to say something about the ultimate meaning of life, the absolute good, the absolute valuable, can be no science” (Wittgenstein, 44). Both James and Wittgenstein realize in their heart of hearts that religion and ethics can be no science and that they transcend the margins of scientific discourse, but Rosemont actually invokes, albeit not directly, a religious appeal to science when he insists that one can be a Confucian, without any challenge to the truths of science. We can take Confucian religious texts literally because they do not confront our rational sensibilities.

This feeling of safety to which James alludes also seems more transcendent than the immanent philosophy of Confucius. As James summarizes the meaning of religious experience in the conclusion of his The Varieties of Religious Experience, he writes,

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance;
2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end;
3. That prayer or inner communion with the spirit thereof—be that spirit “God” or “law”—is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world. (James 1963, 484)

In his fourth point, James touches on and resonates with the robust qualities of living a spiritual life present in the Confucian experience when he writes that religion also includes the psychological characteristic of “A new
feeling safe zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism” (James 1963, 484). However, he only finally comes around to Rosemont’s position when he concludes that religious experience gives us “An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections” (486).

But what is this safety in which Rosemont, James, and Wittgenstein want us to find refuge? Is it about our psychological or ontological insecurity, our quest for certainty or meaning, or is it our desire to belong to something greater than ourselves? Are absolute safety and belonging necessarily inclusive? Are attunement and at-one-ment necessarily entailing? Are all of these states mutually inclusive and entailing?

Rosemont says, “My work with Confucian texts suggests more generally a sense of belonging, fully belonging, in their case to those who have preceded us, those in whose midst we live, and those who will follow us. In the Abrahamic faiths, it is a feeling of atonement, or, as I would prefer to syllabically resegment the term, at-one-ment. ‘Attunement’ is also appropriate” (Rosemont, 31). He continues, “each of the world’s religious traditions offers us several ways, several paths we might follow in order to achieve this sense of belonging, of safety, of at-one-ment, or attunement.”

My hunch is that James and Wittgenstein move in a similar direction here. As James concludes in Lecture XVII of The Varieties of Religious Experience,

In this shape, I think, we have to leave the subject. Mystical states indeed wield no authority due simply to their being mystical states. But the higher ones among them point in directions to which the religious sentiments even of non-mystical men incline. They tell of the supremacy of the ideal, of vastness, of union, of safety, and of rest. They offer us hypotheses, hypotheses which we may voluntarily ignore, but which as thinkers we cannot possibly upset. The supernaturalism and optimism to which they would persuade us may, interpreted in one way or another, be after all the truest of insights into the meaning of this life. (James 1963, 428)

Wittgenstein is more interested in the rituals and symbols of religion than James (here he is closer to Rosemont) and like both James and Rosemont he gives a privileged place to religious thinking. For example, he found the philosophical games of rational argumentation for the existence of God to be little more than nonsense. Religious rituals are more akin to gesturing for him and these gestures have a singular primacy in their presencing of themselves. In other words, nothing else but the particular gesture works be-
cause it invokes a particular attitude, and this attitude is what makes any particular ritual religious. No substitutes are available. By extending this type of religious gesturing to social rituals, Rosemont, following Confucius, extends the scope of what it means to be religious and moves beyond Wittgenstein. Social attitude is religious attitude. There is no substitution for bowing, for example, unless you are in a hand-shaking cultural context.

So far, we have seen the resonance of Rosemont’s thinking with both James and Wittgenstein and where Rosemont’s religious appeal reverberates beyond both. But to get to the source of that experience that is self-authenticating and absolutely safe in Rosemont’s valuation of religious experience, it is requisite to go beyond his philosophical inclinations, temperament, and chosen methodology and enter into the subjective more fully for it is there that the at-one-ment of subjects presents itself as a community of intersubjectivity.

For phenomenological thinkers, religious experiences are especially important because they are concerned most specifically with the rudimentary structures of human consciousness and for some, the role of the unconscious. As suggested above, the *epoche* brings the subject into the moment of being as free as possible from unexamined prejudices, preconceptions, and presuppositions. This state will allow the subject his or her subjectivity in the most objective sense possible. In this originary state, the primary objective becomes the direct investigation of phenomena, that which presents itself, and allows a description of those phenomena as experienced. That description will be without theories about causal explanation, that is, without unexamined prejudices, preconceptions, and presuppositions. Further, it is in this particular originary state that one realizes his or her subjectivity is consonant with other subjects.

James only brings us to the point, without further analysis, of what constitutes the self-authenticating experience. Phenomenology, on the other hand, begins at this point. No scientific or philosophical conjectures are allowed at this moment. Such an analysis of the place of pre-reflection is absent in James, Wittgenstein, and Rosemont. This is what Heidegger refers to as meditative thinking. Meditative thinking is contrasted with calculative thinking. As Heidegger writes in his Memorial Address in *Discourse on Thinking*,

*Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative think-*
Meditative thinking, on the other hand, does not compute, does not analyze, and is free from metaphysical speculation, which is also what Rosemont, James, and Wittgenstein wish to free their philosophical projects from. This type of thinking for Heidegger seeks the horizons of meaning in this world, not the world of some other that seems to surface by offering some kind of a special place for religious experience as in James and Wittgenstein. For Heidegger, the issue is “keeping meditative thinking alive” because it is a matter of “saving man’s essential nature” (Heidegger 1977, 45). Meditative thinking releases us toward all things and creates an openness to mystery. For Heidegger, this is where “persistent, courageous thinking” begins (56).

Calculative thinking as Heidegger defines it is usually associated with scientific thinking. It is clear Heidegger criticized such thinking and had less enthusiasm for science than he did for art and poetry in thinking Being for “Art lets truth originate” (Heidegger 1971, 77) and the “Poets are the mortals who, singing earnestly of the wine-god, sense the trace of the fugitive gods, stay on the gods’ tracks, and so trace for their kindred mortals the way toward the turning” (94). To these fugitive gods I will return later.

In “Science and Reflection,” Heidegger has this to say about art and science:

As part of culture, we count science, together with its cultivation and organization. Thus science is ranked among the values which man prizes and toward which, and out of a variety of motives, directs his attention. But as long as we take science only in this cultural sense, we will never be able to gauge the scope of its essence. This is equally the case for art. . . . Regarded in terms of its essence, art is a consecration and a refuge in which the real bestows its long-hidden splendor upon man ever anew, that in such light he may see more purely and hear more clearly what addresses itself to his essence. (Heidegger 1977, 156)

This is the essence of art for Heidegger. The truth of art pertains to our essence, to human essence; art delivers the truth of our essence. Do Heidegger’s ideas about science apply to contemporary science?

In this same essay, Heidegger asks the following questions: “Is science, then, nothing but a fabrication of man that has been elevated to this dominance in such a way as to allow us to assume that one day it can also be demolished again by the will of man through the resolutions of commissions? Or does a greater destiny rule here? Is there, ruling in science, still
something other than a mere wanting to know on the part of man?” And he answers these questions with, “Thus it is, in fact. Something other reigns” (156). What reigns is a conception that “Science is the theory of the real” (157). In his analysis, Heidegger sees the failure of science because it can only understand the presencing of nature from its own perspective. In other words, human theorizing of the real will always be projective of categories of calculative thinking’s measurements. Although we may believe in the objectivity of science, Heidegger gives a turn to this thinking that we view the real from projected categories: “Because modern science as the theory of the real depends on the precedence that attaches us to its method, therefore it must, as securing of object-areas, delimit these areas over against one another and localize them, as thus delimited, within compartments, i.e. compartmentalize them. The theory of the real is necessarily departmentalized science” (170).

For Heidegger, we have moved from an understanding of the presencing of phenomena, the unconcealing of the truth of reality, to assuming falsely that we are standing upon something firm through the givenness of our categories of scientific understanding. However, has science not changed? Has science not become more akin to art and its truth that speaks to human essence? And does not this new science suggest the necessary presence of danger in order for the emergence of harmonious relations amongst humans and other species? The words, “chaos and complexity,” “mutualism and emergence,” “cooperation and fractal congruence” sound like esoteric philosophical abstractions with vaguely mathematical and scientific overtones. Yet these phenomena pervade our immediate world and, as far as we can see, extend throughout the entire universe. Although Darwin was perhaps blind to these concepts, contemporary science sees them shaping evolution in a variety of manifestations—physical, chemical, biological, and social—since the Big Bang event.¹

Heidegger cannot be faulted for his failure to imagine a scientific revolution that focuses on the self-organizing universe. Such an approach reveals the integrated properties and behaviors of the systems of nature, which is a way of knowing called holism. Holistic thinking opens a window on the universe that addresses the reductionism of “departmentalized science” of which Heidegger is concerned. Although Heidegger’s thinking is

¹ What follows in this discussion is from the Introduction and second chapter of my book in progress with John L. Culliney, The Fractal Self: Emergence and Intimacy in the Universe. Although written jointly, the more scientific prose is mostly attributable to my co-author, and adapted here for my purposes.
sympathetic to holism, he saw it as something extending beyond the limits of calculative thinking.

At the physical level, the strangely pregnant patterns and creative powers of the universe lie hidden in the seamless contours of fractal geometry, strange attractors, and the edge of chaos and are waiting in their potential states to come into the light of unconcealment. The cosmic origins as suggested by modern science were envisioned in holistic creation myths of various ancient peoples. After the world is created, some form of turbulence is needed in order to promote the potent emergence of the evolutionary process. In the mythic realm, trickster gods satisfy this need. Trickster gods have the ability and predisposition to move their mythic systems out of the mere frozen realm of creation. They create turbulence and move things into much more chaotic and creative patterns. Trickster gods are agents of emergence in nature by creating evolutionary changes. The Hawaiian god Maui and the Coyote of the Navaho are examples. Coyote inserts himself into the creation of the universe by pulling the blanket out from under the other gods who were creating a more static perfect universe; this universe would have been one of a safe and intelligible order. The “Holy People,” the deities, of the Navajo carefully place the sun and moon in the sky and as they were in the process of arranging the stars in their static orderly way, the impetuous trickster Coyote yanks their blanket from under them where the remaining celestial bodies lay and tosses them into the sky as we find them today.

The Hawaiian god Maui (who is also found throughout Oceania) is another trickster god whose devious actions move the world to the level of turbulence necessary for the creation of a novel, and often beneficial, state of affairs. Maui, the youngest and smartest of his siblings, possesses magical powers and has a rogue-like nature about him. Although not a good fisherman in comparison to his brothers who want nothing to do with him because he is so mischievous, Maui is ultimately able to hook the islands of the Hawaiian archipelago and bring them to the surface. As a demi-god, Maui is able to take advantage of situations in his quest to execute his schemes, which were often ultimately useful for humans. Being able to change himself into different animal forms, Maui’s protean like being is a forerunner to the shaman who will also be able to enter into various forms of animals. This power allows Maui not only to be adaptable, but also to affect opportunities for emergence such as when he lassoes the sun’s rays as the sun comes up over Haleakala, the House of the Sun. By harnessing the sun, Maui convinces the sun to slow down so crops can be planted and harvested. Hence, days in the summer are long, and in winter short allowing
for prosperous growing seasons. With this defiant act and the threat of retribution from the sun, a new beneficial order emerges.

It is not unusual that trickster gods such as Maui offer the gift of fire to humans. This gift almost always causes a tumultuous occasion for the other gods and goddesses as we see in Greek myth as well. Such occasions always seem to provide opportunities for evolutionary growth for humans. Hermes (Mercury for the Romans) who has the epitaphs of: the Contriver, the Wily, Shifty, and Many-Turning as well as the Bringer of Luck, Ready Helper, and the Keen-Sighted and Watchful one is another trickster god who makes things happen and, like Maui, sought the art of fire. He is said to be responsible for inventing fire sticks. As a youth, he brings the art of cooking to humans by stealing Apollo’s cows. Although a prankster, Hermes is loved by many of the gods for his beneficial deeds, which are also extended to the human realm.

But this account of the world, so valuable to human understanding, is born from his flair for transforming what might be chaotic events into meaningful change. Another epitaph of Hermes is that he is the “god of games and chance.” By creating opportunities for chance occurrences will position Hermes as an archetype for many of the Presocratic philosophers such as Herakleitos who states that a “Thunderbolt steers all things.” Such turbulent occasions for opportunistic subsequent developments find further expression in the ancient Greek god Dionysos. From these beginnings comes a revolutionary synthesis of nature and human nature.

The recent formulators of chaos and complexity theories have swept up and crystallized in computational and graphic terms the long and venerable, but chronically suppressed, tradition of thinking about origins, behavior, and evolution of the physical universe, life, and human society as just suggested. Inexorably, contemplation of the evolution of complexity turns to the mysterious principle of emergence. Scientifically elusive, but of immense philosophical interest, emergence is a non-Darwinian phenomenon that is increasingly recognized as operating at the heart of universal evolution. Emergence results in unpredictable and often powerful new properties or behaviors of systems of interconnected units such as atoms, polymers, cells, organisms, ecosystems, economies, societies, and so forth. For human beings, emergence has led to a critical juncture where, as organisms and societies, we have the power of choice—to resist nature. We can consciously oppose and destroy some of nature’s highest and rarest expressions, just as we find ourselves with nascent capabilities to guide evolution’s flow, or we can choose to participate creatively and mutualistically, from within, in the natural self-organization of the future. This I want to suggest
is what religious experience will look like in the future, and that this religious experience makes its home in the creative turbulence whose dangerous countenance must be affirmed as being necessary and essential.

All emergent phenomena develop and thrive under conditions scientists refer to as deterministic chaos—a kind of turbulence with hidden patterns and creative potential. Learning to cooperate, become closely aligned to or virtually congruent with this creative turbulence is to exercise the profound human potential to foster positive emergence in the service of creative complexity. Thus, we have reached a critical nexus in the process of universal evolution. We currently stand at a juncture where no being has stood before. Our world of complex economic, political, and ecological processes is inexorably interwoven in ways never imagined before. Developing sensitivity vis à vis the world, we have the potential for shaping future emergence where humans can realize the integration of animate and inanimate, mind and matter, spirit and flesh, self and other, that is, a naturally emergent vision for a burgeoning “ecology of hope.” Hence, the rationally religious experience should seek inclusive participation in nature, as a form of saving grace for our planet and our species. This holistic tendency then becomes not only a philosophical and scientific issue, but also a religious and spiritual posture that projects itself to a benign future.

The time is now ripe to take on this religious challenge that will especially require humanity to overcome its simplistic attraction toward fundamentalism of any sort. Fundamentalism cripples the religious self and the society in which it thrives by subjugating individuals to wholly artificial, authoritarian constraints, antithetical to the principles by which self-determining complex systems evolve in nature. Earliest human societies were not fundamentalist in outlook; they did not seek the refuge of safety, but embraced the potential of peril around them and learned to move with that very danger so omnipresent in the dynamic natural order of all that is. Fundamentalist societies are frozen realms that suppress innovation, invention, and entrepreneurship. Fractally open societies dwell in a kind of creative chaos (but not anarchy) for they encourage imagination and empower innovation and foster a rich spirituality with an outlook that portends significant participation in a future that opens to the world and its cosmos.

We are perhaps now able to bring the meditative and calculative thinking together and overcome the advantage Heidegger gave to the meditative. Borrowing freely from science, religion can now encounter a newly consilient and satisfying worldview that places humanity, once again, into the process of the becoming of the universe. To do this we must realize the at-
one-ment, the re-segmenting of atonement suggested by Rosemont, through our intersubjectivity.

But in the meantime, by returning to concrete lived experience through meditative thinking, the human experience is richer, more robust. It turns us continually to an originary intuition constitutive of our humanity that provides a conceptual clarification of the self-givenness of the insights of the intuitive experience, which is more akin to the projects of Chan and Zen than to Confucianism. As Heidegger suggests in his “Letter on Humanism,” “Thinking does not overcome metaphysics by climbing still higher, surmounting it, transcending it somehow or other; thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down to the nearness of the nearest. The descent, particularly where man has strayed into subjectivity, is more arduous and more dangerous than the ascent” (qtd. in Krell 1977, 231). As Nietzsche realized, the starting point of the life-world in the epoche, the world of throwing the ego away, is a world of mad men and women as well as saints, bodhisattvas, the junzi, and shengren.

Is this where Henry Rosemont, William James, and Ludwig Wittgenstein wish to go, into this danger net of safety? That is our question, for without this essential feature of danger, there is no dynamic system. There can be no trickster gods, shape-shifters, and self-shifters who flirt with chaos and dwell at the interface of the natural and supernatural worlds. There can be none of those demigods in place to set the universe and human world into progressive movement toward increasing levels of complexity; and there will no roles for these gods to shake up their mythic systems out of the initial frozen systems of mere creation. For such gods there will be no myths in which to live and without them there is no identification in the flowing continuum of qi, mana, or soul. As Nietzsche writes in his Birth of Tragedy, “Without myth every culture loses its healthy, creative, natural power” (qtd. in Parkes, 81). And myth is so often violent; its gods and goddesses take chances and add the element of turbulence, always potentially perilous, into the process.

This sensibility is close to Georges Bataille’s insight in Erotism: Death and Sensuality when he writes, “Transgression alone in spite of its dangerous nature had the power to open a door on to the sacred world” (Bataille, 122). Bataille is referring to pre-Christian religions in much the same vein as Rosemont’s reference to the cannibalistic transformation of bread and wine, of earth and grape, to body and blood of Jesus in Christianity’s modification of the Abrahamic God. As Bataille continues, “In the original world of transgression the impure was itself well-defined, with stable forms accentuated by traditional rites. What paganism regarded as unclean was automati-
cally regarded as sacred at the same time” (123). Where we might see Rosemont and Bataille coming together is in their concern with the Christian project, but Bataille wishes to affirm what Nietzsche called “making danger one’s vocation.” As Bataille writes, “Transgression in pre-Christian religions was relatively lawful; piety demanded it. Against transgression stood the taboo, but it could always be suspended as long as limits were observed. In the Christian world the taboo was absolute. Transgression would have made clear what Christianity concealed, that the sacred and the forbidden are one, that the sacred can be reached through the violence of broken taboo” (126). To transgress is to be holy; and through this act we are surrounded by the danger of our own human vulnerability in a world where our humanity is close to the animality of other species and sensed in our very own lives as we make our way into the heightened states of religious awareness and experience.

What our “pagan” forbearers understood, more profoundly than we do, is that the delineation between the sacred and profane is, to borrow a term from Thomas Kasulis, a holographic entry point to the divine itself. The religious question is ultimately an existential one. How can I, the community of subjects to which I belong, and the species from which I arise feel comfortable, safe, and flourish in the danger-net of life and still remain in life and advance its very nature?

Henry Rosemont’s life work has been devoted to changing the ordering of values to which everyone can subscribe. To achieve the maximization of the good ordering of values requires an openness to learn from, not only about, other cultures. In many ways, his project also deals with the overcoming of ego identity at both individual and collective levels. As openness increases, other cultures become less threatening. As other cultures become less threatening to us, we learn our limits of living in a world as a life-world from them. It is impossible to learn this from ourselves for we are subjugated to seeing through the lens of our own cultural context. It is impossible to learn this from ourselves since as historical beings, we are no longer at home in our own language and history of perilous myths, those various myths that are our precursors of science, and the brave new world we are creating. But Rosemont would add, and the last words are his, in the end, “meaning will very probably not be a godly or cosmic meaning, but a human one; which would not, however, be inconsequential, for human is what we are” (Rosemont, 93).
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Heart/Mind’s Purity vs. Utilitarianism: Ethics in Mencius, Wang Yang-ming, and Nishida Kitarô

William R. LaFleur

As a physician my father’s motto was
“medicine is the art of ren 医は仁術”

On Refusing a Heart

The topic of this essay has two sub-themes, on both of which Henry Rosemont has written with profound insight. In fact, Rosemont, more than any one else, has written with intelligence and passion about the interconnectedness of both themes. They are, first, the error we make when we do not pay close attention to East Asian philosophy and, second, the danger to civilization when we fail to take a critical stance vis-à-vis some of the American values implicit in the technologies that Americans deem so universally desirable that they should be thrust on other societies. I wish to excavate here what I take to be a central element in the resistance felt by many Japanese people to certain forms of biotechnology ordinarily acceptable to Americans. I will, in addition, maintain that at the base of that resistance lies a culturally-inscribed philosophical difference, one which we now can clearly identify.

It may be helpful to begin with something concrete — namely a Japanese woman’s articulation of a dilemma posed by the gap between moral values in her own society and the values implicit in a form of medical technology assumed to be an unambiguous “good” by many Americans. The woman to whom I refer appeared anonymously on a Japanese televi-

1 I am grateful to Henry Rosemont for inspiring, reading, and commenting on an earlier version of this essay. Professor Yuasa Yasuo, who some years ago urged me to look into the connections I explore here, died on November 9, 2005, while this was in press. My debts to this great and generous scholar go well beyond that suggestion and the citations from his work in what follows.
sion interview in November 1999. The interview came at a time when there was not yet any legal transplantation in Japan of organs from a “brain-dead” person. The Japanese public still had deep reservations about the morality of such a procedure, although the legal hurdles had been cleared by legislation in 1997 that recognized “brain death” as legal death. The woman in question, whom I will call “Ms. Sugita,” had been married for many years to a man whose heart had gotten so weak that early death from its failure had been diagnosed as virtually certain. However, through the auspices of his own cardiologist in Japan, Mr. Sugita had been promised access to a transplantable heart if a suitable organ were to become available on the American West Coast. Mr. Sugita, it was assumed, would travel there quickly enough to become its recipient and, through it, gain years of longer life.

During the protracted period of waiting for such a heart the morality of receiving the transplant had begun to bother the couple considerably. In their view what eventually became ethically unbearable was that this situation forced them into a mindset in which they found their own consciences becoming sullied with semi-murderous thoughts. Although they would never learn the name of the original owner of the potentially receivable heart and surely would not be physically instrumental in his or her death, the Sugitas found themselves constantly hoping that some American somewhere would have such a terrible accident that his or her salvageable heart would become available to benefit them. The extensive planning, their initial readiness to profit from another’s death, and the continued presence in their own minds of thoughts smacking of the homicidal—these things dirtied, at least to them, this whole plan. Fundamentally it had led to a change in their view of themselves as moral agents. Therefore, although they knew it would mean an earlier death for Mr. Sugita, they elected to cancel the whole arrangement. This for them was a matter of deepest moral concern, fundamentally a matter of conscience. In the end they declared a decision to keep a “good conscience” [literally 良心 ryōshin or “good heart/mind”] rather than barter that away for a “heart” that would be a physiological organ [心臓, shinzō].

Americans to whom I relate this episode tend to react in two ways. Some find it benignly “interesting,” a cultural curiosity or part of what makes the Japanese “different” from themselves. Others, however, find the attitudes and decision of the Sugitas downright incomprehensible, somewhat shocking, and perhaps even morally problematic. Persons in the latter category have typically responded, “Why would anyone not choose life when given the chance? Surely recipients of organs do not cause the deaths
that make those organs available. Why should or would they feel somehow implicated in that death? What a waste!”

I am fascinated by the gap here. Japanese persons with whom I have discussed the Sugitas’ decision readily understand their thinking, fundamentally agree that standing in queue to profit from the death of another raises ethical questions, and even find the Sugitas’ stance admirable, preferring personal death over a tainted conscience. Since, by comparison, most Americans see the sentiments of this Japanese couple as alien to their own sense of what constitutes matters of “conscience,” I wish to explore the hypothesis that what some might assume to be merely a “cultural” difference is deeply connected to certain divergent philosophical assumptions. Stated most sharply, I hold that the difference in moral judgment on practical issues is due in large part to the utilitarian ethics influencing contemporary American thinking about medical matters, where there remains in Japan a running critique and suspicion of utilitarianism in bioethics. Moreover, the Japanese resistance to both that philosophy and the “push” given it in internationalized bioethics arises, at least in part, out of the culturally-inscribed impact in Japan of Yômeigaku—that is, the philosophical perspective articulated by WANG Yang-ming 王陽明(1472-1529), a Chinese philosopher who, while not “orthodox” in the view of many Confucian, and Neo-Confucian thinkers, had a profound impact not only upon intellectual life in early modern Japan but articulated a viewpoint that resonated with certain existing values within Japanese society and gained an explicit and important place within the processes whereby Japanese philosophy itself became “modern.” In fact, it could be said that precisely because WANG Yang-ming’s way of thinking had such an important role in the “modernizing” of Japanese thought, it presents us with a lucid example of how modernization need not be uniform or even largely dictated by what it has meant in Europe and/or America.

Nishida on Utilitarianism

There is wide agreement, both within and outside of Japan, that Zen no kenkyû 善の研究, translated as “An Inquiry into the Good,” written and published by Nishida Kitarô 西田幾多郎 (1870-1945) in 1911, was the publication that convinced many young Japanese intellectuals that there could be an articulate and convincing “response” from within East Asia to the philosophies and ethics of Europe and America. And that work continued to have that impact. Although he read it years after it was published,
Kôsaka Masaaki (1900-1969) had a reaction that was not atypical. Reading only a portion of it, he was overcome with emotion—so much so that, he reports, tears ran down his cheeks (Kôsaka, 34).

To many Western readers of this work in translation, however, the reasons for Nishida’s contemporaries’ satisfaction with it are far from obvious. They see the work as replete with references to European writers but mentioning only a handful of Chinese and Japanese thinkers. Readers here, not without reason, will wonder why it is that so many in Japan viewed Zen no Kenkyû as such a tour de force, staking a strong claim for an “Eastern” point of view, one prepared at last to challenge what had seemed to them to be the hegemony of Western philosophy and ethics.

Until now the preferred way of addressing this problem, at least in the West, has been by pointing out the role of Zen meditation in Nishida’s religio-philosophical life, by calling attention to the book’s opening statement about the importance of “pure experience” 純粋経験, and by building in this way a case for seeing Zen no kenkyû as based in or on Zen and perhaps, therefore, grounded more in religious experience than in rigorous philosophical analysis.

I do not wish to deny that his meditations and his readings in Zen texts played a role in Nishida’s thinking. However, here I will approach this question from a different direction, initially by calling attention to certain implications of the work’s title, An Inquiry into the Good. A work so titled should, it would seem, have something to say about ethics as its primary goal. And, if that is so, we should also be able to detect in that work a response to the ethics and ethical systems commonly found in Europe and America. Although Nishida’s discussion of “pure experience” was extremely important, Michiko Yusa points out that Nishida’s own preference was against fore-fronting it in the book and he placed it at the beginning only on another’s urging (Yusa, 128).

Very few Chinese philosophers are mentioned in An Inquiry into the Good. There are two passing references to Confucius, a disapproving mention of Xunxi, and a longer, approving reference to WANG Yang-ming. The last of these might easily have been overlooked if it had not been for Takeuchi Yoshitomo, a student of Nishida, who in 1970 called attention to the fact that Japanese Sinologists, when reading Nishida, frequently noted that it was “like reading WANG Yang-ming” (Takeuchi, 241).2 Takeuchi, noting also the references to Yômeigaku—that is, the Japanese school of

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2 For notes on Takeuchi’s complex and changing relationship with Nishida, his mentor, see LaFleur 1993.
WANG Yang-ming studies—in Nishida’s diaries, pushed the study of Nishida in a new direction by claiming: “Although to-date the role of Yômeigaku in the shaping of Zen no kenkyû has been scarcely noticed, it in fact plays a huge role in the thought of Nishida” (241).

But also important, especially for the argument I am pursuing here, Takeuchi detected a specific linkage between Nishida’s attraction to this form of Chinese thought and what in Zen no kenkyû constitutes his strong criticism of the ethics of the utilitarianism (233ff). Moreover, because it seems likely that many of the younger intellectuals of Japan in the early 20th century had become aware of a basic incompatibility between the Yômeigaku component in their own thinking about ethics and the emphases within utilitarianism, this helps explain, I suggest, the extraordinary enthusiasm with which Nishida’s study was met. That is, the book’s readers were able to recognize that Nishida had skillfully redeployed WANG Yang-ming/Yômeigaku as a Sino-Japanese antidote to the philosophy of Bentham and Mill. And this applied especially in the domain of ethics, the prime topic of the work announced in its own title.

That utilitarianism had already had an impact in Japan is beyond doubt. In 1877 Nishi Amane (1829-1897), the figure who initially introduced many of the concepts and terms of Western philosophy to Japan, translated the 1861 work, Utilitarianism, by John Stuart Mill into pure kambun Japanese and titled it Rigaku 利学. In making this work available Nishi also gave it high praise and is described by Thomas Havens as having become a “thoroughgoing utilitarian” by the 1870s (Havens, 219).\(^3\) Utilitarianism was the adopted basis for the political philosophy articulated by Ono Azusa (1852-1886) and seems, at least until Nishida’s criticisms, to have found no one able to offset its appeal.

Nishida viewed Bentham rather than Mill as the more consistent of the utilitarians and he scored its ethics as nothing more than hedonism with a social dimension and, ultimately, a form of justified selfishness.\(^4\) Nishida argued that, since pleasure can in fact only be experienced by individuals and not by larger collectivities, as an “ethics” utilitarianism fails miserably because in the final analysis the appeal is one to the selfishness of the individual. Thus, the crux of Nishida’s argument is that Bentham and Mill not

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\(^3\) Later translators would render “utilitarianism” as kôrishugi, 功利主義 the name by which it remains known today in Japan.

\(^4\) For the text of Nishida’s treatment of utilitarianism, see Nishida 1911/1950, 167-75 and Nishida 1987, 115-21. Although it might be charged that Bentham was the easier target, the problems inherent in the utilitarians’ ethics were, at least in MacIntyre’s analysis, hardly solved by the adjustments attempted by Mill. See MacIntyre, 232-44.
only have no place for altruism in their ethics but cannot even account for the altruism that is demonstrably present in human behavior. In a claim that resonated well with WANG Yang-ming, Nishida noted: “Humans have an innate instinct of altruism” (Nishida 1987, 120).

What I select as having special importance, however, is what Nishida detected as the utilitarians’ appeal to quantitative assessments and to calculation in arriving at what might constitute “the good.” Bentham, he noted, had devised a method “to determine the value of conduct and pleasure quantitatively” and believed that “we can calculate pleasure according to such standards as intensity, duration, certainty, and uncertainty” (117).

Here, I suggest, is the nub of the difference between the consequentialism of this eminently Anglo-American mode of ethics and what Nishida elsewhere in his treatise praised as an ethics worthy of the name. For, especially to the Japanese who valued and interpreted WANG Yang-ming’s thought—that is, the adherents of Yōmeigaku and persons implicitly agreeing with them—the appeal in it appears to have included how it provided a basis for actions within which calculation had no part and was, in fact, not included under the rubric of principles and measures deemed truly “ethical.”

The Critique of Calculation

Here I am, of course, trying to see how certain Japanese thinkers saw themselves and the core questions of ethics in a Chinese mirror. And if there was, as I assume, a plurality of Chinese mirrors from which to choose, it seems clear that what they selected was that of WANG Yang-ming rather than ZHU Xi. For Japanese thinkers this was probably a circuitous way of tapping into the ethical stance of Mencius since, as TU Wei-ming shows, “the Mencian line of Confucianism, comes down through WANG Yang-ming rather than ZHU Xi” (quoted in Neville, 218) and Japanese thinkers, primarily because Mencius legitimated “dyaastic change,” tended to treat Mencius quite circumspectly. WANG Yang-ming, I suggest, offered them a way to take advantage of a Mencian animus against “moral judgments based on calculations of li (benefit 利)” and against “any notion of utility” (Ivanhoe, 9) without being forced to deal with the political ramifications of Mencius’ readiness to push the concept of “heaven’s mandate” to conclusions.
that would justify dynastic change, a ramification largely anathema within Japanese intellectual and political life.\(^5\)

Since it is outside the scope of this paper, I cannot here review the impressive body of scholarship on either WANG Yang-ming or Yômeigaku carried out by scholars writing in English.\(^5\) My focus will be on how ideas about the linkage between thought and action, about immediacy, and about giving priority to pure intention over calculation could, and did, eventuate in a thought-style in Japan that tended, at least at specific junctures, to regard utilitarian positions as unethical.

To state the obvious, calculation is a time-requiring procedure. Weighing, imagining, and evaluating possible or likely outcomes of an action, a \textit{sine qua non} for any consequentialist ethic, is itself an action, even if only mental, that is incompatible with value placed upon \textit{immediacy of response}. Mencius, of course, provided what came to be the classic example of immediacy as good in his depiction of the person who shows his true humanity by being immediately moved to compassion when seeing a child about to fall into an open well. He takes no time in showing that he knows “the good” and does not calculate his own advantage—by “getting in the good graces of the parents” or in order to “win the praises of his fellow villagers or friends” (\textit{Mencius}, 82).

There is wide agreement, furthermore, that when WANG Yang-ming recast the Mencian emphasis upon immediacy by teaching that knowledge and action are all of one piece and that there cannot be true knowledge without action, he was expressing a point of view with which Japan’s samurai/literati class would readily agree. It is also generally recognized that, although the samurai may have misused Yômeigaku to justify bellicose acts, there is nothing intrinsic to this philosophy that necessitates or even leads inevitably to such behavior.

We have clear examples within modern Japan of applications of Yômeigaku strongly present within a value system but not being pushed where certain samurai/literati pushed it. Yoshida Kôhei makes a strong case for recognizing not only that it was important in the thought of Japan’s most articulate modern Christian, Uchimura Kanzô (1861-1930) but also is crucial for an understanding of the ethical perspective in \textit{Kokoro}, the 1914 novel by Natsume Sôseki (1867-1916) that is widely regarded as the most

\(^5\) Ueda Akinari (1734-1809) either invented or repeated the legend that every ship carrying a copy of \textit{Mencius} from China to Japan had fortuitously sunk along the way! Ironically, this shows that he and others clearly knew what was contained in the book that putatively had never made the crossing successfully.

\(^6\) This would certainly include, in addition to sources cited here, Ching 1973; Minamoto 1997.
important work of fiction in modern Japan (Yoshida 2000). A sub-theme of that novel surely is how a Japanese man, sensitive to intellectual trends within “Westernization,” opts for the values within Yômeigaku.

The Innately Good Conscience

Both WANG Yang-ming and Nishida Kitarô can be read as shifting emphasis away from consequences, about which a given actor can only speculate, and towards intentions, which are, at least at the inception of an act, far more accessible to the actor willing to look at them with care. Nishida, it must be remembered, was calling attention to “right” or “pure” intention at a time when utilitarian ethics discounted intention’s importance altogether and placed all the emphasis upon the other end or ends of the act, namely, its consequences. This may be part of the reason why Nishida constructs his ethics the way his does. His opening chapter is titled “Pure Experience” and begins:

To experience means to know facts as they are, to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one’s own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by pure I am referring to the state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberate discrimination. (Nishida, 1987, 3)

While there now seems no doubt that Nishida’s own involvement in the practice of Zen meditation provided a concrete context in which he personally meditated/experimented to locate what “pure experience” might mean, critics of this err, I think, when they rush to conclude that what Nishida had in mind here was something “mystical” and, therefore, something we must disallow as meaningless. Robert H. Scharf, for instance, includes this move by Nishida in a critique of all religious experience and concludes:

The category experience is, in essence, a mere placeholder that entails a substantive if indeterminate terminus for the relentless deferral of meaning. And this is precisely what makes the term experience so amenable to ideological manipulation. (Scarf, 113)

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7 Nishida came to know the term “pure experience” via correspondence from Suzuki Da- isetz (1870-1966), who had been in the United States 1897-1908 and had taken it from the writings of William James. On the fascinating relationship between Nishida and (D.T.) Suzuki see now the excellent study by Michiko Yusa (Yusa, 1-4 and passim).
Henry Rosemont has taken issue with Scharf’s claim, pointing out that the latter’s refusal to see value in employing the term “experience” is not a conclusion we should feel forced to make (Rosemont, 97). To this I would add the following. Scharf seriously mistakes what Nishida writes about “pure experience,” taking it as a uniquely mystical experience, ultimately ineffable, and separable from moral actions. In fact, the opposite appears to have been Nishida’s point. A “relentless deferral” is, rather, characteristic of a utilitarian or consequentialist ethic because what tomorrow is anticipated to be the “good” consequence of what I do today may turn out later to have been only a temporary illusion, one crushed by an wholly unanticipated but “bad” consequence that showed up on the following day. Such deferral is, because the future itself is endlessly unsettled, necessarily end-less. Compared to such an ultimately indeterminable “consequence” of a given action, an actor’s own mind is far more immediate and knowable to him or her. Because he had no reason to dismiss introspection as valueless, Nishida knew that it is far easier for me to know whether or not my mind, my intentions, and thus my “experience” are pure than for me to have any knowledge whatsoever of events and eventualities still wholly in the future and, to that extent, not yet even part of this world.8 Yuasa Yasuo reiterates the close nexus between “pure experience” and an ethical viewpoint as follows:

The core of Yômeigaku is found in two key terms: hsin chi li 心即理 [heart/mind is principle] and chih-liang-chih 致良知 [innate knowledge extended]. If we compare Nishida to them, it appears that his theory of “pure experience” corresponds to the former and his theory of “good conscience” matches the latter. And when we put these within the context of Western philosophy, the former is Nishida’s epistemology, whereas the latter is his ethics. His concept of “pure experience” had a basis in Nishida’s practice of Zen meditation. But, as we know, WANG Yang-ming did meditation in Zen too in his youth and, therefore, we may expect to find correspondence between philosophy and Zen here. (Yuasa 1981, 361) 9

While in no way wanting to dilute the strong nexus between the epistemological dimension of “pure experience” and the ethics of “good conscience,” I will try to flesh out the specificity of the latter. I will examine

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8 May we not say that underlying their respective attempts to account for what they call “moral luck,” Thomas Nagel and Bernard Williams show the implicit collapse of what had once been the consequentialists’ confidence that outcomes could be known and controlled?

9 On the dramatic change in WANG Yang-ming’s life brought about by his meditation at Lung-ch’ang in 1508 see Tu 1976, 118ff.
two sections, one in which Nishida directly discusses WANG Yang-ming
and another that implicitly targets utilitarianism or, more exactly, it as a va-
riety of what we now embrace within the term “consequentialism.”

In a discussion of the will Nishida writes:

... as in WANG Yang-ming’s emphasis on the identity of knowledge
and action, true knowledge is always accompanied by the performance
of the will.

To think in a certain way but not to desire in the same way
means that one does not yet truly know. (Nishida 1911/1950, 132 and
1987, 90-91)

Nishida refers there to “the identity of knowledge and action” 知行同一,
chikô dôitsu). Yuasa explains that this is Nishida’s explicit appeal to the
concept of hsin chi li (shin soku ri) 心即理, a term used in Yômeigaku and
notes that, although there may be a difference between the meaning if hsin
in WANG Yang-ming’s thought and the terms used by Nishida, it was not
so much the case that Nishida was putting Wang into modern Japanese phi-
losophy as it was that he was giving expression to something already in it
throughout—namely, that understandings of “the good” were informed by
the notion of “knowledge of the good in extension” chih-liang-chih
(chiryôchi) 致良知, the core doctrine of WANG Yang-ming noted above

Accordingly, at this point recognizing that the root of this perspec-
tive lies in Mencius becomes important. Yuasa notes that Mencius’ prioritiz-
ing of 惲隱, to-yin/sokuin or “compassion” over 是非, shih-fei / zehi or
“[discriminating] right from wrong”, is of crucial importance. Yuasa too
calls attention to Mencius’ reference to the adult whose “compassion” for
the endangered child “rises spontaneously, being a heart/mind that empa-
thizes with the plight of another” (Yuasa 1981, 365).

Mencius famously held that the human mind/heart and, therefore,
human nature, are fundamentally “good” 良 and the combination of these
two terms—i.e. good mind/heart—is what functions in both Nishida and
modern, colloquial Japanese to denote what we call “conscience.” However,
Yuasa notes, while the Sino-Japanese phrase links “conscience” automat-
ically to what is “good,” the English word “conscience” and the German
word “Gewissen” are value-neutral, needing still to be modified by adjectives
describing them as either “good” or “bad.” He goes on to note that as a
word “conscience” has affinity with “consciousness” and both seem sepa-
rated from “the good,” still seeming to stand in need of processes of delibera-
tion and evaluation before a clear consciousness or a good conscience can be
attained. By contrast, the trajectory running from Mencius, via WANG Yang-ming, and into the philosophy of Nishida recognizes the good as intrinsic in the mind/heart. This viewpoint naturally regards deliberative and evaluative process not only a road that will never reach the good but even one that deflects and enervates.

In the second half of *An Inquiry into the Good* Nishida presents and evaluates various theories of ethics before presenting the view of which he himself approves, a view he articulates in a chapter titled “The Good: (A Theory of Activity)” 善 (活動論) Zen (katsudō-ron). The emphases of this chapter are on “the good as articulated from the internal demands of consciousness, not from without;” on avoiding heteronymous ethics; on the will as “the fundamental unifying activity of consciousness;” on accepting pleasure but at the same time recognizing that (via a citation from Confucius) “depending the circumstances, we are able to maintain happiness even in the midst of pain;” and “that to see the good and to return to it is to know the true reality of the self” (Nishida 1911/1950, 176-82 and 1987, 122-26).

What unifies these terms is their insistence on a tight unity between the good located in the mind/heart and how the will, located there, actuates a deed that is fundamentally all-of-a-piece with the mind/heart. The causurae, both temporal and logical, required for deliberation, are inappropriate, even damaging, to the act expressive of the goodness of the mind/heart. And the result of such immediacy, as Yuasa explicates the matter, is a gain in “life’s capacity.” Because this point is crucial for the following discussion, Yuasa’s statement deserves translation here. Concerning the nexus between WANG Yang-ming and Nishida, he writes:

In WANG Yang-ming’s philosophy what turns the “good knowledge/good conscience” 良知 into action is referred to as “what is without a stop” or “what spontaneously goes on full of life and without stopping.” It is explained as overflowing with an active life-force. In a word, we might be able to say that our good conscience is that which, inherent at the base of what we are as human beings, is expressive of a force of life. (Yuasa 1981, 372)

In what follows I will try to show the relationship among this understanding of the “force of life,” Nishida’s dissatisfaction with utilitarianism, and a specific understanding of a “good conscience” that we find in

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10 I have changed only the chapter subtitle, preferring “A Theory of Activity” to the term “Energetism” used by Abe and Ives.
contemporary Japan—for instance, in the case of the Sugitas’ refusal of a transplant.

The second section of An Inquiry into the Good which is helpful in understanding what Nishida meant by a “good conscience” is one entitled “Perfect Good Conduct 完善なる善行.” Although not mentioned specifically, consequentialism is probably being discussed in the following:

In considering how the fact of the good and the demands of the good might conflict... one [type] is when a certain conduct is good in actuality but its motive is not good, and the other is when the motive is good but the conduct is not. In the first case, if an internal motive is selfish while the external conduct in actuality accords with a good goal, then the conduct falls short of good conduct that takes the actualization of humanness as its goal. We might praise such conduct, but at such a time we are viewing it not in terms of morality but simply in terms of benefit. From the perspective of morality, this conduct is inferior to that of someone who, no matter how foolish he or she might be, has demonstrated the utmost sincerity. (Nishida 1987, 143-44) 11

Eminently clear from this is that Nishida disapproves of “viewing [conduct] not in terms of morality but simply in terms of benefit (rieki 利益).” In other words, anticipated or projected benefit has nothing to do with morality (dōtoku 道徳). This is so, Nishida continues, even if the benefit is not accrued by a sole individual but is helpful to many. Expanding the number of the recipients, a quantitative change, does not fundamentally alter things because “...if conduct is not good conduct internally, then it is merely a means to promote good conduct rather than good conduct itself.” (144).

How shall we understand what Nishida means here by “good conduct internally” 内面的に真の善行? The contrast, I suggest, is not between what is inner and what is outer. Rather, if I may change the terms slightly, the difference is between a) the “heart/mind actuated” without caesura and b) a mind that is separated, via what it takes to engage in calculations (of benefits), from a subsequent and necessarily disconnected act or action. 12 If what is truly moral is already a lost cause as soon as someone enters into processes of discrimination, analysis, and calculation, the quantitative expansion of the number of benefactors of a projected action can change its ethical character in no way whatsoever. Once the calculations begin the

11 I have rendered the term jinkaku 人格 as “humanness” rather than “personality.”
12 A common term for this in Zen-influenced texts is shiryo bunbetsu 思慮分別, separating a thought from anticipations and/or anxieties consequent to that thought.
good mind/heart, which certainly and intrinsically had been present at the outset, is already out of the picture. To get back to it, consequently, would be not only to return to the only locus of “the good” in ethics but also to return to “pure experience,” a category within epistemology.

**Measuring the Gap**

It would, I suggest, be difficult to find a form of philosophical ethics more at odds with Nishida’s viewpoint than that of utilitarianism. Not only is the reliance upon *calculation* a central tenet of utilitarianism, but also, especially after the seventeenth century, the quantification of all things moved from the physical sciences into philosophy and became an explicit part of public arguments for utilitarianism’s superiority as a mode of ethical reasoning. Aiming at providing “the greatest good for the greatest number” is a pithy but not inaccurate way of summarizing how a utilitarian conceives both the ends and means of ethics. Also noteworthy, I think, is the degree to which an unusually accurate description of Japanese society by an anthropologist shows the link between philosophical options discussed above and a particular cultural pattern. Takie Lebra writes:

> The exaltation of *junjô* [pure emotions] 純情 relates to the moral significance of inner purity. [In Japanese society] the pure self is identified, morally, as sincere, selfless, altruistic, while the impure self is identified with calculation and the pursuit of self-interest. Lacking a dogma to serve as the ultimate value standard, the Japanese make moral judgments in accordance with the presence or absence of such pure, sincere motives. (Lebra, 162)

Although Anglo-American philosophers such as John Rawls and Bernard Williams criticized utilitarianism, among thinkers specifically concerned with medicine and bioethics, utilitarianism retains its appeal and has avowed advocates such as Peter Singer. This may be in large part because in the administration of medical care and therapies, a concern for numbers—of the recipients of therapies, of the time of health-care professionals, of pharmaceuticals and biotechnologies, and especially of the funds to pay for all of these—is extremely important. If utilitarianism was itself a reflection of the growing quantification of life within modernity, it also seems true that its promotion as an especially “modern” form of ethics gave increased
quantification the aura of being an intrinsic part of mankind’s moral development.

Martin Pernick shows how this came about. A “cost-benefit” analysis in public policy constituted a “major revolution” and “reflected a utilitarian philosophy, a social moderation, and a numerical frame of mind, none of which was prominent in American medicine prior to the 1830s” (Pernick, 108).

Japan’s bioethicists, by comparison, are generally more cautious than their American counterparts in turning to risk/benefit calculation as the way to solve ethical problems that surface in medical research and the provision of medical care. Among the major Japanese figures in this sub-discipline there is, to my knowledge, not only no avowed utilitarian such as Peter Singer but also a fairly pervasive skepticism about utilitarian ethics as being genuinely ethical.

Moreover, inasmuch as the development of techniques for recycling the organs of “brain-dead” people constitutes a Benthamian preoccupation with avoiding “waste,” the fact that many, perhaps even a majority, of Japan’s bioethicists either disapprove of or, at least, withhold approval of cadaveric (as opposed to live) organ transplantation probably reflects a readiness not to base ethics on a calculation of possible outcomes.

After having looked carefully at Nishida, we return to the case of Mr. and Mrs. Sugita, who prefer a return to an unsullied or “pure conscience” even over what would in our society be rather automatically considered an unambiguous “good”—namely the extension of life. To judge this, as some may do, as choosing “death” over “life,” falsifies the options. If, as Yuasa notes, in WANG Yang-ming and in Nishida something identifiable as an active “life-force” is enhanced when “good knowledge” 良知 or “good conscience” 良心 is present, then our concern for “quality of life” as opposed to mere “quantity of life” is not merely a matter of preferring a comfortable dying to a chronological extension of days but, even more basically, one of preferring the purification of experience and intentionality above all else. This, I suggest, is what we see in the Sugitas’ decision.

How long is the reach of Mencius, WANG Yang-ming, and Nishida into contemporary Japanese society generally and bioethics in particular? I have only been able to suggest it may be far longer than we might have thought. But I conclude with another specific instance—that of Doi Kenji, a Japanese scholar who as a Christian discusses bioethical matters.

Doi’s expertise is in the study of the New Testament and the early Church “Fathers.” Writing about organ transplantation, he objects to the way many ethicists in the West, including many appealing to the Bible
and/or Christian values, make a simplistic jump from the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” in the Gospels to the surgical suite in which organs from someone putatively “dead” are to be transferred into someone else. Doi argues that the immediacy and spontaneity of the Samaritan’s good action are no longer present and ethically at work when a complex set of calculations, intervening agencies, and types of interestedness and profit have become necessary parts of a technological and social practice such as organ transplantation. Thus, he does not see how such a practice can be justified as expressive of a distinctively Christian ethic.\(^\text{13}\) While I see no overt reference to Mencius, WANG Yang-ming, or Nishida Kitarō in the work of Professor Doi, it is not improbable that he has reclaimed something of the meaning of the parable of the Good Samaritan by seeing in it the importance of a “good conscience.” Or perhaps this is recapturing what was referred to in the Sermon on the Mount as the blessedness of the “pure in heart.”

My suggestion is that Doi as a scholar-ethicist and the Sugitas as ordinary people trying to enhance life by reclaiming a conscience they experience as “good” are representatives of a very positive development in the exchange between East Asia and “the West.” They are rebuffing the intellectual colonialism that often rides along implicitly in what is loosely called the “globalization” of bioethics. And, as such, they are moving us a step closer towards the abandonment of what Henry Rosemont has wisely scored as the West’s reprehensible habit of engaging in “moral imperialism” (Rosemont, 2001, 30).

REFERENCES


\(^{13}\) See LaFleur 2002 concerning Joseph Fletcher, who as an American theologian/bioethicist first wanted to fuse Christian and utilitarian ethics in order to justify a rational control over reproduction (i.e. eugenics) but subsequently abandoned the “Christian” component in this mixture.


Mencius on Pleasure

Michael Nylan, with Harrison Huang

“It isn’t action but pleasure which binds one to existence.”
— Adam Dalgleish (James 1993, 101)

At least since the beginning of the third century CE, all readers of the Chinese classic, the *Mencius*, have approached its sophisticated philosophical arguments through chapter one, which is devoted to the topic of pleasure. As argued below, Mencius (act. 320 BCE), who claims to be not “fond of disputation” (i.e., rhetorical argument), makes a single, if complex argument in the writings attributed to him, and that argument is about pleasure. Yet modern studies of the *Mencius* rarely, if ever allude to the topics of pleasure and desire, probably because the Four Books have been read in light of the changing preoccupations of Anglo-European philosophy and religion since the days of Matteo Ricci in the early seventeenth century. Therefore, this essay intends to restore to this important classic the integrity of its original approach, recasting Mencius’ discussions of value as neither disembodied, rational, abstract formulations of bloodless virtues nor de-natured accounts of human nature, but rather earned, self-aware, and ultimately humane calculations presuming bodies and hearts that are both full of desire and responding at an unusual level of passion. This reading of the *Mencius*, which “returns to the basics,” develops a familiar line of thought found in the *Analects*, whereby “taking pleasure in Heaven” and in fellow feeling consti-

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1 The standard text of the *Mencius* dates to the time of ZHAO Qi (d. 201), the commentator. For further information, see Loewe (1993, 331-36). See also *Mencius* 3B:9. Translations are based on those of D. C. Lau for Penguin, but modified where appropriate.

2 Matteo Ricci was the earliest translator into a Western language of the Four Books, the corpus that includes the *Mencius*. For further information, see Mungello (252-272). Undoubtedly, the most sophisticated analysis of the *Mencius* is that by Shun (1997) which never mentions the topics of pleasure or desire, though these figure in every single book of the *Mencius*. Readers are advised to consult Riegel (1997), which should be credited with introducing the topic of pleasure to the early China field.
tutes the whole of doing good, which itself represents the best kind of human knowing.\(^3\)

In contrast to the Socratic dialogues, which continually ask, “What is \(X\)?”, dialogues in the *Mencius* nearly always begin or end with the questions “What do you like?” “What do you want?” Evidently Mencius does not feel the need to establish definitions agreeable to all parties. Instead, Mencius’ conversations attempt to help the listener/reader ascertain the true relation of ordinary desires to more civilized desires for the good; drawing out his partners in dialogue so that they identify their own needs and predilections as the first step toward accepting the needs and desires of others. In Mencius’ telling, the ordinary desires experienced by every human being, desires for food, sex, music, companionship, security, and respect, are the key resources that can be transmuted or redirected – *if* the person’s whole being has been sufficiently aroused – into the single overpowering desire for cultivation and integrity.\(^4\) Accordingly, Mencius does not seek to contain the desires of the powerful, even when convention casts those desires as flaws, faults, weaknesses, and shortcomings (*ji* 疾). The desire to be exalted is shared by all human beings, and that specific desire becomes the chief motivation for moral action, so long as the person believes the self to be capable of acting morally. Mencius puts it this way: “All people share the same desire to be exalted, and every person has within the self, as a matter of fact, that which is exalted. The fact has simply never dawned on the person” (*Mencius* 6A:17). The desire to be exalted is to be held in high regard in one’s own estimation and in that of others. The inherent nobility of the person aiming to do good – the quality that is “exalted within” – lends dignity to even the simplest and most unconscious of the social gestures. And where a ruler seems unaware of his potential to tap this sort of authority, he must be given better teachers (*Mencius* 6A:9).\(^5\) As Mencius bluntly puts it, “It is not worth the trouble to talk to a man who has no respect for himself . . . or confidence in himself . . . .” (*Mencius* 4A:1).

Mencius’ fundamental aim is to encourage the rulers with whom he converses to recognize the essential humanity inherent in all their desires,

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\(^3\) For the *Analects* citations, and the historical background to the pleasure discourse described here, see Nylan 2003.

\(^4\) The most important passage on prioritizing the desires is perhaps *Mencius* 6A:10.

\(^5\) This tactic works, as ibid. says, because “if one does not give one’s whole mind to it, one will never master it.” Conversely, if one devotes one’s whole effort to something, one will master it. But see also: “The trouble with people is that they are far too eager to assume the role of teacher.”
then “push” (tui) or “enlarge” (da) them to the fullest extent possible.\(^6\) Enlargement comes simply through crediting other humans with having the same human desires as oneself and then acting in a way that allows others to satisfy their desires.\(^7\) Through the acknowledgment of the importance of desires in humans, the person comes to accept responsibility for human failings (Mencius 4B:19 and 2B:4). Through the same acknowledgment, the person also finds a way to return to the self’s true home, peaceful abode, and proper path (Mencius 4A:10). By Mencian logic, then, ardent longing – longing sufficient to sustain a serious commitment over time – becomes the single, broad path open to humans who strive for the same sense of the wholeness that the natural order (“heaven”) experiences effortlessly. “Wholeness is the way of heaven, and longing for that integrity is the way of human beings” (Mencius 4A:12).\(^8\)

There is strikingly little carping in Mencius’ dialogues, and even less of the standard moralizing talk about curbing the desires and abstaining from pleasures. Wisely, Mencius recognizes that, “You can never succeed in winning people’s allegiance by trying to conquer them with goodness” (Mencius 4B:16). Mencius believes his main job to be to “get the cruel man to listen to reason,” to realize that foolishly “he dwells happily [because he dwells unconsciously] amongst dangers” (Mencius 4A:8). He knows also that he is not able to accomplish this task, in all likelihood, if he continually confronts others with their faults.

Every important part of Mencius’ arguments on pleasure and desire is laid out in Book I of his collected writings, though no recent account of the Mencius, so far as we know, deigns even to consider the contents of that chapter. For that reason, this essay will go through, one by one, the arguments laid out there, before proceeding to analyze the relation between Book I and the rest of the writings attributed to Mencius. If we take pleas-

\(^6\) For one example of such an argument, see Mencius 1A:7: “The ancients greatly surpassed others in no other respect but being good at extending (tui) the rationale for what they do.” Cf. 1B:3. For a discussion of the original provenance of tui as a concept in Mohist logic, see: Nivison, 40-41, 96-101.

\(^7\) Once the fact of human dignity has “dawned on the person,” the person no longer “envies other people’s enjoyment of fine food. . . or fineries.” See Mencius 6A:17.

\(^8\) As acknowledged above, Lau’s translation (1970) remains the standard in the field, even though Lau’s analysis of Mencius’ arguments needs amplification and emendation. Mencius is not a second-rate debater, aiming for “rigorous” propositional analysis. That explains why he is far more persuasive than Lau – or Waley before him – cares to acknowledge. The views of Henry (2004) have inspired these translation efforts. Henry argues that ren and zhi (“knowing”), are often nearly identical in meaning, in that they refer to the ability to extrapolate from “what is near at hand” (the self) to “what is far away” (others).
ure to be the starting point for Mencius, the adoption in Book I of the dialogue genre is hardly coincidental, since the dialogue is the genre best suited for eliciting and directing the focus of particular individuals to specific views and desires. Moreover, the ruler provides the perfect example of how a person’s pleasure-seeking figures into his choices, since the ruler’s actions are unlikely to be constrained by others, and the ruler has within his grasp a seemingly infinite array of pleasures, as well as the power to dictate how others enjoy themselves. By educating rulers, Mencius educates all. Still, if we begin at the beginning, we see that the opening passage of the Mencius appears to have nothing at all to say about pleasure, aside from the conventional pleasantry that King Hui of Liang employs to express his delight that Mencius has troubled to pay a visit to his kingdom. The king inquires, most politely, what Mencius would have him do to profit his realm. Quite irrationally, it seems at first reading, Mencius launches into a tirade, protesting that the king should set an example for his people. If he asks, “How I can profit my realm?” his subjects will soon start asking how they can profit themselves, and before long regicides will be committed. For, Mencius reasons, “If profit is put before rightness, there is no [logical] satisfaction [to his subjects’ desire for ultimate profit] short of total usurpation [since the ruler’s expression of his desires famously influences his subjects’ formation of their desires]. . . . All that matters is that there should be benevolence and rightness. What is the point of mentioning profit?” (Mencius 1A:1)

Mencius’ critics have had a field day with this passage. Since “profit” (利) in classical Chinese, as in modern English, means “benefit,” Mencius’ argument is criticized as weak, if not downright puerile. The critics have missed Mencius’ point entirely. Mencius knows precisely what he is doing. As he remarks elsewhere, “Those who are in the service of princes today all say that they are able to extend the territory of their princes and fill their coffers for them, but the [conventionally] ‘good subject’ of today would have been regarded as a real pest by the people in antiquity” (Mencius 6B:8), given the aggression inherent in such claims. What is peculiar about human beings’ assessment of human worth is that they seldom think about what is needed to nurture life, despite the seminal importance of this subject to every single person (Mencius 6A:13). Mencius’ first dialogue intends,

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9 As the dialogues in Book I are not between teacher (superior) and student (inferior), as those in the Analects, but between adviser/entertainer and ruler/patron, the success of the dialogic relationship rests on the interlocutor-ruler feeling that he gains from the exchange. Book I is also remarkable for its false starts, that is, what Mencius refuses to talk about despite his patron/ruler’s request. E.g., see 1A:7.
therefore, to plunge the listener/reader immediately into the heart of the problem, and the reader, naturally enough, reacts much as King Hui must have done— with utter shock at the pedantic quality of the thinker's lecture. Nevertheless, Mencius in one short dialogue has accomplished quite a lot. He has forced a change of topic from talk of profit (i.e., whatever is assumed to nurture our ambitions) to the serious consideration of several moral topics needing further explication: topics such as the feasibility of limits on our actions, the urgency of our desires and those of others, and the real dangers— moral and physical— attendant upon entertaining desires in ourselves that we forbid to others. Suddenly there looms the specter of injustice, retribution, and societal chaos unleashed by “treat[ing] people like horses and hounds”— or worse (Mencius 5A:6). Mencius has also, unobtrusively if crucially, forged a common identity among the reader/listener, the omniscient recorder/spectator of Mencius’ dialogues, and Mencius’ interlocutors themselves, blurring time, space, and character.

As such topics can only be usefully considered through a pleasure discourse, the next reported interview finds the thinker again in the company of King Hui of Liang, who is idly taking in the view in his pleasure park. The park setting is important, not only because parks provide the setting for pleasurable outings and feasts, but also because they represent such desirable commodities as high status and immense wealth. The king wonders if a man of true goodness and wisdom would ever deign to feel the ordinary sort of enjoyment that he feels— we would call it “pride of possession”— when he views his well-stocked parks and ponds (Mencius 1A:2). By implication, the king does not consider himself to be a good and wise man, since his thoughts are not particularly elevated. Mencius hastens to correct the king. “Only if a man is good and wise will he be able to enjoy” sights such as these, he insists. Immorality precludes true enjoyment, Mencius says, for true enjoyment comes only when the person shares pleasures with others. When the best of rulers, King Wen of Zhou, had a vast Magical Park and Terrace and Pond built by the people, they were “finished in no time,” by the Odes report, precisely because the vistas were open to all his subjects. According to the Odes (Mao 242), the people completed the park and terrace “in no time.” They did not find the work of building the park and terrace burdensome, since they afterwards gained access to the fabulous structures and the creatures inhabiting the area. The ode is cited by Mencius

Note also that the Mencius provides a very clear portrayal of King Hui of Liang’s stunning lack of virtue in Mencius 7B:1.

In the theoretical literature, this feat might be compared to “enactment.” For further information, see Branigan, 73 and Flittermjan-Lewis, 13.
because it confirms his view: as long as public works like these are shared, then the ruler is the ultimate source of the people's enjoyment of these projects. “King Wen received the mandate and the people took pleasure in his possession of magical virtue.”12 With past paragons like King Wen in mind, Mencius remarks to King Hui of Liang, “It was by sharing their enjoyments with the people that the men of antiquity were able to enjoy themselves;” knowing full well that they could never really have enjoyed their perquisites “all by themselves,” the most excellent kings of yore through various boons, grants, and concessions secured the people’s loyalty, unified the realm, and prevented the inevitable harms that attend social isolation. Mencius leaves the king to wonder, “If such large and costly projects, usually regarded as the probable causes of the ruler’s downfall, serve instead to strengthen the state, what pleasures cannot usefully be shared?”

In the next exchange, therefore, King Hui of Liang turns to consider a resource that is strictly limited, stocks of grain. The grain that feeds one is taken from another. The king complains that he has been willing enough to move his farmer-subjects at great expense from one district to another, as natural disasters necessitated, so that they get enough to eat, and still he is not widely regarded as a model ruler. Why not? Mencius observes, “Your majesty is fond of war,” beginning once again with the ruler’s likes and dislikes. Borrowing an analogy from war, a subject which he knows to be of absorbing interest to the king, Mencius tartly asks whether those who retreat a mere fifty paces on the battlefield can justly mock those who had fled a hundred paces. The unspoken implication: that the king himself has been undertaking half measures. In the realm, consequently, “food meant for human beings is . . . thrown to dogs and pigs while people drop dead from starvation by the wayside.” The king does not know how to properly employ the resources at his command. “There is fat meat in your kitchen and there are well-fed horses in your stables, yet people look hungry and in the outskirts of cities people drop dead from starvation. This is to show animals the way to devour humans” (Mencius 1A:4, cf. 3B:9).

Mencius then imagines a better way for the ruler to manage his resources:

If you do not interfere with the busy seasons in the fields, then there will be more grain than the people can eat. If you do not allow nets with too fine a mesh to be used in large ponds, then there will be more fish

12 Here, the Mao preface reads the ode’s “magical terrace” (ling tai) as King Wen’s “magical virtue” (ling de). In effect, the people take pleasure (le) in the terrace because they take pleasure in the king’s virtue.
and turtles than they can eat. If hatchets and axes are permitted in the hill forests only in the proper seasons, then there will be more timber than they can use. When the people have more grain, more fish and turtles than they can eat, and more timber than they can use, . . . then those who are fifty can wear silk, . . . those who are seventy can eat meat; . . . and families with several mouths to feed will not go hungry. . . . When those who are seventy wear silk and eat meat and the masses are neither cold nor hungry, it is impossible for their prince not to be a true King. 

(\textit{Mencius} 1A:3)\textsuperscript{13}

“Who among us does not want wealth and rank” (\textit{Mencius} 2B:10) or the benefits they bestow? By careful planning and provisioning, the lucky subjects of the true king may come to know, at least in their declining years, luxuries fit for a king: there will be silk to wear and meat and fish to eat before a warming fire. The people will finally know what it is to be satisfied, and in their gratitude, they will support the king, so that he may have his way as well. If the ruler fails to provide the opportunities that allow his people to savor the creature comforts he values so much, how can such a king dare to call himself “father and mother of the people?”

The king does not answer. Instead, the king unburdens himself of his great sorrows. His realm has met defeat in the east, the west, and the south; his eldest son has perished while on campaign. All he wishes in his old age is to wash away the shame, but how can he possibly accomplish this enormous task within the short span of his remaining years? Mencius replies that the king’s territory, while small, is “sufficient to enable its ruler to become a true King.” The king need only practice benevolent government, reducing punishments and taxes and teaching the people to get the most out of their lands and their families, and Liang can yet be victorious. “For in a world where the king’s rivals ‘push their people into pits,’ the benevolent man has no real peer” (\textit{Mencius} 1A:5). The people are like rice sprouts. If they are to grow sturdy, they require sufficient moisture, where moisture is a metaphor for the king’s civilizing influence, his boons, and his favors. If the people get what they need – and they are satisfied with little enough – the people will turn to the ruler “like water flowing downwards.” “Who can stop them” from doing so? (\textit{Mencius} 1A:6) There is silence.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Mencius} 2B:7 and 3A:5 consider the satisfactions of burying the beloved dead well. This focus on burying the dead as one of the most basic human desires is understandable in a culture where death has not been sanitized and kept from sight.

\textsuperscript{14} At the same time, Mencius would sharply distinguish his principle of “sharing one’s pleasures” from trying to please everyone: “If a person in authority has to please every one separately, he will not find the day long enough” (\textit{Mencius} 4B:2).
The scene shifts abruptly to the court of King Xuan of Qi, who asks Mencius to describe the heyday of his country, under the hegemon Duke Huan (r. 685-43 BC). Mencius refuses to discuss the proposed topic. “None of the followers of Confucius spoke of the history of the hegemons. . . . I have no knowledge of them. If you insist [on my speaking], perhaps I may be permitted to tell you about becoming a true king.” King Xuan asks, rather anxiously, “How virtuous must a man be before he can become a true king?” Mencius replies that anyone who can bring peace to the people is a true king; King Xuan has all the necessary qualifications. King Xuan wonders how Mencius can be so sure. Mencius says that he has heard at court that the king, having caught sight of a sacrificial ox in his halls, ordered the ox to be spared, saying, “I cannot bear to see it shrinking with fear, like an innocent man going to the place of execution. . . . Use a sheep instead.” On the basis of this story, Mencius concludes that the king has the heart of compassion that is the precondition for becoming a true king; he is not complacent in the face of suffering. The King, in response, remarks: “I looked into my heart and I failed to understand it [my motivation in this incident]. Your description of it has struck a chord in me, however. What makes you think that my heart really accords with the Way of the True King?” insists that the King need only extend to his own people the feelings of compassion he once felt for the ox, and quit confusing a refusal to act on the people’s behalf with an inability to act.

Treat the aged of your own family in a manner befitting their venerable age and extend this treatment to the aged of other families. Treat your own young in a manner befitting their tender age and extend this to the young of other families. Then you can have such complete mastery over the realm that it will be like rolling it on the palm of your hand. In other words, all you have to do is take this heart that is here and apply it to what is over there. . . . There is just one thing in which the Ancients greatly surpassed others: that is the way they extended what they did. . . . It is by weighing a thing that its weight can be known and by measuring it that its length can be ascertained. It is so with all things, but particularly so with the heart. Your majesty should measure his own heart.

The king rather sheepishly responds by attributing his present bad conduct to his larger ambition. “I have a failing,” he confesses. Though the king

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15 According to the ritual texts, the posthumous title Huan is given to rulers with a legacy of territorial expansion. A common formula is “To expand the territories and bring into submission those far away (pi tu fu yuan) is called Huan.” See Xu Jianxue 1993, juan 64.

16 Mencius, of course, is dissembling here. He knows quite a number of traditions about the famous hegemons, if 6B:7 is any indication.
refuses to name his ambition, he believes that in order to achieve it, he must start wars, imperil his subjects, and incur the enmity of the other feudal lords. To counter this, Mencius replies, “Do you find satisfaction is such things?” “Of course not.”

“Are fats and sweets not enough to satisfy your mouth? Are light yet warm fabrics not enough to satisfy the body? Are beautiful colors and sexy women (cai se 艳色) not enough to satisfy the eye, and the sounds of a musical performance not enough to satisfy your ears? Are your servants and officers too few to effect your orders at court, and your slave boys and serving maids not enough to supply your needs?” “No, it is not that.” “Well, then, it is obvious what your great ambition is. You wish to expand your territories . . . and view the Central States as your own . . . But to seek what you desire by the means you use is just like barking up a tree to catch a fish.” “Is it as bad as all that?” “It may be even worse! . . . You will not harm yourself by climbing a tree to look for fish. But if you seek to fulfill your ambition by acting as you do, after you put all your heart into the pursuit, you are certain to reap disaster in the end. . . . If you applied the insights you have gained from self-examination to the cases of other men (ren 仁) in governing your kingdom, then all those in the realm who seek office would hope to find a place at your court, all tillers of land to till the land in outlying parts of your realm, all merchants to enjoy the refuge of your marketplaces, all travelers to go by way of your roads, and all those who hate their own rulers to lay their complaints before you. Perhaps you should go back to the basics. . . . If you do that, who can stop you [from attaining your heart’s desire]?” (Mencius 1A:7)

Mencius continues: “Only a truly noble person can have a constant heart in spite of a lack of constant means of support” (Mencius 1A:7, cf. 3A:3). The common people cannot be expected to be constant in their virtue if they are not secure in their livelihoods. That being the case, the ruler who punishes his subjects for disobeying the laws is merely setting a trap for them. Ac-

17 This is the final dialogue in the first book of the Mencius. For the definition of ren, which is borrowed from Eric Henry, see fn. 8 above. Note that language here is highly patterned and rhymed. The key section that begins “If you applied those insights…” follows an eight-character meter and keeps the same end rhyme four times. For a discussion of rhetorical features and patterning in Mencius’ language, see Huang 2002. The pronoun zhi in the closing phrase “shu neng yu zhi” (translated “Who can stop you?”) encompasses and logically collapses several possible renderings, so that the phrase means simultaneously: (1) Who can stop peoples from all lands from flocking to your kingdom? (2) What other rulers could stop you since the people all submit to you? (3) Who could stop you from attaining your heart’s desire? and finally (4) Who could stop a true king such as this?
Accordingly, the clear-sighted ruler “determines what means of support the people should have,” and then insures that “their means are sufficient” for their parents, wife, and children. Only then does he “drive them [like draft animals] toward goodness,” at which point the people will find it easy to follow him. Going back to the basics, Mencius again offers the suggestion that the king rule in such a way that those who reach the age of fifty can wear silk and those who are seventy can eat meat. (The king can do this by not requiring labor service of them during the months of planting, tending, and reaping; also by disciplining the people in such a way that “the grey-haired will not have to carry loads on the road.”) “When the aged wear silk and eat meat and the masses are neither cold nor hungry, it is impossible for their ruler not to be a true King.”

By the end of the first half of Book 1, we have learned the definition of the true king: it is he who manages to satisfy his own ambitions while satisfying the ambitions of those below; he achieves his heart’s desire by extending to all his subjects the natural compassion he feels for helpless animals and for himself, so that “those below” can attain their natural desires to live well and securely (cf. Mencius 3B:9). In the dialogues of Mencius, then, the supremely human desires that others tend to identify as the source of all human misery and shame become the best means by which a person in power can attain greatness. Believing the sage to be “one who turns disasters into blessings and repays offenses with acts of kindness,” Mencius begins to build the case that will, in a later passage, link desire, goodness, and greatness: “The desirable is what we call the good. To have it in oneself is what we call being true. To possess it fully in oneself is what we call beauty, and to shine forth with this beauty fully in one’s possession is what we call greatness. To be great and to be transformed by this greatness – that is what we call being a sage” (Mencius 7B:25).18

The second part of Book I reiterates these themes, while making the rhetoric of pleasure even more prominent, as in the following exchange:

Zhuang Bao went to see Mencius. “The King received me and told me that he was fond of music. I was at a loss what to say.”

“If the King has a great liking for music, then there is perhaps hope for the state of Qi.” (Mencius 1B:1)

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18 For the first citation, see Shuoyuan 13:21 (“Guan Zhong Dissuades Duke Huan of Qi from Attacking Lu”), where the saying is ascribed to Confucius. While Mencius also urges “a reduction of the desires” in 7B:25, in most of his writings he emphasizes the necessity to recognize one’s own desires and to extend that recognition to the desires of others.
Another day, when Mencius was received by the King, Mencius inquires of him if he is really fond of music. The king blushes and says, “Yes, but I am not capable of appreciating the music of the Former Kings. I am merely fond of the popular music of today.”

To the astonishment not only of the king but also of later readers, Mencius replies: “Whether it is the music of today or of antiquity makes no difference.” The king asks to hear more.

“Which is greater, enjoyment by oneself or enjoyment in the company of others?”

“Enjoyment in the company of many.”

Based on this seemingly minor but crucial concession, Mencius leads the king through a thought experiment:

Let me explain a thing or two about enjoyment. Let us suppose that you were having a musical performance here, and when the people heard the sound of your bells and drums and the notes of our pipes and flutes they all with aching heads and knitted brows said to one another, “In being fond of music, why does our King brings us to such straits that fathers and children do not see one another, and siblings, wives and children are parted from one another?”

Suppose now that you were hunting here, and when the people heard the sound of your chariots and horses and saw the magnificence of your banners they all with aching heads and knitted brows said to one another, “In being fond of hunting, why does our King bring us to such straits that fathers and sons do not see each other, and siblings, wives, and children are parted from one another?” The reason would be simply that you had failed to share your pleasures with the people.

Now suppose you were having a musical performance here, and when the people heard the sound of your bells and drums and the notes of your pipes and flutes, they all looked pleased and said to one another, “Our king must be in good health. Otherwise, how would he have music performed?” Or suppose that you were hunting and when the people heard the sound of your chariots and horses and saw the magnificence of your banners, they all looked pleased and said to one another, “Our king must be in good health. Otherwise, how would he undertake to go hunting?” The reason again would simply be that you shared your enjoyment with the people. (Mencius 1B:1)

On the basis of the foregoing suppositions, Mencius concludes, “Now if you shared your pleasures and enjoyment with the people, you would be a true king.” Since the two words for “music” and “pleasure” (yue and le) are graphically identical and, in classical Chinese, either homophonous or phonetically close, the metaphor of the musical performance allows Mencius to
teach the listener/reader a series of important lessons about pleasure-seeking and pleasure-taking, following the standard tropes, enunciated in texts such as the *Zuozhuan*, linking the harmonies of musical performance to the exemplary balance of dispositions displayed by men of cultivation.¹⁹

The fact that all people, unless they are deaf, seem to like some form of music or another demonstrates our shared humanity. That musical performances are usually more pleasurable in the company of others tells us that humans are social beings. That laments change quickly to sounds of joy shows us that life is changeable at best and precarious at worst; hence, the need for serious reflection about priorities. That in music, as in pleasure, “the present pleasure/music comes from the past pleasure/music” invests tradition with added glamour. The trick is to figure out how to “drum up” (i.e., arouse excitement in) the person in ethical situations, as in musical performances (*Mencius* 1B:1). So Mencius, the master-rhetorician, urges the king to see his apparent weaknesses (his fondness for wine, women, and song) as the chief source of his potential moral strength. Mencius methodically pursues this line of argument in the next paragraphs, which take up three traditional sources of pleasure available to those on the throne: (1) the building of parks; (2) the defense of one’s honor in response to minor affronts; and (3) the enjoyment of the fine prospect from a winter palace.

Mencius concludes,

> The man who is not given a share in such pleasures will speak ill of those in authority. It is wrong, of course, to speak ill of those in authority because one is not given a share in such pleasures. But for one in authority over the people not to share his pleasures with the people is equally wrong. For their part, the people take pleasure in the pleasures of the ruler who takes pleasure in their pleasures. They feel concern for the cares of the ruler who feels concern for their cares. He who takes pleasure and feels concern on behalf of All-under-Heaven is certain to become true king. (*Mencius* 1B:4).²⁰

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¹⁹ Wang Li, 519. In the *Zuozhuan* (Duke Xiang, year 29), the Western Zhou traditions of music and dance, which have been preserved at the court of Lu, are performed for the visitor Ji Zha. Ji Zha, after each performance of a musical piece, gives an evaluation that assigns the piece to an historical event and correlates it with some stage of moral-emotional development. Favorable pronouncements characterize the historical agent’s balance by the formula “x but not extreme-x” (as in “taking pleasure but not abandoning oneself”). On the completion of the performance of the final piece, which represents the pinnacle of cultural achievement, Ji Zha says that though there may be other pleasures, he dare not request them. Music, like pleasure-taking, should stop at the perfect balance and beauty and go no further. For further information, see Schaberg 2001, 86-93.

²⁰ Note the opposition between “delight” and “care.” The graphs used for “curbing” and “loving” the ruler (see below) were near homophones in classical Chinese.
Even the king’s progresses through the land—typically identified as a waste of scarce resources that fosters “drifting, lingering, rioting, and intemperance”—become occasions promoting the serene functioning of the administration of the realm. “In spring the purpose is to inspect the ploughing; in autumn, to inspect the harvesting…” “If our King does not travel,/How can we have rest? If our King does not go on tour,/ How can we have help?/ Every time he travels/ He sets an example for the lords.” Apparently, the same activities said to sap the people’s energies can energize them as well, so long as the ruler at every opportunity considers the welfare of the people to be no less important than his own. The ruler need only open the granaries and have his musicians play music as he passes through. Mencius ends this flight of fancy with a suitably sober classical citation from the Odes, “What harm would there be in curbing the Lord?” However, having broached the topic of limits, the account he offers suggests that few restraints need be applied to the ruler’s conduct by himself or others. No pleasures are inherently bad, except those that deprive the people of a reasonable level of comfort and security. Any ruler who plans carefully has sufficient resources to feed the people, satisfy his own tastes for pleasures, and still attain his supreme ambition to rule the world.

Mencius conveys this optimistic message in yet another dialogue with King Xuan of Qi. The king reports to Mencius that all of his advisors would have him tear down the magnificent Hall of Light. The king “loves money,” and money—lots of it—is what is required for the upkeep of such follies. Mencius sees no problem with the king’s love of money. Long ago, the exemplar Gong Liu loved money, too. “He stocked and stored/ He placed provisions in bags and sacks…” “You may love money, but so long as you grant the people this same love, how can it interfere with your becoming a true King?” The king then raises a further objection: “I love women.” Mencius responds with another example from antiquity. Tai Wang loved women. “He brought with him the Lady Jiang/ Looking for a suitable abode.” “You may love women, but so long as you grant the people this same love, how can it interfere with your becoming a true king?”

Mencius makes it all sound very easy.21 The king may enjoy his palaces, his parks, his well-stocked ponds, his money, his dogs, and even his beauties so long as he sees that the needs of his own people have also been met. The king—clearly uncomfortable with this line of argument—“turned

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21 Compare the arguments of the “Great Commentary” to the Changes, as summarized in Peterson, 67-116 and Yang, Chap. 2.
to his attendants and changed the subject” (*Mencius* 1B:6). But lest the king neglect his duty, Mencius proposes two stark alternatives: Either the king is a true king – one who insures that his people will taste enjoyments, too, or he is a “mutilator, a cripple, and an outcast” (*Mencius* 1B:7-8). Mencius then drops the topic of the king’s responsibility for a time, confining his next remarks to advice on the way the king should punish evildoers in his state: See that the wicked are put to death “by the whole state,” Mencius says, so that the king shares in this activity as well. This injunction reminds the king that major undertakings require expert advice, and that Mencius is an expert. So while Mencius refuses to give straight answers to the questions whether Qi should invade its neighbor Yan, or Teng ally with Qi to its north or Chu to its south or take action in the event of its neighboring state fortifying a border town, Mencius knows the true king to be one whose invasion will always be perceived as “liberation.” The king then complains again, this time about disloyal subjects, who are too numerous to punish. Mencius finally delivers a harsh verdict: “In years of bad harvest and famine…the old and young were abandoned in the gutters…though your granaries were full. … This shows how callous those in authority have been and how cruelly they have treated the people.” Turnabout is fair play. It is only now that the people have seized the opportunity to pay back the treatment they themselves received at the hands of their ruler (*Mencius* 1B:12).

Book I of the *Mencius* ends with a curious story in which the Duke of Lu, who originally thought to seek the advice of Mencius, is dissuaded from such a course by his male favorite. Mencius remarks,

> When a man goes forward, there is something that urges him on, and when he halts there is something that holds him back. It is not in his power either to go forward or to halt. It is due to Heaven. (*Mencius* 1B:16)

So, is it fate or human agency that will determine Mencius’ success at the courts of the Central States? Is the king refusing to act or unable to act? Mencius returns to such questions in other writings attributed to him, but it is important that every single substantial proposition that he will seek to prove has been laid out by the concluding dialogue of Book 1 of the *Mencius*. Mencius has equated “true kingship” with “sharing one’s pleasures

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22 The ruler, Mencius tells us in 2B:4-5, is remiss if he treats the people less well than he would treat his cattle and sheep. The ruler should discharge officials and even resign himself if he or his officials cannot take care of his flock.
with the people” and he has gotten the kings with whom he has conversed
to see themselves, however briefly, as they see others. “Tyranny” has been
equated with the refusal to allow the people’s desires to be satisfied. And
the very qualities that society perceives as weaknesses – a love of hunting
and arms, of palatial surroundings, of money, music, and sex – have been
identified as the stuff from which true kings are made, insofar as these
pleasures require social interaction and illustrate the companionable ease to
be had by sharing one’s pleasures with others. Human nature may be a
bundle of conflicting desires, yet good rule is entirely feasible, since it rests
on a series of conscious choices.23 Good rule is principally a matter of see-
ing the connections between one’s actions and their likely effect on one’s
dependents. Some goods one can share directly (as with grain or fish). Oth-
ers require the king to create the conditions whereby others can procure
these goods for themselves (as with women, music, spectacle, and educa-
tion). The people always desire good rule, for by definition it maximizes
their opportunities for receiving and giving pleasure. And through good
rule, the king can easily make himself the ultimate object of his subjects’
desires. “No one will be able to stop him,” if only because “the appearance
of a true King has never been more overdue than now” (*Mencius* 2A:1). It is
easy, in other words, for a ruler to create the desired effect, and so attain his
own supreme ambitions, when so many long for him to institute good rule,
and when all human desires compel humans in essentially the same direc-
tions. What counts is this: “that those who are morally well adjusted look
after those who are not” (*Mencius* 4B:7) because those in power realize that
“the people are of supreme importance” – not the rulers (*Mencius* 7B:14).

The contents of Book 1 have been summarized here in some detail
because they deal nearly exclusively with pleasures satisfied or denied, set-
ing the stage for all subsequent talk about morality in the *Mencius*. Alert-
ness to the pleasure discourse permits a keener and subtler appreciation of
the parts of the *Mencius* that tradition has favored. Let us look at Mencius’
impressive description of the “flood-like *qi*” that the good man summons
up in times of crisis. An interlocutor asks of Mencius whether he would be
willing to tell him something about the “heart that cannot be stirred.” Men-
cius replies:

23 “The way the mouth is disposed to taste; the eye to color; the ear to sound; the nose to
smell, and the four limbs to rest: such is human nature, yet therein lies also heaven’s decree
[i.e., what is fated]. That is why the gentleman does not describe it as nature [since heaven’s
decree is more important]” (*Mencius* 7B:24). *Mencius* 5A:1 explains why sex, wealth, and
honor are not sufficient causes for worry for the good man.
The will is commander over the *qi* (configured energy) while the *qi* is that which fills the body. The *qi* halts where the will arrives [meaning, the *qi* holds to the position determined by the will]. Hence, the saying, “Grasp your will firmly and do not abuse your *qi* . . . . The will, when blocked, will move the *qi*. On the other hand, the *qi*, when blocked, will move the will. Now stumbling and hurrying affect the *qi*, so that palpitations of the heart are produced. . . .

The flood-like *qi* [circulating in the body] is, in the highest degree, vast and unyielding. Nourish it with integrity and place no obstacle in its path and it will [expand to] fill the entire space between heaven and earth. . . . Deprive it [the *qi*] of rightness and the Way, however, and it will collapse. As it is born of accumulated rightness, it cannot be appropriated by anyone through a sporadic show of rightness. Whenever one acts in a way that falls below the standard, it will collapse. (Mencius 2A:2)

This discussion makes no sense unless we understand that *qi*, configured energy, has physical and ethical dimensions and the desires induce alterations in the body that shape, in turn, our interactions with the phenomenal world. Thus the moral will – the desire to do good – operates in a person like the surge of adrenalin a warrior feels on the battlefield: once the will is sufficiently determined to carry out a particular action, the person can perform seemingly impossible feats. The steady desire to act morally, like waves of longing, propels the good person to pursue the Way and live well. But just as constant exercise is required to build up the warrior’s muscles prior to battle, so, too, the constant use of our moral faculties for judging right from wrong is needed, if we are to be able to respond spontaneously, resolutely, and effectively to moral challenges as we make our way on the path of life (Mencius 4B:28).

Why is *ren* – the supreme virtue in the Analects of Confucius – so little in play in the 2A:2 discussion in the Mencius? *Ren* (the ability to extrapolate from one’s own condition to that of others) is reduced in this key passage to one virtue among four that defines what it is to be human, the others being a sense of shame; a willingness to yield; and a sense of right and wrong. *Ren* often connotes a kind of knowing, “knowing what lies far away by knowing what lies near to hand; knowing what is in the heart of others by knowing what is in one’s own heart.”24 *Ren* is indubitably important, but for Mencius, it is comparatively easy to grasp the relative value of other things and other people, insofar as such judgments involve primarily

24 For many examples, see Henry 2004.
the head and not the heart. "That things are unequal is part of their nature. . . . But common to all humans is reason and a sense of what is right" (Mencius 3A:4; 6A:7, 14). The challenge is to confront the inequality in capacities and talents both within and among individuals (intelligence and largeness of spirit being but two of these unequal portions) and still reliably summon the will to do right, in the manner of a courageous soldier on the battlefield – ah, there’s the rub (Mencius 2A:2). The vast majority of situations do not require a sage to figure out what to do (Analects 6.30). They require the courage to do what one knows one should do – a “measuring of the heart” and a “commanding of the qi” (Mencius 1A:7, 2A:2). Still, it is clear that this sort of courage derives first, from being filled to bursting with the desire to do good and second, from expecting to be celebrated for goodness.

In 2A:6, Mencius demonstrates the counter-intuitive proposition that “no man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others.” (It is this heart that King Xuan of Qi showed when he decided to save the ox that trembled as it was led off to be sacrificed.) The superb example that Mencius cites is that of a man who sees, “all of a sudden, a young child on the verge of falling into a well.” Mencius believes that the man would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to benefit in any way (by “getting in the good graces of the parents,” by “winning the praise of his fellow villagers or friends,” or by “stopping the cries of the child”). But wisely, Mencius never promises his readers that the man will actually move to save the child. Self-interested motives may intervene and prevent action. The man may dislike his neighbors, or perhaps prefer to curry favor with the enemies of the child’s parents. Maybe he is too lazy or timid. Mencius does not promise too much, in other words. What he says is consistent with his discussions in Book I, where a “human being” is defined as one who has heart of compassion, meaning a heart whose first impulse rebels against any prolongation in the suffering of others. Whether that first impulse will be encouraged and strengthened depends substantially on the prevailing conditions in which the individual grows to maturity, the conditions determined by fate or heaven, by the ruler’s suasive example and intervention, and by the person’s own decision or refusal to cripple his own

25 Mencius observes that people regularly have the experience of reversing their earlier judgments after further consideration. The park in the capital area, for example, is not so big (40 li square), but if it has become a trap for the people in the middle of the capital, then it must be judged, after some consideration, to be too big.

26 As Confucius says (Analects 5.11), “to know it [the Way] is not as good as delighting in it.” For another passage emphasizing the simplicity of moral choice, see Mencius 7A:35.
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potential. 27 As Mencius points out, the maker of arrows does not begin by
being more unfeeling than the maker of armor. It is the daily conditions in
which he works that make him keener to cause death than to protect life
(Mencius 2A:7).

Understanding the rudiments of Mencius’ pleasure-writing can also
help us unpack puzzling passages in the text, for example, the linked max-
ims of Chapter Four:

If a man in a subordinate position fails to win the confidence of his su-
periors, he cannot hope to govern the people. There is a way for him to
win the confidence of his friends. If his friends do not trust him, he will
not win the confidence of his superiors. There is a way for him to win
the trust of his friends, but if, in serving his parents he fails to please
them, he will not win the trust of his friends. There is a way for him to
please his parents, but if, upon looking within himself, he finds that he
is not whole in his person and true to himself, he will not please his par-
ents. There is a way for him to become true to himself, but one will not
make the self have integrity (cheng qi shen 誠其身) if one does not per-
ceive the good and let the self be illuminated by it (ming bu shan 明乎
善). . . . For this reason, integrity is the way of Heaven and longing for
integrity the [proper] way of Man. . . . Always, when a man is totally true
to himself, he moves others. (Mencius 4A:12) 28

On first reading, the obscurity of this passage borders on the Delphic: how
can the treatment of one’s parents be a decisive factor in one’s relationships
with friends, for example? A closer look reveals that the worth of each rela-
tion where pleasure is given and received is predicated on the relative
strength of the prior and more fundamental commitment. As Mencius ex-
plains elsewhere, “For a man to give full realization to his heart is for him
to understand his own nature. A man who knows his own nature will know
Heaven. By retaining his heart and fostering [the potential in] his nature, he
is serving Heaven” (Mencius 7A:1). Put another way, the steady desire to
pursue the good must have taken possession of the self before there can
occur a suitable extension of the desire for good to others. The good and
wise person persists in desiring wholeness, which is achieved by successive
acts that record the relative worth of different things, people, and impulses.

27 If the person is not to cripple his own potential, he must “seek the cause [of his condi-
tions] within himself.”
28 The progression of the passage here is reminiscent of the Zhongyong now available in a fine
new translation by Plaks 2003. The term cheng (usually translated as “sincerity”) has a pho-
netic component meaning “wholeness,” “completion,” or “perfection.” For Mencius, culti-
vating oneself preserves one’s original wholeness.
As for a man’s relation to his physical person, he cherishes all parts of himself, he nurtures all parts of himself. . . . Nevertheless, the parts of the physical person differ in value and importance. The body possesses what is greater and what is lesser. . . . Muddled, certainly, is the man who takes care of one finger to the detriment of his shoulder and back without realizing his mistake is. . . . Those who nourish the lesser part are petty people. Those who nourish the greater parts are by definition great. (Mencius 6A:14)

The ranking and prioritizing of the desires that allow a person to attain the greatest quantity and quality of experiences fostering the good life – that is at once the most sophisticated of all human tasks and the task most aesthetically gratifying to all humans. For to strive for and to attain wholeness is not only to “return to the self” (Mencius 4A:10, 12) but also to beautify one’s person. Fortunately, this form of adornment is available to the very least of us: “Seek and you will obtain it; shunt it aside and you will lose it. This seeking is invariably of benefit to the getting, for what is sought [a sense of wholeness and its true value] resides in the self” (Mencius 7A:3).

It is also the pleasure discourse that allows modern readers to understand the extreme reaction of Mencius to Gaozi’s rather unexceptional assertions about human nature. Mencius accepts Gaozi’s belief that “the appetite for food and sex is [human] nature,” but Mencius hopes to convince the listener/reader that right conduct is not something external to human nature (and so potentially alienable from it). Commonsense and ordinary experience tell us that Mencius is flat wrong. Is it not the case that we must be taught to do good and to prefer it to evil? In the following extended dialogue Mencius refuses to concede that all-important point:

A man of Ren asked Wulu Zi, “Which is more important, the rites or food?” “The rites.” “Which is more important, the rites or sex?” “The rites.” “Suppose you would starve to death if you insisted on the observance of the rites but would manage to get something to eat if you did not. Would you still insist on their observance? Again, suppose you would not get a wife if you insisted on the observance of qinying, the ritual where the groom goes to the home of the bride to fetch her, but would get one if you did not. Would you still insist on the observance of the ritual? Wulu Zi didn’t know how to answer. The following day he went . . . to give an account to Mencius. Mencius said, “What difficulty is there in answering this argument? . . .. If you compare a case where

29 When King Xuan admits a fondness for martial valor (hao yong), Mencius does not discourage this penchant but asks that he enlarge and extend (da) it. See Mencius 1B:3.
30 Cf. Analects 7.30: “The Master said, ‘Is benevolence really far away? No sooner do I desire it than it is here.’”
food is important with a case where the rite is inconsequential, then the greater importance of food is not the only absurd conclusion you can draw. Similarly with sex. Go and reply this way to your interlocutor: “Suppose you would manage to get something to eat if you took the food from your elder brother by wrenching his arm, but would not get it if you did not. Would you feel comfortable wrenching his arm? Again, suppose you would get a wife if you climbed over the wall of your neighbor to the east and dragged away the daughter by force, but would not if you did not. Would you feel comfortable dragging her away by force?” (6B:1)

Then, to shore up his case that our potential to desire the good is innate, Mencius relates the story of Ox Mountain, a hill nearby the capital that has been clear-cut. Understanding that most people, not excluding kings and rulers, vastly underestimate their own capacity to do good (hence their refusal to begin the undertaking), Mencius asks his potential adherents to imagine their own lives, not only as they are, but as they might be:

People see its barrenness and think it never had any resources or potential (cai 材). How could this be the true nature of a mountain? As for what remains of humanity, how could it be that humans lack the heart that discerns humanity in others and commits to doing good? Hacked at day after day, how can humans [realize their potential] to become a thing of beauty? (Mencius 6A:8)

Though human society is often not a pretty sight, if Ox Mountain is any guide, every person is born with the potential to do good and to grow into a thing of beauty. . . . As Mencius concedes, “There are cases where a person is twice, five times, or countless times better [at something] than another, but this is only because there are people who fail to make the best of their innate endowments” (Mencius 6A:6). “That things are unequal is part of their nature. Some are worth twice or five times, ten or a hundred times, even a thousand and ten thousand times, more than others” (Mencius 3A:4). But for Mencius the more important lesson to be drawn is this: doing good requires little more than the capacity for enjoyment – delighting

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31 For another passage that links beauty with ethical culture, see 2A:19.
32 “There are those who use their minds and there are those who use their muscles. The former rule; the latter are ruled. Those who rule are supported by those who are ruled. This is a principle accepted by the whole Empire.” In Mencius’ ideal state, the hierarchy of desires would correspond directly to the hierarchy of status levels. “This is the way of the common people: once they have a full belly and warm clothes on their back they degenerate to the level of animals, if they are allowed to live idle lives, without education and discipline” (Mencius 3A:4). This is the reason why the true King appoints a Minister of Education for the people after he has insured their ordinary livelihoods.
in the rich verdure of a flourishing grove, savoring the roast, to take two examples – and a frank acknowledgment that we are all human (Mencius 6A:2-4).

To agree with these assertions is to go a long way toward accepting the astonishing proposition that Mencius advances time and time again in the writings attributed to him: Each human has the potential to become a sage. Mencius says of Shun, for example, “He is a man and I am a man. Why should I be in awe of him?” (Mencius 3A:1) The ruler’s subjects, in assessing his effectiveness, may presume a fundamental parity between the past and present, and between high and low. At the same time, the king, for his part, had better, in thinking of each subject, remind himself that, “He is a man and I am a man. Why should I not be in awe of him?” Those sorts of observations cannot but lead the person back to the more fundamental question, “What sort of man am I?” (Mencius 3A:1) In Mencius’ terms, “There is no man who is not good, just as there is no water that does not flow down” (Mencius 6A:2). “Any person is capable of becoming good.” That is what Mencius means by saying that all persons are good. Mencius insists, “Compassionate insight, duty, observance of the rites, and moral wisdom – they are not welded on to me from the outside; they are in me originally. The fact has simply never dawned on me” (Mencius 6A:6). As the ruler shares with his subject the capacity for pleasure-seeking and pleasure-taking – and the consequent abhorrence for suffering – both one’s own and that of others – Mencius finds all to be equally human.

Contrary to the charges of his fiercest critics, Mencius was not under any delusion that the very mediocre rulers he advised would suddenly “become Tangs and Wus” [i.e., dynastic founders of perfect goodness and wisdom] (Mencius 2B:12). That the objects of one’s desires will naturally vary with education, heredity, past experience, and present opportunity is a given with Mencius. Still, the rewards to be had from inciting goodness in a head of state are potentially infinite, insofar as a good administration promises to usher in a world of pleasures fulfilled:

Now if your administration applied insights derived from yourself (ren) to governance, it would give rise to the following situation in the realm:

The officers in the realm would all want to be standing guard in your court; the farmers would all want to be ploughing in your outlying districts; the merchants would all want to store their goods in your maj-

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33 Cf. 4B:32; “Even Yao and Shun were the same as anybody else”; and 6A:7: “Now things of the same kind are all alike. Why should we have doubts when it comes to man? The sage and I are the same kind... What is common to all hearts? Reason and rightness. The sage is simply the man first to discover the common elements in our hearts.”
In this best of all possible worlds, the people will make joyful music, “opening with the bells and ending with the jade pipes” (Mencius 5B:1).

Wanting, wanting, and more wanting. Mencius gives us a litany of desires. The moral person is one who “yearns all his life” because he never ceases to feel the yearnings that others experience (Mencius 5A:1). “What need is there for pretence?” Mencius asks (Mencius 5A:2). Confucius himself, in Mencius’ accounts, serves as an exemplar precisely because he is a sage with an unparalleled capacity for longing. The Master is avid for the middle Way; he moreover longs to return home to his beginnings (in both the physical and moral senses). And “when he could not get the principal object of his desire [to be an advisor to kings],” he did not stop longing, we are told. “He simply longed for the next best” person to carry out his vision of a just and noble state (Mencius 7B:37). Going still further back in history, Shun likewise “was the best and most noble of sons,” for at the age of fifty, he still yearned for his parents “(Mencius 6B:3). Doing good means doing good tirelessly, and an admirable persistence comes from seeing a clear connection between what one longs for and what one achieves (Mencius 7A:25). In general, the sages are presented as men who made a number of mistakes (Mencius 2B:9), but whose sense of humanity was never wanting. For it follows as night follows day that the sage, as a result of his steady quest, becomes completely himself and an object of emulation. “That is the definition of a great man” (Mencius 3B:2). Mencius, who never doubted his own sageliness, commented of himself, “All the ten thousand things are there in me. There is no greater pleasure than for me to find on self-examination, that I am true to myself. Try your best to treat others as you wish to be treated yourself, and you, too, will find that this is the shortest way to attain ren, insights about shared humanity” (Mencius 7A:4).

To those who are capable of hearing, Mencius brilliantly makes the case that the greatest moral error that a person can make is to see human

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34 Rhymes are on the endlines with the words “under” (xia 下), “outlying districts” (ye 野); “roads” (tu 塗); and “those” (zhe 者).

35 For an extended treatment of the notion of returning to one’s beginnings in Mencius, see Huang (2002).

36 “He who gets up with cockcrow and never tires of doing good is the same kind of man as Shun [the sage].” Cf. Mencius 1A:7.
society as a zero-sum game – to think that “if one’s aim is wealth, one cannot be benevolent and if one’s aim is benevolence, then one cannot be wealthy” (Mencius 3A:3). “For when it is clear to all that those in authority understand human relationships, the people will be affectionate. . . . One who can put his heart into his actions should therefore be capable of renewing his state” (Mencius 3A:3). Furthermore, “he who loves others is always loved by them, and he who respects others is always respected by them” (Mencius 4B:26). Morality is supremely easy to understand: “Do not do to others what others would not choose to have done to them. Do not desire for oneself what others do not desire for themselves. That is all” (Mencius 7A:17).

Mencius is hardly unaware of everyday mishaps: Suppose a person has been treated in an outrageous manner by someone else. “When looking into himself, if he finds he has been benevolent and courteous and yet this outrageous treatment continues. Then the gentleman will say, ‘I must have failed to do my best’ for the malcontent.” In short, “a benevolent man neither harbors anger nor nurses a grudge. . . . All he does is love” (Mencius 5A:3). He even loves the person who wishes to harm him, not out of Christian charity, but because of his own heightened sense of shared humanity. Mencius’ gentleman has cares enough, but he can have no “unexpected vexations” (Mencius 4B:28). Such generosity of spirit, as it happens, has its reward: it simplifies decision-making in the extreme. “Shun was a human being. I also am a human being. I should be like Shun. That is all” (Mencius 4B:28). “The trouble with a man does not stem from a lack of strength, but from his refusal to make the effort. . . . The way of Yao and Shun is simply to be a good son and a good younger brother. If you wear the clothes of Yao, speak the words of Yao and behave the way Yao behaved, then you are a Yao. . . .” (Mencius 6B:2). In Mencius’ opinion, “No one has ever erred through following the example of the former kings” in their loving responses to the world around them (Mencius 4A:1).

Conclusion

37 Cf. Mencius 7A:13-14: “Good government wins the wealth of the people; good education wins their hearts.” “The people under a leader of the feudal lords are happy; those under a true king are expansive and content. . . . A noble man transforms where he passes and works wonders where he abides. . . . Can he be said to bring but small benefit?”

38 This is said of a brother in an anecdote, but applicable to any evildoer in the Mencian accounts.
Even as Mencius discourses on pleasure, he himself performs in such a way as to heighten the pleasures of his listener/reader. He recites odes, he relates stories of the famous and the forgotten, he empathizes with his interlocutor’s weaknesses in such a way that they succumb to Mencius’ flattering vision of themselves, with the result that they reinterpret their own inchoate yearnings into the self-conscious pursuit of personal integrity and compassion toward others.

Harrison Huang, in his Master’s thesis, points to the “family resemblance” between the Mencian dialogues and the *fu* (rhapsody, prose-poem) that became the dominant form of verse-making during the Han period (206 BCE-220 CE). The Han *fu*, like the earlier *Mencius*, employ as point-counterpoint celebrations of the emotions incited by pleasure and expressions of concern about the proper way to contain the ruler’s desires. They reveal a heightened consciousness of the ways that desires and methods of gratification tended to multiply exponentially after unification in 221 BCE, when the Son of Heaven had All-under-heaven in his possession. These continuities between the dialogues in the *Mencius* and the rhapsodic forms may have prompted YANG Xiong, the foremost *fu*-writer of his time, to defend Mencius in Chapter Two of the *Fayan* (Model Sayings). Of the strong appeal of beauty and classicism to the noble of spirit, and the severely limited capacity of the *fu* genre to encourage the emperor’s desire to do good, YANG Xiong also spoke. But such matters deserve more space than this particular essay can provide.

I, Michael Nylan, end, then, this essay with a dedication to Henry Rosemont, observing that he is more like the Mencius of my imagination than anyone else of my acquaintance. Rosemont begins many a conversation with the salutation, “dear heart.” Conversations with him are like “falls of timely rain” (*Mencius* 3B:5). By Mencian logic, it should come as no surprise that he evokes in all those lucky enough to know him the same feeling that Mencius must, on his better days, have aroused in his boon companions: the desire to enlarge their hearts, so as to extend to others the fellowship they have enjoyed with him. We can but revel in his great goodness. “And when joy arises, how can one stop it? And when one cannot stop it, then one begins to dance and wave one’s arms without knowing it” (*Mencius* 4A:27). A man of passion and of scruples, and no bloodless parser of the human experience – of Rosemont it could truly be said, “Washed by the Yellow River and the Han, bleached by the autumn sun, so immaculate is he that his whiteness cannot be surpassed” (*Mencius* 3A:4).

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39 Huang 2002.
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Nature and Self-Cultivation
in Huainanzi’s “Original Way”

Harold D. Roth

Introduction

“Original Way” (Yuandao 元道) is an essay containing a beautiful poetic rhapsody on the cosmology of the Way (Dao 道) and its Inner Power (De 德) in the tradition of the Laozi 老子, certainly one of the canonical sources for this particular essay and for the book as a whole. In it we see a detailed examination of how these cosmic foundations are manifested within the world and a detailed description of how sages are able to use their unique penetrating vision of these foundations, attained through self-cultivation, to bring peace and harmony to the realm. Coming at the beginning of the entire twenty-one essay book and written at a time when its compiler LIU An 劉安 was trying to dissuade his nephew, Emperor Wu 武帝 against the arguments of his Confucian (Ru 儒) advisors, this essay serves a number of purposes.

First, it is a summa of the activist Daoist argument for government by a ruler enlightened by Daoist inner cultivation practices and by their overarching cosmology of an intimately interrelated universe interfused by the unifying power of the Way and governed by discoverable patterns and sequences and predictable natures that tend towards harmony when not interfered with by the desires of the human ego.¹ Second, it contains an implicit appeal to rulers – Emperor Wu of the Han in particular – to adapt this Daoist position as the official ideology of government and, under-

¹ “Inner cultivation” is the term I use to refer to the apophatic practices of emptying the mind in order to realize the Way that are found in all early Daoist works. For details, see Roth 1999, 7-9 and passim. This activist Daoist position belongs to the Syncretist phase of the early Daoist tradition that is sometimes identified with the “Huang-Lao” intellectual position. For a good overview see Queen and Roth, 241-43; Major, 8-14.
standably, a number of implicit critiques of the Confucian tradition and its contemporary practitioners. Third, as lead essay of the collection it sets out general themes that will be pursued in more details in the remainder of the work. Its importance for understanding the entire book and for looking back upon the earlier Daoist tradition and seeing it in a clearer light cannot be overemphasized.

In the great religious traditions of the West we have come to be familiar with the notion of a transcendent source for moral and political authority, a divine law-giver who set up the universe and its phenomena and the laws that govern them and who stands apart from his creation. The natural world is that creation, and both this world and human beings who are made in God's image to dominate and control it have little divinity inherent within them. The divine is to be sought in another, transcendent realm, a sacred region that is, for the most part, denied to the living.

By contrast, one of the distinctive hallmarks of early Daoist cosmology is a complete fusion of the two realms that we can roughly describe as the transcendent and the immanent, the noumenal and the phenomenal, the sacred and the secular, the supernatural and the natural. They depict a universe totally infused with inherent divinity, a divinity that is contained in the everyday activities of the phenomena that constitute it as well as in the phenomena themselves. It is a universe of precision and order, whose activities are governed by natural guidelines and propensities, and whose phenomena are governed by their inherent natures so that they act in predictable ways. Human beings are an integral part of this universe and as a result are subject to its laws. Moreover, all this is thoroughly interfused by a force that guides the spontaneous activity of all things according to their inherent natural laws. This force is, of course, the Way, a unitive power that transcends any single phenomenon yet is paradoxically immanent within all of them. The Way guides the self-generation of all phenomena and remains at the basis of them throughout their existence.

Because the natural world to the early Daoists is both natural and supernatural, secular and sacred, the natures and patterns that constitute it attain a normative prominence that is mostly unfamiliar to us in the West. That is, these patterns, sequences, propensities and natures are themselves divine. They are the basis through which all the multitudinous phenomena in the world adhere and function in harmony and as such are to serve as the models and standards for the communities of human beings who are an

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2 For a classical formulation, see Otto 1925. For the effects on the laws of nature see Needham, 533-39.
integral part of this order. Thus Nature is holy in and of itself—to be respected, adhered to, even worshiped. According to the early Daoists, human beings can either ignore this normative natural order and fail in their endeavors or they can follow it and succeed. This is the choice the authors of “Original Way” present to their intended audience of regal readers. Inner cultivation is the primary way in which human beings can both, on a macrocosmic level, follow this divine natural order and, on a microcosmic level, fully realize its elements within them. I would like to summarize this important essay in order to demonstrate how it elaborates upon the basic position I have just outlined.

“Original Way” can be divided into a number of distinct sections, each of which contains a particular argument; one problem is of course that most of us who have worked on it divide the text differently. Thus D. C. Lau sees thirty-three paragraphs in his critical edition (Lau and Chen 1992), and organizes them into twenty-two sections in the translation he did with Roger Ames (Lau and Ames 1998). Kusuyama Haruki has twenty-one sections (1979), while ZHANG Shuangdi sees eleven (1997). I have also organized the text into eleven sections in which I have identified a principal theme and a consistent line of argumentation, although my eleven concur with Chang’s in only about a third of the cases. The Lau, the Lau-Ames and the Kusuyama divisions also seldom converge completely.

On the Nature of the Way (1/1/3-24)

This section discusses how the Way interfuses the entire phenomenal world and how the mythical organizer deities Fu Xi 伏羲 and Nü Wa 女娲 “grasped the handles of the Way,” in other words, made use of it to bring order to the entire world. It contains some of the most beautiful and evocative poetic verses on the Way in all of early Daoist literature. For example:

As for the Way:
It covers the Heavens and upholds the Earth.

1 In his analysis of the presence of laws of nature that serve as the foundation for human natural laws in the Huang-Lao boshu, Randall Peerenboom has made a similar argument (19-29).

4 References to the Chinese text of the Huainanzi are to the edition in Lau and Chen 1992. They follow the format: chapter/page/line. In the following translations from Yuandao, block prose will be continuous, parallel prose will be laid out line by line from the left margin of the quotation, and true verse will be indented. All translations are my own.
It extends the four directions
And divides the eight endpoints.
So high, it cannot be reached.
So deep, it cannot be fathomed.

It embraces and enfolds the Heavens and the Earth
It endows and bestows the Formless.
Flowing along like a wellspring, bubbling up like a fount,
It is empty but gradually becomes full.
Rolling and boiling
It is murky but gradually becomes clear.

Therefore, pile it up: it fills all within the Heavens and the Earth.
Stretch it out: it encompasses all within the Four Seas.
Extend it limitlessly: nothing marks dusk and dawn.
Roll it out: it expands to the Six Coordinates.
Roll it up: it doesn’t make a handful.
  It is constrained but able to extend.
  It is dark but able to brighten.
  It is weak but able to strengthen.
  It is pliant but able to become firm.
It stretches out the Four warp-threads and binds yin and yang.
It suspends the cosmic rafters and displays the Three Luminaries.
It is saturating and soaking,
Subtle and minute.

Mountains are high because of it.
Abysses are deep because of it.
Beasts can run because of it.
Birds can fly because of it.
The sun and moon are bright because of it.
The stars and time keepers move because of it.
Unicorns wander freely because of it.
Phoenixes soar because of it. (1/1/3-8)

Thus the Way is the ultimate cause for the existence of the entire universe
and all the myriads of things within it. Yet paradoxically it cannot be fully
perceived nor conceived of by human beings. It has the qualities of a highly
refined energy that enables all things to spontaneously realize the dynamism
that emerges from their inherent natures yet unlike an energy it can never
be exhausted.
Cosmic Rulership: The Ability of Great Rulers to Merge the Spiritual and Political Orders (1/1/26-2/11)

The sage-kings Ping Yi 馮夷 and Da Bing 大丙 are the first exemplars of enlightened Daoist government. They ruled the cosmos by “grasping the handles of the Way” and governed by following the natural tendencies in the phenomenal world:

Thus if you take the heavens as your canopy
Then nothing will be uncovered.
If you take the earth as your carriage,
Then nothing will not be supported.
If you take the four seasons as your mounts
Then nothing will not be employed.
If you take the yin and the yang as your charioteers
Then nothing will not be complete.

Therefore, why is it that they hastened forth but did not wobble,
Went far but did not weary
Their four limbs did not weaken,
Their perceptual acuity did not diminish
And they could comprehend the shapes and outlines of the eight outlying regions and the nine fields of the heavens?
Because they grasped the handles of the Way and roamed in the land of the inexhaustible.
Therefore, the affairs of the world cannot be controlled.
You must draw them out by following their natural direction.
The alterations of the myriad things cannot be fathomed.
You must grasp their essential tendencies and guide them to their homes. (1/2/9-12)

The main point here is that human beings cannot succeed by going against the fundamental principles of the natural world. They must discover them and then not interfere with how the myriad things follow these principles in order to govern effectively and enable the human world to flourish. In other words, the human ruler must, like these sage-kings, have the wisdom to discern and to then adhere to the greater patterns of the heavens and the earth.

The Inherent Spontaneity of the Natural World (1/2/13-3/13)

Natural phenomena (a water mirror, echo, shadow, etc.) act spontaneously and respond harmoniously to whatever situation they are in all without any kind of intentional effort. In effect, they constitute a normative natural or-
Now when a water mirror comes in contact with shapes, it is not because of wisdom and precedent that it is able to flawlessly reflect the square, round crooked and straight.

Therefore, the echo does not respond at random and the shadow does not independently arise. They mimic sounds and forms and naturally do so without intent.

That which is tranquil from our birth is our heavenly nature. Responding only after being stimulated, our nature is harmed. When things arise and the spirit responds, this is the activity of perception. When perception comes into contact with things, preferences arise. When preferences take shape and perception is enticed by external things, it cannot return to the self and the heavenly patterns are destroyed.

Thus those who penetrate through to the Way do not use the human to alter the heavenly. Externally they transform together with things but internally they do not lose their true responsiveness. (1/2/13-16)

This passage argues that human beings fall away from this normative natural order and lose their spontaneous functioning as part of a kind of natural development of perception. The senses’ desire for sense objects generates preferences and enticements and people become so obsessed with them that they lose touch with their innate nature and natural spontaneity. Humans must learn to get back in touch with this natural and spontaneous side within themselves; it is that part of us that is directly connected to the normative patterns through which the Way subtly guides the spontaneous self-generation of all things. To realize this is to “follow the Great Way” (1/3/1), to not have a “crafty mind” and to know yourself completely, thus implying that the Way resides within the deepest layers of human beings.

**Contrasting the Heavenly (Natural) and the Human (1/3/15-4/10)**

The qualities, tendencies, and properties of the things of the natural world emerge from their innate natures (xing 性) and their natural (ziran 自然) propensities.

- Plants like duckweeds take root in water.
- Plants like trees take root on land.
- Birds beat their wings in the air in order to fly.
- Wild beasts stomp on solid ground in order to run.
Serpents and dragons live in the water.
Tigers and leopards live in caves.
All this is the nature of the heavens and the earth.

When two pieces of wood are rubbed together they make fire.
When metal and fire are close together the metal becomes molten.
Round things always spin.
Hollow things excel at floating.
This is their natural propensity. (1/3/15-17)

This section also discusses how human beings at the periphery of civilization adapt to their environment, that is, to the assemblage of innate natures and natural propensities in the various phenomena that constitute it. Here we see the important Syncretic Daoist principle of *yin* (going along with, adapting to these natures and propensities of things). We also see the principle of suitability (*yi*): each thing is intimately connected to its environment: there is a kind of inherent resonance between innate nature and natural environment that must be accorded with:5

Tree-dwellers nest in the woods;
Water dwellers live in caves.
Wild beasts have beds of straw;
Human beings have houses.
Hilly places are suitable for oxen and horses.
For travel by boat it’s good to have a lot of water.
The Xiung-nu produce grass mats,
The Gan and Yue make clothes of kudzu.
Each produces what it urgently needs in order to adapt to the aridity or dampness. Each accords with where it lives in order to defend against the cold and the heat. All things attain what is suitable to them, things accord with their niches. From this viewpoint the myriad things definitely accord with what is natural to them, so why should the sage interfere with this? (1/3/21-22)

All these things are part of a normative natural order that humans are part of but fall away from and this order gets further obscured by the development of such Confucian, virtues as “wisdom and precedent.” Humans must practice inner cultivation in order to return to their inherent connection to this natural order:

Therefore, those who penetrate the Way return to clarity and tranquility.
Those who look deeply into things end up not competing with them. If

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5 Roger Ames identifies this principle as one of the fundamental ideas in *Huainanzi* 9. See Ames 1983.
you use calmness to nourish your nature, and use quietude to stabilize
your spirit, then you will enter the Heavenly Gateway.
What we call “Heavenly”
Is to be pure and untainted, unadorned and plain.
And to never begin to be tainted with impurities.
What we call “human”
Is to be biased because of wisdom and precedent.
Devious and deceptive,
To look back to past ages and resort to convention.
   Thus that the ox treads on cloven hooves and grows horns
   And that the horse has a mane and square hooves
Is what is Heavenly (i.e. natural).
Yet to put a bit in a horse’s mouth
And to put a ring through an ox’s nose,
Is what is human.
Those who comply with the Heavenly roam with the Way.
Those who follow the human resort to convention.
Now you can’t talk to a fish in a well about great things because it is
confined by its narrow space. You can’t talk to a summer bug about the
cold because it is restricted to its season. You can’t talk to petty scholars
about the Utmost Way because they are confined by conventions and
constrained by teachings.
Thus sages do not allow the human to interfere with the Heavenly
And do not let desire confuse their genuine responsiveness. (1/4/3-9)

The concept of the Heavenly (tian 天) is here used as a general term for
this normative natural order. Randall Peerenboom finds a similar use in the
Huang-Lao boshu 黃 老 帛 書, and argues that “nature” provides a more ac-
ccurate translation.\footnote{Peerenboom, 42-45, discusses the range of meaning of tian in early Chinese philosophical
literature and decides upon “nature” as the best translation in his sources.}

Self-Cultivation and Non-Striving (1/4/10-5/8)

Sages cultivate themselves so that they do not strive to act contrary to Na-
ture (wuwei 無為) and do not interfere (wushi 無事) with its normative pat-
terns and principles. So Shun did not speak but transformed his environment
in a numinous fashion because of his high degree of inner cultivation:
In order to do this:

Sages internally cultivate the root (of the Way within them)
And do not externally adorn themselves with its branches.
They protect their vital essence and spirit (jing shen 精神) and dispense with wisdom and precedent. Unperturbed, they do not strive to act yet there is nothing left undone. Detached, they do not strive to govern but nothing is left ungoverned. (1/4/22-23)

Sages do not assert their own wills and force things to conform to them but rather accomplish their ends by complying with and blending with other things:

Thus those who attain the Way
Their wills are weak but their deeds are strong.
Their minds are empty but their responses correspond (dang 当).
(1/4/28)
Therefore, the pliant and weak are the supports of life
And the hard and strong are the disciples of death. (1/5/6-8; Laozi, 76)

The message here is clear: there is a normative and harmonious order in nature. Sages cultivate themselves and become empty and tranquil so that they can accord with this natural order. Once they are able to attain this harmony they can act without effort and govern without striving because they do not allow any self-interested actions to interfere with the spontaneous evolution and transformations of this normative order.

Self-Cultivation and Timely Action (1/5/8-23)

It is important that sages do not act in advance of the correct moment. If they act in advance of it then disaster will result. When they detect that moment they act spontaneously in response to it.

Why? Because those who act in advance have a hard time acting with wisdom,
But those who follow after have an easy time acting efficaciously.
What we call “following after” does not mean being stagnant without breaking out of it or being congealed and not flowing. It is, rather, to value being able to accord with the (Heavenly) sequences (shu 數) and act at the right moment. (1/5/15-16)

These Heavenly sequences are the precisely measured movements of the sun, moon, stars, planets, and constellations that govern the heavens and are the basis of determining time. Following means to act in accord with them and act in a timely fashion but in order to do this, sages practice inner cultivation:
Therefore sages guard the Pure Way and embrace the limits of the feminine principle. They adapt to things and comply with them, they respond to alterations spontaneously, they constantly follow and do not precede. Because of their tranquility they are pliant and weak, Because of their stability they are relaxed and calm. They defeat the great and grind down the hard, and none is able to compete with them. (1/5/22-23)

The notion of timely action pervades much of early Chinese thought and certainly undergirds the hermeneutical basis of the various commentaries to the *Yijing* (Book of Changes). In this section of “Original Way” the emphasis on following after rather than acting in advance is also based in this notion but I think it is further related to the more general idea of the non-assertiveness of the human will over the normative natural order contained in such concepts as *wuwei* and *wushi* (non-interference). For humans to act in advance of the right moment is a selfish and almost “unholy” act that will inevitably result in failure. This is stated more dramatically in earlier Huang-Lao works such as the “Four Measures” (*Sidu*) section of the “Normative Standards” (*Jingfa*) section in the Huang-Lao boshu. For example:

When activity and tranquility do not correspond to the right moment
We call this deviance.
When generating and killing do not correspond (to the Heavenly patterns)
We call this cruelty. . . .
With deviance, you lose the Heavenly (correspondences).
With cruelty, you lose (the goodwill) of human beings. . . .
When you lose the Heavenly (correspondences) there will be famine.
When you lose (the goodwill of) human beings there will be enmity. . . .
When activity and tranquility align with (the patterns of) the Heavens and the Earth
We call this “civility” (*wen*). When punishments and prohibitions correspond to the right season,
We call this martiality (*wu*). (Chen, 155-56)

This notion of Heavenly correspondences (*tian dang*) is central to the *Huang-Lao boshu*. It refers to the matching of human endeavors to the greater patterns of the cosmos. These patterns are the *li*, the natural guidelines that direct the spontaneous interactions of all things. They form a vast matrix in space and time in which human beings are embedded and which guide the spontaneous responses of things that arise from their innate natures (*xing*) as they interact with one another. As a result of these
hidden guidelines the universe is precise and ordered. Human beings have these natures and guidelines within themselves but often do not realize it and fail to act in harmony with these greater forces. If they govern a state, then disaster results. The authors of “Original Way” shared in this vision but added to it an additional element derived from inner cultivation practice. Sages follow apophatic methods of emptying the mind of all desires, thoughts, and emotions that constitute the factors that interfere with human realization of these innate forces. Removing these enables them to experience these forces working within them as microcosms and in the greater world as macrocosm. Thus when these Huainanzi authors state above that “. . . those who attain the Way. . . Their minds are empty but their responses correspond (dang 当),” they do so as part of a tradition at least a century old that placed a great deal of emphasis on realizing the right thing to do at exactly the right moment by uncovering the normative natural order inherent in that situation.

The Normative Metaphor of Water (1/5/25-6/7)

The authors of “Original Way” often used the metaphor of water to express the most important aspects of this normative order:

Of all things under the Heavens none is more pliant than water. Nonetheless it is so great that its limits cannot be reached. . . .

Therefore,

It is neither partial nor impartial,  
It overflows and surges through  
And vastly merges with the heavens and the earth.  
Without favoring the left or the right,  
It coils and swirls and twirls round and round,  
And it ends and begins with the myriad things.  
This is what we call “Perfected Inner Power.” (1/6/6-7)  
. . . Now the reason that water is able to achieve its Perfected Inner Power within all under the heavens is that it is gentle and soaking, moist and slippery.  
Thus, in the words of Lao Dan:  
The most pliant things in the world  
Ride roughshod over the most rigid.  
This is because they emerge from what has no existence  
And enter into what has no spaces.  
I thereby understand the benefits of acting without striving (wu-wei). (1/6/9; Laozi 43)
The importance of the water metaphor in the Daoist tradition has recently been recognized by Sarah Allan and received a new impetus with the discovery of the “Vast Unity Generates Water” (Taiyi shengshui 太一生成水) text at Guodian (see Allan 1998; Allan and Williams 2000). In both this text and in “Original Way,” water moves and acts as the Way does. It is also something from which we can learn about how the Way works in the world and also a normative model for how the sages act. When they encounter difficulties, they do not meet them with force but rather with a mental attitude based upon the model of the persistent weakness of water. This is a quality of mind to be cultivated and is related to the notions of weakness, pliancy, non-striving, and non-assertiveness. It is through this normative model of water that we can, as the Laozi says, understand the benefits of acting without asserting the human will over and against the patterns of Nature.

Cultivating The One (1/6/11-7/2)

The Formless (wuxing 無形) and the One are metaphors for the Way. They are certainly described in very similar terms to the Way:

What we call the Formless is a designation for the One.
What we call the One is matchlessly united with all under the heavens.
When standing by itself it is lofty,
When dwelling by itself, it is amorphous.
It permeates the Nine Heavens above,
And threads through the Nine Regions below. . . .

Therefore, you may look for it but you will never see its form;
You may listen for it but you will never hear its sound;
You may touch it but you will never feel its contours.
It is a formlessness from which forms are generated;
It is a soundlessness from which the Five Tones call out.
It is a tastlessness from which the Five Flavors take shape.
It is a colorlessness from which the Five Colors develop. . . . (1/6/16-20)

As for the Way: when the One is established then the myriad things all are born (1/6/24).

Therefore, the Formless and the One are both mysterious and omnipresent. They provide the basis from which all sense objects continuously emerge and the foundation from which phenomenal things are continuously born.
The implication seems to be that this aspect of the Way serves as a kind of baseline from which all values emerge. Because it is also at the basis of all human beings, sages are able to merge with the One through inner cultivation practice and apply it to daily life:

Therefore, clarity and tranquility are the perfection of Inner Power
And the pliant and weak are the essentials of the Way.
Emptiness and nothingness, calmness and serenity are the ancestors of the myriad things.
To quickly respond when stimulated; to boldly return to the Foundation,
This is to be merged with the Formless. (1/6/15-16)

Therefore, when the Perfected govern:
They conceal their mental acuity,
They extinguish their literary brilliance.
Relying on the Way, they set aside wisdom and act impartially towards the people.
They are restrictive in what they guard (the One)
And they reduce what they seek after.
They cast off enticements and longings,
Discard lusts and desires.
And reject thoughts and deliberations. . . .

Therefore, sages make use of the One Measure to comply with the tracks of things.
They do not alter its suitability
They do not change its constancy.
They follow it as their level;
They take hold of it as their plumb line.
And they intimately accord with its correspondences (dang). 1/6/29-7/1

Through a process of “inner cultivation” sages are able to become calm and tranquil and penetrate through to a direct inner apprehension of the Formless One within their own beings. This subsequently gives them the clarity and serenity and freedom from egotistical desires that enable them to govern impartially by constantly referring back to this “One Measure” as their guiding power.

The benefits of this include freedom from attachment, spontaneous responsiveness in any situation, impartiality, and the ability to recognize and comply with the greater patterns and propensities of the heavens and the earth. Cultivating the One is thus what puts sages directly in tune with the normative natural order.
Inner Cultivation and its Personal Benefits (1/7/4-8/9)

While previous sections have argued that inner cultivation enables sages to penetrate the Way and make use of its Inner Power, they have not detailed how this process works. This is addressed here:

Thus when the mind is neither worried nor joyful you attain the perfection of Inner Power.
When it is unified and does not alter you attain the perfection of tranquility.
When lusts and desires are not borne by the mind you attain the perfection of emptiness.
When the mind is without likes and dislikes you attain the perfection of equanimity.
When the mind is not mixed up with things you attain the perfection of purity.
If you are able to attain these five qualities then you will break through to Spirit-like Clarity (shenming 神明).
If you break through to Spirit-like Clarity then you will realize your deepest interiority. (1/7/4-8)

Therefore it is through the systematic elimination of the emotions, distractions, desires, preferences, thoughts, deliberations, and attachments to sense-objects that usually flood the conscious mind that one may break through to the level of “Spirit-like Clarity” and realize what lies at the basis of one’s own inner being. We know from the previous section that what lies deep within one’s innermost core of one’s being is the One Way. This subsequently confers benefits throughout one’s life:

When treading through dangers and traversing defiles
You will never forget your Profound Support.
If you are able to preserve this here,
Then your Inner Power will not diminish.
The myriad things commingle in profusion,
And you can revolve and transform together with them.
And thereby listen to all under the heavens.
It is like galloping with the wind at your back.
This is called “perfect Inner Power.”

7 The concept of realizing the deepest aspects of your own inner-most being is a constant in the early Daoist inner cultivation tradition harkening back to its oldest extant source, the “Inward Training” (Neiye 内業) chapter of the Guanzi 管子. I have discussed this at great length (see Roth 1999). Early Daoists conceived of a number of closely related aspects at the core of your innermost being including the spirit and its vital essence and ultimately the Way itself.
If you attain perfect Inner Power then you will be truly joyous.
(1/7/15-16)

On true joy:

What I call “joy” how could it refer to the so-called joy of residing in the Lofty Terrace... or to galloping on a level highway; or to hunting the auspicious turquoise kingfisher. What I call “joy” refers to realizing your own deepest interiority; (1/7/20)

Therefore if you have the resources to realize your own deepest interiority, then beneath lofty forests and within the bowels of the deepest caves you will have what it takes to respond appropriately to your situation. But if you do not have the resources to realize your own deepest interiority, then although you take all under the heavens as your own family and the myriad people as your servants and concubines, you will not have what it takes to nurture life. (1/7/23-6)

This section ends with a further discussion of what joy is not. It is not the extremely transient pleasures of the senses that give enjoyment when they are present but pass away quickly leaving sadness. Why is this?

Because you do not use what lies within you to bring joy to what lies outside but rather use what is outside you to bring joy to what lies within. (1/8/3)

Therefore, if you do not realize the center that lies within you then you will take your commands only from the outside and use them to falsely adorn yourself...(1/8/4-5)

Thus when they hear good words and sound advice, even fools know to accept it.

When they are told of perfect Inner Power and lofty actions, even the unworthy know to yearn for it.

Yet while those who accept it are many, those who make use of it are few.

While those who yearn for it are many, those who practice it are few.

Why is this so? Because they do not know how to return to their innate natures. (1/8/6-8)

Inner Cultivation and the Benefits it Confers on the Ruler (1/8/10-9/13)

This section presents an elaborate argument about the benefits of inner cultivation practice for rulership:

Therefore if you do not realize (what lies deep) within your own mind (bude yu xin 不得於心) and still want to control the vital energies of all under the heavens, this is like having no ears yet wanting to tune bells
and drums and like having no eyes and wanting to enjoy pattern and ornament. You will, most certainly, not be up to the task.

It also unequivocally states the holiness or divinity of the normative natural order:

Thus, all under the heavens is a spirit-like vessel (tianxia shenqi 天下神 器): you cannot impose your personal will on it; those who do so will be defeated; those who try to hold onto it will lose it. Now that Xu You devalued all under the heavens and would not trade places with Yao because he had the intention of leaving behind all under the heavens. Why was this so? Because he thought that you should act on all under the heavens by adapting to it (and not trying to impose your own will upon it).

The essentials of all under the heavens
Do not lie in the Other
But instead lie within the Self.
Do not lie within other people
But instead lie within your own being (shen 身).
When you realize what rests within your own being then the myriad things will all be arrayed before you.
When you thoroughly comprehend the discussions of the Techniques of the Mind then you will be able to put lusts and desires, likes and dislikes outside yourself. (1/8/14-17)

This passage argues that there is a normative natural order implicit within the world and this is why the world is called a “spirit-like vessel.” As we have seen, it is made up of the various innate natures of things that determine their course of development and their actions and the great patterns inherent in the cosmos that govern the characteristic ways that things interact with one another. These natures and patterns are thoroughly infused with the empty Way, which mysteriously guides their spontaneous processes of development and of daily activity. This entire complex world functions completely spontaneously and harmoniously and needs nothing additional from human beings. All sages need to do is to recognize these natures and patterns and adapt to them. It is because of this normative order that sages can accomplish everything without exerting their individual will to control things. In other words, wuwei functions because of the existence of this normative natural order. Sages cultivate themselves through the “Techniques of the Mind” in order to fully realize the basis of this order within.8

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8 The “Techniques of the Mind” is the title of two short texts in the seventy-six-text Guanzi compendium. Together with “Inward Training” and “The Purified Mind,” they constitute a group that in modern scholarship is referred to as the four “Techniques of Mind” works. By
By realizing the Way at the basis of their own deepest interiority, sages can simultaneously realize the basis of the interiority of all phenomena. Hence the saying “the myriad things will all be arrayed before you.” The section continues:

Now to possess all under the heavens, why must it consist of grasping power, holding onto authority, wielding the handles of life and death and using them to put one’s own titles and edicts into effect? What I call possessing all under the heavens is certainly not this. It is realizing your own deepest interiority and that’s all. Once I am able to realize it then all under the heavens will also be able to realize me. When all under the heavens and myself are mutually realized, then we will always mutually possess each other. And so how could we fail to fill in any space between us? . . . .

What I call “to realize your own deepest interiority” means to fulfill your own being. If you fulfill your own being then you will become united with the Way. (1/8/21-25)

Thus when you realize your own deepest interiority you unite with the Way that interfuses the phenomenal world. As you do this you return to your innate nature and attain your natural propensity to act spontaneously and harmoniously. All things have this propensity and it is also called the “Heavenly Dynamism” (tianji 天機). Sages experience both enticements and privations but neither can cause their minds to be displaced in their focus on their true natures because of their realization of this “dynamism:”

Because inwardly they have the means to penetrate the Heavenly Dynamism they do not allow honor or debasement, poverty or wealth to make them weary and lose their focus on Inner Power. … Therefore when the realization of the Way is secured and does not depend on the vagaries of the myriad things, momentary transformations do not determine my ability to spontaneously realize it. What I am calling “realization” means realizing the true responses of my nature and destiny and resting securely in the calmness that it produces. (1/9/6-8)

In early Chinese thought, what happens to people over the course of their lives is seen as a combination of two factors over which we have little or no control: the inherent nature and talents we are born with (xing) and all the various life circumstances that are beyond our control (ming 命). The Zhuangzi 莊子 follower whom Graham deemed “the Primitivist,” was the first Daoist to derive a foundational idea from these terms and use it as the

the time of the Huainanzi, this phrase was probably used as a general term for what I have called “inner cultivation” practice. For details, see Roth 1999, 15-30.
basis of his unique philosophy. For him, the “true responses of my nature and destiny” (xingming zhi qing 性 明 之 情) meant the spontaneous and harmonious reactions that arise from that deepest part of our beings in response to the various circumstances in which we find ourselves throughout the course of our lives. These are often obscured by the psychological effects of culture that produce a self-consciousness that prevents us from uncovering this instinctive connectivity with the rest of the world. The authors of “Original Way” seem to be using this phrase with the same meaning. It seems to be an elaboration of their idea of the “Heavenly Dynamism.”

There is a further poetic extolling the praises of those who realize the Way (de Dao zhe 得道者) in this section. It echoes descriptions in the Laozi and Zhuangzi and ends with the following summation:

Therefore, they are not content with prosperity
Nor do they suffer with privation.
They do not take honor as security
Nor do they take debasement as danger.
Their bodies, spirits, vital energy, and attention
Each dwell in appropriate activities
And they thereby follow the workings of the heavens and the earth.

These “workings of the heavens and the earth” are the normative natural order that sages discover and rely on.

Techniques of the Mind: Underlying Principles of Inner Cultivation (1/9/15-10/10)

This final section discusses the basis of inner cultivation as depending on preserving the inherent balance between the functioning of the four basic aspects of human beings: physical body (xing 形), vital energy or breath (qi 氣), spirit (shen 神), and will or attention (zhi 志). These aspects and the relationships among them can be seen as part of the normative natural order that exists in human beings and that, if their balance is not interfered with, will enable humans to function spontaneously and harmoniously.

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9 For Graham chapters eight through the first part of 11 of the Zhuangzi were written by a single author whose literary style and intellectual viewpoint are unique in the work. He deemed this author the “Primitivist.” See Graham, 283-321.
Now the physical form is the abode of the life force,
The vital energy is what infuses the life force,
And the spirit is what regulates the life force.
If one of these loses its position then the other two are harmed.
Therefore, sages ensure that each rests in its suitable position, preserves
its specific functions, and that they do not interfere with each other.
(1/9/15-16)

The body has the usual variety of life activities it performs, all of which are
infused with vital energy or breath; sense perception is among the most
important of these. All these activities must be directed by the spirit if the
proper balance of four aspects is to be maintained. Clogging up consciousness
with the lusts and desires that arise from the senses causes the spirit to
lose its focus and sometimes when this happens, even madness results. The
antidote for this is inner cultivation practice, which cleanses the mind by a
process of emptying and thus gradually restores the inherent balance be-
 tween these activities:

Thus for those in whom the spirit is the ruler,
The body will follow and will benefit from this.
For those in whom the body is the governor,
The spirit will follow and will be harmed by this.
People who are covetous and filled with desires
Are blinded by political power and profit
And are enticed by their lust for fame and station. (1/10/3-4)

So if you let your body and its sense desires and desires of the ego govern
your spirit then you will every day squander your spiritual essence until it
will disappear. However there is another way:

Now the vital essence, spirit, vital energy, and attention:
If you are tranquil and infused by them then you will daily get stronger.
If you are agitated and squander them then you will daily grow older.
Therefore sages will nourish their spirits,
Harmonize and soften their vital breath
Level out their bodies
And sink and float, plunge and soar through life along with the Way.
In calmness they relax into it
When pressed they employ it.
Their relaxing into it is like their taking off clothes;
Their use of it is like the (automatic) shooting of a crossbow.
If you can be like this then among all the transformations of the myriad
things there will none that you will not welcome.
And among all the alterations of the hundreds of endeavors there will
be none that you will not spontaneously respond to. (1/10/8-10)
Thus by practicing inner cultivation that calms mind and body and yields a deep state of tranquility, sages enable the four basic aspects of their beings to function spontaneously and harmoniously in accord with their inherent natural guidelines. This then allows them to fall into the “Heavenly Dynamism,” the normative natural order of which they are an integral part and thus act completely in accord with the Way.

Conclusion

Thus the attitude toward nature and self-cultivation found in the “Original Way” chapter of the Huainanzi can be summarized as follows:

1. There is a normative natural order in the Heavens and the Earth that is established—and interfused—by a single divine force called the Way.

2. This order consists of natural patterns, innate natures, spontaneous propensities, and numerical sequences, all of which govern the behavior of everything in the world, including human beings. It is also called the “Heavenly Dynamism.”

3. This normative natural order is divine or holy.

4. Human beings, while connected to this order by their innate natures, tend to fall away from it in their activities and must learn how to re-establish their connection to it.

5. Humans can accomplish this through “Techniques of the Mind”—in other words inner cultivation practice—through which they can set aside lusts and desires, likes and dislikes, and wisdom and precedent, all of which have separated them from their innate natures and wasted their inherent potential for true happiness.

6. Rulers who are able to do this achieve complete success and happiness because they govern in accord with the normative patterns and forces that infuse the Heavens and the Earth.

Afterword
The *Huainanzi*’s approach to self cultivation in the context of a normative natural order has remained influential within the various traditions of the Daoist religion, although the details and the depth of this influence have varied over the course of the two millennia or so since its creation. Indeed, Michael Saso asserts that the *Huainanzi* is one of the principal works upon which the modern Daoist training manual whose use he observed in Taiwan, “Origins of Religious Daoism” (*Daojiao yuanliu* 道教原流) is based and thus expresses many of “the fundamental ideals of religious Taoism.”

Indeed the strong likelihood that there was a copy of this text included in the Northern Song recension of the Daoist Canon of 1016 and the distinct possibility of its inclusion in Tang recension of circa 740 indicates that the *Huainanzi* was considered an important part of the philosophical foundations of the tradition from its earliest times. Given its central role in the *Huainanzi*, the theories of nature and self-cultivation in “Original Way” are at the very heart of these philosophical foundations of the entire Daoist tradition.

To a great extent, the masterful work of Henry Rosemont Jr. has dealt with the natural tendencies of human beings and the political organizations that can best be developed to harness and direct them. Hence his work in traditional Chinese thought has cleaved to the Confucian tradition, which, over the course of two millennia, has directly dealt with these problems in normative and innovative ways. However such questions are not the sole purview of the Confucians; Daoist thinkers have grappled with them as well, although their contributions have long been overlooked because they are not contained in those works that Chinese literati have favored, the *Laozi* and the “Inner Chapters” of the *Zhuangzi*. In the *Huainanzi* we find a novel approach to these problems that grounds human nature in a normative natural order and recommends that government be organized in light of this foundational insight. The authors of “Original Way” thus find a source of human nature that inherently links human beings with something greater than their own individual natures, the normative natural order in which all people are embedded. In so doing they provide a Daoist theory of human nature that offers an explicit cosmological dimension that is argua-

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10 Saso, 45-51, presents a series of translations from the opening sections of *Huainanzi* 1, 3, and 7 that he argues contain many of the fundamental ideas of religious Daoism.

11 Roth 1992, 144-47, notes the existence of Northern Song taboos in the *Huainanzi* redaction in the Zhengtong Daoist Canon of 1445 thus indicating that it was based on an edition from this earlier recension.
bly only implicit in the classical Confucian sources that Professor Rosemont has so deftly analyzed.

REFERENCES


Civility, in the grand old sense of respect for others, continues to take a beating at the hands of modernity. As I write, the NBA’s latest “bad-boy,” Ron Artest of the Indiana Pacers, pursues an appeal of his season long suspension for actions detrimental to the league. Near the end of the November 19th 2004 game on Detroit’s home court, Artest and Detroit Piston Ben Wallace became embroiled in an on-court altercation, which quickly spread into the stands after a fan threw a cup full of a beverage onto a supine Artest. Immediately charging into the stands, the Pacer exchanged punches with fans while his teammates and several Pistons joined the melee. When a spectator later rushed him on the court, Artest punched the man to the ground; when he arose and charged again, teammate Jermaine O’Neal punched the fan once again (New York Times, November 20, 2004a.). Meanwhile, near my hometown in Wisconsin, six hunters were shot to death on November 21st following a dispute over private property and a hunting tree stand. Chai Vang, a Hmong-American from St. Paul, Minnesota, told police that he had shot the others after being surrounded, threatened and being cursed with racial epithets. Two other hunters were injured in the confrontation. Mr. Vang, a refugee from Laos who has lived in St. Paul for 24 years, is being held on six counts of homicide and two counts of attempted homicide (New York Times, November 24, 2004b). Over Thanksgiving, a Worcester, Massachusetts man was charged with stabbing two relatives at the dinner table. The reason? During the course of the meal, Gonzalo Ocasio and his son allegedly criticized Frank Palacios for his lack of table manners; having been chastised for using his hands to pick at the turkey, Palacios responded by picking up a carving knife and attacking the two men. He now faces charges of domestic assault and assault with intent to commit murder (Seattle Times, November 26, 2004). Within the political realm, Theresa Heinz Kerry, wife of then-Presidential candidate John Kerry, told a newspaper editor to “shove it” following his repeated attempts...
at getting clarification for her use of the term “un-American.” In an ironic but telling twist, Mrs. Kerry had just finished a talk to the Pennsylvania Democratic delegation on … incivility in American politics (CBS News, July 26, 2004). A month earlier, Vice President Dick Cheney fired the “f” word at Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy during a photo session (CNN News, June 24, 2004).

Expanding our definition of respect for others to another front, charges and counter-charges of eco-terrorism are being exchanged by the Bush administration and environmental and animal rights activists. Speaking at a May Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, John E. Lewis, Deputy Assistant Director of the FBI’s Counterterrorism Division, reported that “eco-terrorism” is now America’s greatest domestic threat. As he testified, in the view of the current administration, “In recent years, the Animal Liberation Front [ALF] and the Earth Liberation Front [ELF] have become the most active criminal extremist elements in the United States” (Congressional Statement, Federal Bureau of Investigation). Leaving aside the controversy over the appropriateness of the administration’s categorizing such movements as terrorist, the battle over who best represents the interests of the bio-sphere rages on. Arguing that the predominant culture is engaged in specieism, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) co-founder Ingrid Newkirk has asserted, “I don’t believe that people have the right to life. That’s a supremacist perversion. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy” (Conniff, 127). In their efforts to secure equal rights for animals and the environment, ALF and ELF have increasingly turned to violence as a means of changing public policy. Dr. Jerry Vlasak, a prominent spokesperson for the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, interviewed on Australian television in October 2004, engaged in the following exchange with the show’s host:

HOST: “You’ve been quoted as saying, ‘I think, five lives, 10 lives, 15 human lives would save 1 million, 2 million, 10 million non-human lives.’ And you’ve also said that violence is a morally acceptable tactic, and that it might be useful in the struggle for animal liberation. Do you stand by all that?”

VLASAK: “I do stand by all that.”

In answer to a follow-up question, he then stated, “Would I advocate taking five guilty vivisectionist’s lives to save hundreds of millions of innocent animal lives? Yes, I would” (“Insights”).
From spiking trees to burning down laboratories and resort hotels, environmental activists have often targeted the very resources they seek to protect. By the same token, the Bush administration is viewed by some as one of history’s worst in terms of environmental policy. As Fred Lebrun opined in October 2003, “At every turn, this administration is thumbing its nose at every president who’s gone before, back to Teddy Roosevelt. It is staggering how much environmental progress Bush is trying to undo. There is a cumulative sense over the last couple of years of a level of greed and exploitation encouraged by the White House that at some points of our history would have been the stuff of impeachment” (Lebrun). While both sides debate the appropriateness of federal and public policy, the environment continues to suffer at the hands of corporate exploitation and popular consumerism.

At the risk of sounding trite, and to steal a line from the eminently quotable Rodney King, I cannot resist asking, “Can’t we all just get along?” Is there a solution to the ever-increasing incidents of incivility, not only towards one another, but the bio-spheric community as well? In his insightful and thought-provoking essay, “On Confucian Civility,” Henry Rosemont, Jr. offers up the community-centered sense of respect for “other’s humanity” as a viable alternative to the individualism of Western society (Rosemont). Effectively arguing that classical Confucians sought to create the perfect society through “formal politeness,” Rosemont demonstrates both the practicality and value of viewing our fellow humans as companions on the road of life. As inherently social beings, we must treat one another in a way that reflects our relationality. This of course means that it is imperative that we recognize the fact that “other persons are not merely accidental or incidental to my goal of fully developing as a human being; they are essential to it” (Rosemont, 189). As a panacea to the problems of overindulgent, rampant individualism, Confucianism “may have much to teach us about civility” (197).

In the present essay, I would like both to support and to expand upon this notion of civility by taking recourse to China’s indigenous high religion, Daoism. Often criticized for its alleged amorality, particularly when compared to the Confucian tradition, Daoism in fact boasts a very elaborate ethical system, one that complements the insights of classical Confucianism while simultaneously expanding its vision to include the entire cosmos. Far from being a “religion for losers,” Daoism has commanded the devotion

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1 For example, the incidents at Vail, Colorado, and the University of Washington.
2 This was the depiction presented by a Boston University and Harvard trained Professor of Philosophy at Vietnam National University in March 2003. When I asked what role Daoism
of the Chinese for millennia, from the illiterate peasantry to the Emperors themselves. While contemporary Confucians often deride the tradition as mere superstition and charlatanry, Daoist practices and its priests continue to play an important role in the daily life of the Chinese, particularly in the countryside. In addition, much incivility and conflict, both personally and globally, appears to derive from a perceived challenge to one’s identity, often couched in terms of “I” or “us” versus “you” and “them.” Once again, the actions of Daoists over the centuries offer an alternative vision of personal or corporate identity: that of evolution or processualism.

The Daoist tradition, at least since the turn of the common era, placed tremendous emphasis on the value of civil behavior within the community. This is particularly evident in those schools that went on to create segregated communities, such as the early Taiping, Celestial Masters, and later monastic organizations. In sharp contrast to the romanticized Western vision of Daoism as an individualistic, mystically oriented tradition devoted to the liberation of the self from social constraints and mores, Daoist sectarian movements created elaborate systems of community oriented rules designed to ensure harmony with other people and the surrounding ecosystem.

Moreover, while classical Confucianism has little to say in regards to the environment or the world of animals, Daoism goes to great lengths to promote civility and respect towards the greater community of living beings. Confucius 孔夫子, at least as represented in the Lunyu 論語, placed far greater value on humanity than he did the world of nature. While we can tease an environmental ethic out of his writings, his own statements belie an interest in non-human life outside of their utility to humanity. Perhaps the best illustration comes in Book X, where we read: “The stables caught fire. The Master, on returning from court, asked, ‘Was anyone hurt?’ He did not ask about the horses” (Analects 10.17).

played in Vietnamese religion, he replied that it was simply the religion of losers, those who had failed the State sponsored exam system and fell back onto this easier and lesser form of religion.

3 See recent work by Kenneth Dean, and Ronnie Littlejohn and Erin Cline.
4 For example, the works of Benjamin Hoff. Even within the academy, we find depictions such as Robert Ellwood’s: Daoism began as a movement wherein one must be “true to what one is in the depths of one’s personal self—one must ‘get oneself together’ and ‘do one’s own thing...’ [while offering] a romantic, speculative approach open to nonrational, ‘mind-blowing’ possibilities” (Ellwood, 197, 204).
5 See for example Philip J. Ivanhoe’s “Early Confucianism and Environmental Ethics,” and other essays in Tucker and Berthrong.
Mencius 孟子 expresses a more sympathetic attitude, but one that reflects the debilitating effects of non-human suffering on the human observer rather than the nature of the animal itself. “The attitude of a gentleman towards animals is this: once having seen them alive, he cannot bear to see them die, and once having heard their cry, he cannot bear to eat their flesh. That is why the gentleman keeps his distance from the kitchen” (Mencius, I, A, 7, emphasis added). Interestingly, it is the “Neo-Confucian” scholar WANG Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529) who most forcefully articulates an ethics of responsibility not only to animals but the environment as well. Expanding on Mencius’ observations in Chuanxi lu 傳習錄 (Instructions for Practical Living), Wang declares that this feeling of pity …shows that his humanity forms one body with birds and animals. It may be objected that birds and animals are sentient beings as he is. But when he sees plants broken and destroyed, he cannot help a feeling of pity. This shows that his humanity forms one body with plants. It may be said that plants are living things as he is. Yet, when he sees tiles and stones shattered and crushed, he cannot help a feeling of regret. This shows that his humanity forms one body with tiles and stones. This means that even the mind of the small man necessarily has the humanity that forms one body with all. Such a mind is rooted in his Heaven-endowed nature…. (Wang, 272)

Of more than passing interest is the fact that Wang, while remaining a devoted Confucian scholar, spent much of his life pursuing various Daoist arts of longevity and spiritual cultivation. This is because rather than basing its civility and respect for others on mere utility, Daoists espouse an attitude derived from the intrinsic value of the world. Just as the western concepts of civility and individual rights find their roots in the inherent worth of humans as human, so too does the Daoist locate value in the very fact of existence.

In brief, the Daoist worldview rests on the fundamental principle of cosmic harmony and reciprocity. Humans hold an integral place within the larger scheme of the universe, and their actions both contribute to and challenge the inherent interconnectedness of the whole. Beyond the obvious ramifications in the realm of humanity, sins and acts of incivility reverberate throughout the entire cosmos emanating from and sustained by Dao. As the fourth century CE text Chisongzi zhongjie jing 赤松子中戒經 (Essential Precepts of Master Redpine) observes, “People reside right between the two [Heaven and Earth]. All their licentious intentions and passionate de-

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6 See Tu Weiming’s biography of Wang’s early life, 42-54 and 72-79.
sires, whatever they do or do not do, Heaven and Earth know all about it... when the people of the world commit violations, bad actions, or faults, or speak contrary words, Heaven’s way is no longer even; instead, it is bent and loses its spontaneity.” Even the simple act of swearing invites repercussions within the great “net” that is Dao. “Do not let your mouth spout loud sounds—cursing, reviling, scolding, or abusing. This will agitate Heaven and shake Earth, startle the spirits and terrify the demons.”

The Daoist ethic consistently reflects this sensibility, even going so far as to proclaim that transgressions committed by one individual carry over into subsequent lines of descendants, in some cases as far removed as the ninth generation. As Master Redpine revealed to the Yellow Emperor, commit “1000 evil deeds, and [one’s] sons and grandsons for generations will be malformed and of crooked limbs looking like maimed animals or wild birds.” While a certain degree of utility admittedly creeps in here, as one does not desire harm to come to future generations or disharmony to reign in Dao, it is nevertheless rooted in the conception of cosmic, rather than human, relationality.

Civility East and West: The 180 Precepts of Laojun and Washington’s Code of Civility

Regarding civility towards humans, interesting parallels can be drawn between Daoist precepts and those much discussed rules of civility copied by a young George Washington. In fact, several recent works on civility have suggested that a return to these rules would provide the panacea to our current state of affairs. Such a comparison not only highlights the value Daoists placed on human interrelatedness, but demonstrates that the tradition articulates civility in much the same way that we have come to understand the concept. Our focus now turns to the rules of behavior presented in a fifth century document of unknown provenance, the Laojun yibai bashi jie, or 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao, or 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao. As Livia Kohn has

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7 Daozang 道藏 185 2a, 5b translated in Kohn 2004a, 14
8 From the fifth century text Tianshì jiào jiēkē jīng 天時教戒科經 (Precepts and Rules Taught by the Celestial Master) Daozang 789, fasc. 563, translated in Kohn 2004c, 13.
9 Chìsōngzǐ zhōngjiē jīng 赤松子中戒經 (Essential Precepts of Master Redpine), translated in Kohn 2004a, 161. Also see my forthcoming work on corporate responsibility in ancient Judaism and medieval Daoism.
10 Washington 2004. Many have made the argument that these 16th century rules were instrumental in the formation of Washington’s character, considered at the time to be nearly irrefragable.
noted, this text is central to Daoist ethics, as “all other extensive community
codes recapitulate its rules in one form or another…” (Kohn 2004a, 139).
Prefaced by an account of Laozi’s adventures in the west teaching the “bar-
barians” the Buddha Dao, and a discussion he has with Lord Gan of Lan-
gye, the text contains a series of prohibitions and admonitions in a laconic,
single sentence format. Structurally, the text consists of 140 proscriptions
and forty admonitions.

Not unexpectedly, a large number of precepts deal with typical
prohibitions against stealing, debauchery, murder, untoward behavior with
women (such as traveling alone with a member of the opposite sex or fol-
lowing the same path up a mountain), and certain dietary restrictions (such
as eating meat and drinking alcohol). Of greater relevance to the present
work are the numerous references to interpersonal behavior both with the
community at large and individually. Herein we find the most compelling
parallels with western decorum and civility.

For example, in your conversations, you ought not to “speak about
the dark secrets of others” (no. 32), “praise others to their face and speak
evil of them behind their backs” (no. 34), “speak excessively or chatter”
(no. 111), nor should you “criticize or discuss the good or bad qualities of
what others eat and drink” (no. 133). Washington’s code of civility con-
tains similar admonitions: “Let your Discourse with men of Business be
Short and Comprehensive” (no. 35); “Let your Conversation be without
Malice or Envy, for ‘tis a Sign of a Tractable and Commendable Nature”
(58th); “Never express anything unbecoming, Nor Act against the Rules
Moral before your inferiours” (no. 59); “Speak not injurious Words nei-
ther in Jest nor Earnest Scoff at none although they give Occasion” (65th).
Additionally, both texts caution against the use of language that will inevita-
ably lead to discomfiture on the part of others through an inflation of your
own learning. From the Daoist perspective, one should never “wantonly
speak in fancy language, create divisions, or arouse jealousy” (no. 23), while
Washington advises that civility requires one to “Speak not in an unknown
Tongue in Company but in your own Language and that as those of quality
do and not as the Vulgar” (no. 72).

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11 The precepts have been translated by Kohn in 2004a, 138-146. The entire text is translated
in Hendrischke and Penny.
12 Translations from Hendrischke and Penny, except for no. 133, which is taken from Kohn,
2004a.
13 I have followed the convention of “No.__” for the 100 Precepts and “__th,” “__st” for
Washington’s remarks.
14 All quotations are taken from Washington 2004.
15 Kohn’s translation.
Perhaps just as importantly, the civil person is cautious as to the manner in which they converse with others. In this regard, physical proximity and personal comportment ought to be closely monitored. Washington includes several such rules, ranging from the need to stand when addressed, to the proper countenance and gestures appropriate to the occasion (e.g. no. 20: “The Gestures of the Body must be Suited to the discourse you are upon.”). Of particular interest is the 12th Rule: “Shake not the head, Feet, or Legs rowl not the Eys lift not one eyebrow higher than the other wry not the mouth, and bedew no mans face with your spittle, by appr[oaching too near] him [when] you Speak.” While not as explicit, the 180 Precepts also addresses this issue. For example, precepts number 71 and 72 prohibit Daoists from gaping at other people or sticking their tongue out at them. In keeping with a longstanding Daoist tradition, the 10th precept proscribes the eating of “the five pungent roots.” Typically understood as garlic, ginger, onions, leeks and scallions, these five strong vegetables (wuxin 五辛) were seen as the source of lewd and lascivious behavior, the cause of karmic repercussions, and internal distress. In addition, and most relevant for our present discussion, later monastic rules elaborate on the social consequences of eating these particular vegetables. Although generally advocating a vegetarian diet, Daoist monastic codes point to the offensive nature of the wuxin when in close proximity to others. As Kohn has summarized, the Daoxue keyi (Rules and Observances for the Student of Dao) warns that ingesting the five pungent vegetables “leads to a diminishing of purity in the inner organs and thus to bad breath, which impacts on Daoist discipline, community cohesion, and respect among outside supporters. Bad breath is especially harmful when one attends Daoist services, sends a petition to the gods, or lectures to a group of commoners” (Kohn 2003, 127).

Of course, the subjects about which the civilized Daoist and gentleman speak are also carefully circumscribed. Undue curiosity and intrusion into the private affairs of others ranks high in the lists of offensive conversations. Daoists therefore are to avoid inquiring “about the marriages of other people” (no. 28), discussing “other peoples’ faults or guess and suspect a hundred different issues” (no. 31), and seeking “to know of state or military events” (no. 16). Privacy also extends to the correspondence of others and their home life. Thus, it is improper to “open and read other people’s letters” (no. 103) or to “bore holes in the walls of other people’s houses to spy on the women and girls inside” (no. 99). Similarly, we read in Washington’s rules that the gentleman ought not be “hasty to believe flying Reports to the Disparag[ement of any]” (no. 50) or be “immodest in urging
your Friends to Discover a Secret” (no. 60). Indeed, “Be not Curious to Know the Affairs of Others neither approach those that Speak in Private” (no. 81) and “come not near the Books or Writings of Another so as to read them unless desired or give your opinion on them unask’d also look not nigh when another is writing a Letter” (no. 18).

Applying our maxims to Theresa Heinz-Kerry and Dick Cheney, both were in violation of the rules of decorum. As the *180 Precepts* admonishes, “Do not slander, yell at, or curse anyone” (no. 48), being certain that you “Do not give rise to anger and rage” (no. 64). Even if, as Cheney perceived his encounter with Leahy, “others abuse you, you should simply hear it through. Do not respond” (no. 167) and “If others slander you, you should simply cultivate yourself and gain enlightenment from the Great Dao. Do not do injury to your essence or spirit through distress” (no. 168). Likewise, Washington’s rules caution us to “Use no Reproachfull Language against any one neither Curse nor Revile” (no. 49) and “Take all Admonitions thankfully in what Time or Place Soever given but afterwards not being culpable take a Time [&] Place convenient to let him know it that gave them” (no. 46). Conversely, “If someone sings your praises, do not get overjoyed” (*180 Precepts*, no. 171). Likewise, Washington observes, “A Man ought not to value himself of his Achievements, or rare Qualities of wit; much less of his riches Virtue or Kindred” (no. 63). In this regard, modesty in one’s accomplishments is paramount.

Modesty is also required in one’s manner of dress and private toileting. Men and women should be frugal in their wardrobes, owning “no more than three sets of clothes” (no. 163); nor should a faithful Daoist “covet or begrudge material goods” (no. 22). Or, as Washington urged, “In your Apparel be Modest and endeavour to accommodate Nature, rather than to procure Admiration keep to the Fashio[n] of your equals Such as are Civil and orderly with respect to Times and Places” (no. 52). At all times, the gentleman should not “Wear…Cloths, foul, unript or Dusty…” and assiduously avoid “Playing…the Peacock, looking every where about you, to See if be well Deck’t, if your shoes fit well if your Stokings sit neatly, and Cloths handsomely” (nos. 51, 54).

Perhaps it goes without saying that good manners require care in public appearances. One should neither “go naked or bathe in the open” (no. 55), nor “urinate while standing” or “on living plants or in water that people will drink” (nos. 66, 116). The *Rules of Civility* advise us to “Put not

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16 Translations from Kohn 2004.
17 Translations from Hendrischke and Penny.
off your Cloths in the presence of Others, nor go out your Chamber half Drest” (no. 7); indeed, in any company, “Shift not yourself in the Sight of others” and “shew Nothing to your Friend that may affright him” (nos. 11, 3, taking some liberties with interpretation in the latter case).

Social interactions are also reflected in the respective rules concerning lodging and dining. Deference to others, whether they be a superior or inferior, demonstrates the profound respect and value of community espoused by Daoists and Washingtonian civility. Therefore, never “select the best accommodation or room and most comfortable bed to sleep” (no. 86) and “When you arrive at someone’s house do not hope to be fed by your host if he is a common man” (no. 160). While supping, Frank Palacious would have done well to heed the following advice: “To be able to exclude all meat of living beings and the six domestic animals from the diet is considered best” and “whenever someone offers you a meal, you should always pray for the donor to be blessed and that all people will eat their fill” (nos. 176, 154). Washington meanwhile admits that while “Entertaining any one at table it is decent to present him wt. meat;” however, “Be not Angry at table whatever happens & if you have reason to be Shew it not but on a Cheerfull Countenance especially if there be Strangers for Good Humour makes one Dish of Meat a Feast” (nos. 93, 105).

Finally, both traditions agree with the Confucian emphasis on filiality and respect for elders. Albeit not as pronounced or fundamental to the rules as Rosemont demonstrates it to be in the Confucian tradition, neither Daoists nor Washington’s code belie the importance of honoring one’s parents and holding them in the highest possible esteem. For Washington, I think it fair to surmise that the western emphasis on individualism tempers the responsibility to parents, while at the same time that duty remains significant given the Biblical injunction to honor one’s father and mother. On the other hand, the Daoist perspective subsumes and downplays filial piety under the overarching theme of respect for all, and the greater cosmic responsibility incumbent upon practitioners. Hence, the 180 Precepts enjoin the faithful to take care that they “do not treat the old without proper respect” (no. 57). At the same time, within the community at large, “You should not show partiality to members of your clan,” “show favour to those with whom you are close,” or “show favouritism to your disciples” (nos. 37, 61, 81). Once again, communal relationality is as, if not more, important than familial. For Washington, the familial responsibility is intimately connected with the Judeo-Christian conception of God: “When you speak of
On Being a Civil[ized] Daoist  303

God or his Attributes, let it be Seriously & [wt.] Reverence. Honour & Obey your Natural Parents although they be Poor” (no. 108).

As noted above, the Daoist sense of civility expands well beyond the human realm to encompass the natural world with which we have an intimate relationship. Whereas we must be circumspect in avoiding offensive behavior in our dealings with other people, many of the same rules apply when speaking about our responsibility to the cosmos at large. Again, this reflects the Daoist conviction that we are simply one element within a much wider net of being. Repercussions related to our actions, over which we have complete control, spread throughout the nexus of space and time. Daoists therefore must extend their civility to the land and the entire world of sentient beings. Setting the tone for a Daoist ecological ethic, we read in the 4th precept that one “should not harm or kill anything.”

On the environmental front, the 180 Precepts enjoin us to not “set fire to uncultivated fields and mountain forests,” “improperly fell trees,” “pick herbs or flowers,” or “dig the earth or spoil mountains and rivers” (nos. 14, 18, 19, 47). Even bathing ought to be done with a proper sense of reverence for the source of water: “You should not improperly make light of entering a river or the sea to bathe” (no. 121). Several injunctions can be interpreted as combining social and natural concerns. For example, draining “rivers and marshes” and blocking up “ponds or wells” has both environmental and community ramifications.

As for sentient beings, the 180 Precepts devote considerable space to the proscription of wantonly harming animals, insects and other defenseless life. At the risk of excessive quotation, it is instructive to see the variety of ways in which Lord Lao sought to protect the world of sentient nonhumans. Beginning with the six domestic animals, for whom humans could be expected to have the closest sense of relationality, the 180 Precepts enjoin us that we should neither “step on or kick the six domestic animals,” nor “wantonlly whip” them (nos. 49, 129). It is likewise inappropriate to “ride a horse or drive a carriage without good reason” (no. 130). Just as one sins by spying on women (and presumably men), so too we ought not

18 It should be noted that later Daoist codes of morality contain more extensive references to the concept of filial piety. For example, the Yuqing jing 于清經 (Scripture of Jade Purity) opens with the admonition: “Do not offend against your father and mother, teachers and elders, or in any way disobey orders in an unfilial manner” (Kohn 2004c, 140); the Chuzhen shi jie wen 初真十戒文 (Ten Precepts of Initial Perfection) likewise opens by declaring: “Do not be disloyal or unfilial, without benevolence or good faith. Always exhaust your allegiance to your lord and family, be sincere in your relation to the myriad beings” (Kohn 2004c, 141).

19 The horse, cow, sheep, chicken, dog and pig.
“watch the six domestic animals copulate” (no. 58). Given that no substantive harm can come from such an activity, we are left with two viable reasons for such a prohibition. Either such a sight will stir unhealthy passions within the observer, or it violates the same sense of privacy and decorum that we see applied to human activities. Birds also deserve respect. Thus, it is wrong to “wantonly climb trees to plunder nests and destroy birds’ eggs” or to “catch birds or beasts in cages or nets” (nos. 97, 98). Paralleling the precept concerning humans (“Do not startle other people, causing them to be scared and afraid,” no. 89), one ought not “startle birds and beasts” (no. 132).

In light of the events in Wisconsin, much trouble could have been avoided had all abided by the following rules: “Do not fish or hunt and thereby harm and kill the host of living beings;” “If someone kills birds and beasts, fish or other living beings for you, do not eat them;” and “If something has been killed for food, do not eat it” (nos. 79, 172, 173). And of course, the civil person does not “engage in killing,” “encourage others to kill,” or “kill another in hatred;” instead, “If someone harms you, be doubly good to him” (nos. 39, 40, 42, 169). Another fourth century text, the Nüqing guilü 女青鬼律 (Demon Statutes of Nüqing) assigns the heaviest possible retribution to the taking of any sentient life. Based on the idea that Heaven subtracts from our allocated days of life for every sin committed, the Demon Statutes warn that to “destroy any being given life by Heaven, wanton kill running beasts, or with pellets shoot down flying birds” warrants a deduction of 3000 days (Kohn 2004c, 8). Of the twenty-two prohibitions listed, only wandering about the countryside and “promising to dissolve disasters you cannot in fact prevent and thus causing disruption and confusion” carries a heavier penalty of 3000 days and seven subsequent generations of trouble (7). Once again, however, we see the importance of maintaining communal harmony. At all times, the paramount concern is the welfare, happiness and stability of the community as a whole, whether understood as human or the cosmos itself.

Civility, Identity & Accommodation

Bart Simpson (speaking of Principal Skinner after being fired): “It’s weird, Lisa: I miss him as a friend, but I miss him even more as an enemy.”

Lisa Simpson: “I think you need Skinner, Bart. Everybody needs a nemesis. Sherlock Holmes had his Dr. Moriarty, Mountain Dew has its
How do we then apprehend the Daoist conception of civility, and what is it about the tradition that allows for such an attitude of respect and fellow-feeling on a cosmic level? I would suggest that a large part comes from the Daoist conception of identity. Conflict and incivility, both personally and globally, often appears to arise as the result of challenges to a sense of identity. Wishing to maintain a static conception of selves and culture, typically located within the context of a religious or cultural orthodoxy, humans have traditionally resisted the forces of social change. In our desire to experience individual and social continuity, we construct rigid systems of thought and practice designed to protect ourselves from the intrusion of outside, alien, forces. Additionally, as exemplified by Bart Simpson above, we often construct personal identity in juxtaposition to perceived “others,” those to whom we can point as an opposite, or nemesis. In some cases, our own individual character gets lost in the attempt to define ourselves solely in opposition to that perceived threat.

Challenges to our cherished identity therefore often produce a backlash of violence, incivility and charges of heresy, heterodoxy and infidelism. Given today’s sweeping global changes, how do we combat such identity crises and the resultant conflict? Taking a cue from Daoism, I suggest that we begin viewing identity as a process that allows for a rich plurality of identities within a global community. Notoriously difficult to define, Daoism has been the single major religious tradition that has avoided the need to declare its rivals heretical or anathema. Instead, Daoism has maintained an amorphous identity, one that has evolved over its two thousand year history in intimate interaction with Confucianism, Buddhism, popular religion and ethnic creeds. The challenge to its identity has been met by employing the continuous interaction of the forces of differentiation and integration, constantly changing in alignment with political, economic and social developments. Rather than resistance and the creation of a moribund orthodoxy, Daoism has revised its identity through the ongoing adoption of new and vital forms.

Aside from the examples provided above, one of the most telling examples of the rigidity of personal identity, and the resulting conflict, is the relationship between the United States and members of the extremist Is-

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20 Much of this analysis is deeply indebted to the work presented in Kohn and Roth 2002. I utilize both their introduction and presentation of Hans Mol’s characteristics of religious identity as a framework for this discussion.
lamic positions, such as Al Quaeda. In their respective analyses of the causes and aftermath of September 11, President Bush and Osama Bin Laden point to the irreconcilable differences between the competing identities. As Bruce Lincoln so insightfully observes, both implicitly and explicitly establish a kind of Manichaean duality of absolute evil versus righteous purity. As Bush characterized the beginning of military action, “We’re a peaceful nation...defend[ing] not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear.... In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocents, they have become outlaws and murderers, themselves” (Bush, 100). Bin Laden makes the distinction even more clearly. Calling upon all Muslims to join the struggle against US imperialism and “defend his religion,” Bin Laden announces that “these events have divided the world into two camps, the camp of the faithful and the camp of infidels” (Bin Laden, 103). Throughout their speeches, and by way of conclusion, both invoke the presence and support of God. President Bush modifies the usual closing, “God Bless America,” by concluding, “May God continue to bless America” (Bush, 101). For his part, Bin Laden continuously alludes to Allah’s protection and sanctioning of the attacks, claiming in his opening that “America [is] struck by God Almighty in one of its vital organs,” and petitioning that “God shield us and you from them” (Bin Laden, 103). This stark division of the world into “us” and “them” and “you” is based largely on the creation of irreconcilable identities tenaciously clung to and posited in much the same way that Bart views his relationship with Principal Skinner. “Our” identity, as individual and collective defenders of righteousness, depends upon the clear delineation of “them” as the nemesis.

How do we as individuals and communities combat such rigid characterizations and avoid the resultant conflict? Can we create identities that do not depend on defining ourselves in opposition to the “other”? I believe that an alternative mode of understanding personal and collective identity is available, and can be found in what Russell Kirkland has recently characterized as the “enduring tradition” of Daoism (Kirkland). As he and many other recent scholars have pointed out, defining Daoism and who qualifies as a Daoist, is at times a bewildering enterprise. Much ink has been spilled over the issue, in large part because we continue to insist that there must be an ongoing essence of the tradition, or signpost of “difference” that demarcates a “Daoist” from, at least within China, a “Buddhist” or “Confucian” or “popular religionist.” Our inability to locate such demarcations, I would suggest, is not due to a lack of knowledge (although we are
only beginning to study Daoism in a truly phenomenological manner) or sophistication, but rather that the tradition does not embrace such rigid dichotomies. Daoist identity is not a static, “us” versus “them” construction; instead, the “enduring tradition” is one that sees identity as an evolutionary process, adapting and incorporating a variety of “foreign” elements into its collective sensibility.

As noted above, Daoism has never seriously entertained notions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy or heresy. Part of that is the result of a lack of institutionalization (in contrast to what we saw in the medieval European church), but even when Daoism became the “state religion” of China or one of its powerful “states” (here I’m thinking particularly of the so-called “theocracy” established by KOU Qianzhi 寇謙之 in the Northern Wei Court, 425-451), no attempt was made to eradicate or convert “non-Daoists.” The history of the tradition is one in which we see a continuous adaptation to changing social and cultural conditions, including the introduction of foreign religious traditions such as Buddhism. Accommodation, rather than suppression or even merger, marks the continuing evolution of Daoist identity. In addition, while quintessentially Chinese in origin and spirit, Daoism has both embraced and included such traditionally marginalized groups as women and the vast number of ethnic minorities within China.\(^\text{21}\)

Utilizing anthropologist Hans Mol’s characterization of religious identity as a combination of “objectivation” (“tendency to sum up the variegated elements of mundane experience in the transcendent frame of reference where they can appear in a more orderly, more consistent and more timeless way”), “commitment” (focused emotion or emotional attachment to a specific focus of identity…. Anchoring [them] in a salient system of meaning”), “ritual” (as a “means of articulating and reiterating a system of meaning”) and mythology (a “shorthand for basic personal and social experiences”), we can see how Daoism has consistently resisted the temptation to create a dichotomous sense of identity.\(^\text{22}\)

A couple of examples can serve to illustrate this tendency. As discussed by Kohn and Roth, throughout its history, the Daoist tradition has objectivized its fundamental worldview via the medium of scriptures. Unlike the western traditions, however, which tend to view their sacred writings as singular (\textit{Hebrew Bible, Christian Bible, Qur’an}, though obviously consisting of several separate “books”) and closed due to the cessa-

\(^{21}\) See for example Kleeman and Kohn and Despeaux.
\(^{22}\) Hans Mol as cited in Kohn and Roth.
tion of revelation, the Daoist canon (Daozang) contains over 1400 volumes, inclusive of texts normally classified as Confucian, Moist, Legalist, etc. While the majority of these texts harmonize with the basic assumption of a universal underlying force (Dao 道) within the cosmos, how that force is understood and “communed” with differs dramatically. Rather than a single unified body of philosophical or doctrinal writings, the Daozang exhibits a bewildering array of texts deemed philosophical, ritualistic, quasi-political, health-oriented, etc. etc. New revelations and pronouncements continued throughout the development of the tradition, ranging from the stereotypically “foundational” texts Daodejing 道德經 and Zhuangzi 莊子 to the Tianshi 天師 (Heavenly Masters) revelations of Lord Lao to ZHANG Daoling 張道陵 of 142 CE, the Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity) revelations to YANG Xi 楊羲 in the fourth century, the Lingbao 靈寶 (Numinous Treasure) transmissions of the fourth century, and numerous successive transmissions and revelations. In fact, far from being a closed canon, the Daozang includes new texts from as late as the early twentieth century.

Commitment is located in the traditional Chinese practice of establishing lineages. In this respect, a certain degree of continuity prevails among the vast number of “schools” that make up the Daoist tradition. Incorporating historical, legendary and otherworldly figures, some lineages trace themselves back as far as the early Heavenly Masters (e.g. the Zhengyi 正一 tradition of southern China) and some to the legendary Laozi’s companion, Yin Xi. Such lineages seek to preserve the foundation of the schools’ practices and doctrines, but most actively incorporate elements and doctrines from other traditions, both within and outside the “Daoist” tradition itself. For example, while adhering to the fundamental principles of Daoist cosmological interests, the Lingbao school very self-consciously and openly added numerous Buddhist elements to its practice and sensibility, including the adaptation of the Bodhisatvva ideal, meditative practices, and the Hindu (via Buddhism) notion of world cycles (kalpas) inexorably moving through a series of declining ages or kalpas.

Ritual is a vitally important component of Daoist life. The everyday practices of “lay” Daoists and the “priesthood” are punctuated by the continuously evolving Daoist sensibility of process and accommodation. From the incorporation of Buddhist mudras (hand gestures) and mantras (sacred utterances), to funeral rites, temple offerings, and meditative practices, Daoism has consistently sought to weave “competing” practices into its own rich history. While actively seeking to distance itself from popular blood sacrifices, seeing them as barbaric and a violation of the sanctity of life, Daoist ritual from at least the Song Dynasty (960 CE) has allowed for
the inclusion of meat offerings in community rituals, albeit carefully placed outside the most sacred environs of the ritual. In present day Fujian province, “ordained” Daoist priests such as HUANG Zhi Peng, Master of the Huang lineage of the Zhengyi tradition, perform both Daoist and Buddhist rituals on a daily basis.23 Even the great compendium of Daoist monastic rules, the Fengdao Kejie 奉道科戒, compiled in the 6th century as a manual designed to codify an “orthodox” Daoist monasticism and rectify the author’s belief that Daoist practice had become corrupt (Kohn 2004b, 74), contains elements drawn from various popular and Buddhist practices. Most interestingly within the context of this discussion, amidst the highly detailed instructions for the construction of temples, altars, banners, vestments, etc., we find the conciliatory phrases, “in all cases following what is locally suitable” and “each case follows the relevant present circumstances…and available resources.”24

Mythically, Daoism has also actively incorporated different mythic structures. The best example comes in the figure of Laozi 老子 himself. Traditionally identified as the author of the Daodejing, the Old Master was originally seen as a scribe or cataloger in the imperial library of the 5th century BCE who grew disgusted with China’s strife and rode to the west, leaving behind his wisdom in a two-part manuscript. By the early Han Dynasty, Laozi has been transformed into a celestial being, Laojun 老君 (Lord Lao), who appears to ZHANG Daoling and transmits to him new revelations. Further elaboration will transform him into a manifestation of the Dao itself, and narrate how, much like the Hindu avatars, Laojun will periodically appear on the earth in times of crisis, bringing revelations of salvation and goodwill to humanity.25 By the Tang Dynasty, Laozi (whose surname was reported to be Li), was claimed as the direct ancestor of the Li family, founders of the new dynasty.

Finally, from the main text under discussion here, the 180 Precepts of Lord Lao, we find these words of accommodation and deference. “Whenever you enter another state, first ask about the local prohibitions and taboos,” and upon entering “anyone’s home, first ask about personal and taboo names of the family venerables and elders” (nos. 158, 159). Far from imposing one’s own will or personal beliefs on another, Daoists are encouraged to respect the local rites, taboos and prohibitions. Rather than

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23 Reference the fieldwork of Littlejohn and Cline, partially published as “Taishan’s Tradition.”
24 Kohn 2004b, 117 for an example.
25 See the Laojun bianhua wujijjing (Scripture of Lord Lao’s Infinite Transformations), discussed in Kohn 1998.
viewing them as alien others to be converted, defeated or otherwise mali-
gined, civility demands understanding, wisdom and accommodation.

Numerous other examples could be provided from throughout Daoist history. This short survey should suffice however, to demonstrate both the tolerance and adaptability of a tradition notoriously difficult to pin down. What is Daoism? While rooted in a conviction that Dao permeates all things, and that humanity must in some manner harmonize with it, that harmonization can take many forms that complement, and coexist, with one another. Rather than defining itself in opposition to an utterly foreign, and despised other, Daoism and the resultant Daoist identity reflects the hoped for truths of peace, civility and acceptance. Perhaps we can all “get along” by heeding the words and history of China’s indigenous high religion.

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In his classic essay, “State and Society in the Xunzi: A Philosophical Commentary,”¹ Henry Rosemont, Jr. boldly challenges students of Western political philosophy to consider the merits of Chinese thinkers. He argues that the ancient Confucian text, Xunzi, contains a social ideal that is undemocratic yet can withstand tough criticisms from one of the foremost proponents of democracy in the twentieth century, Sir Karl Popper, in his now-famous work, The Open Society and Its Enemies. Rosemont writes:

Popper’s two main opponents—Plato and Marx—were philosophical pushovers for him when compared to Xunzi, and . . . [Xunzi] faced squarely and attempted to answer a number of significant philosophical questions that have all too often been begged. (Rosemont, 3)

In particular, Rosemont claims that Xunzi starts from a realistic assumption of “harsh meteorological, topographic and soil environments” such that “without large-scale cooperative public works the recalcitrant . . . earth will not surrender a bounty sufficient to nurture the population” (2), and that this assumption leads Xunzi to articulate an un-democratic ideal. In contrast, says Rosemont, there is a “minimal level of economic affluence most Western philosophers since Plato have unfortunately taken for granted” (3), and this latter assumption crucially underlies the attractiveness of democratic ideals and the force of criticisms against un-democratic societies such as Popper’s.

¹ I would like to thank Stephen M. Gardiner, P.J. Ivanhoe, and Gordon Mower for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay, though I have not been able to incorporate all their suggestions fully.

¹ Rosemont’s essay was originally published in Monumenta Serica 29 (1970-1), 38-78, using the Wade-Giles romanization system, but was later reprinted in Kline and Ivanhoe, using pinyin. All references here are to the reprint.
Rosemont’s claims about both Xunzi and the Western philosophical tradition are not uncontroversial, but rather than focus on criticizing or defending them here, I want to argue that other factors not emphasized by Rosemont also importantly shape Xunzi’s view. To highlight these factors, I want to re-visit the comparison between Plato and Xunzi implied by Rosemont in the first remark cited above. My reason for comparing them, rather than discussing Xunzi alone, is that Xunzi and Plato justify their respective un-democratic ideals in quite similar ways. Hence, setting them side-by-side and seeking subtle differences within their similarities will offer us a more nuanced account of Xunzi’s view. Furthermore, I will suggest that the features of Xunzi’s thought to be discussed below may make his view somewhat more palatable than Plato’s and more resistant to Popper’s attacks. In that sense, my aim is to supplement and expand upon Rosemont’s essay.

I. Plato’s Anti-Democratic Stance in the Republic

Popper targets Plato because Plato so clearly rejects democracy; the Republic overtly ranks it as the next-to-worst government, just above tyranny. In examining why Plato is anti-democratic, we must first note that for Plato, democracy is not just rule by the people, but more importantly rule by the poor. Plato explicitly focuses on this point, for he has Socrates remark (echoing the bloody history recorded by Thucydides) that democracy develops out of oligarchy “when the poor are victorious, killing some of their [oligarchic] opponents and expelling others, and giving the rest an equal share in ruling” (Republic, 557A). To understand Plato’s anti-democratic stance, we must thus ask: what exactly is wrong with rule by the poor?

In one sense, nothing is wrong with rule by the poor, and to a certain extent Plato even prefers it. Surprising as that statement may seem, recall that in outlining the ideal city, Plato strips the guardians of all wealth:

[Socrates:] First, none of [the guardians] should possess any private property beyond what is wholly necessary. Second, none of them

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2 Due to limitations of space, I cannot defend my reading of Plato in detail here, but my interpretation, especially concerning Plato’s view of non-philosophers, largely follows Bobonich, 2002, so readers may consult that work for further explanation. Bobonich argues that Plato’s Laws displays a more optimistic view of non-philosophers than the Republic and therefore represents a significant shift in Plato’s position. However, here I consider only the Republic, again due to limitations of space, but also because the Republic suffices for highlighting the features of Xunzi’s view upon which I want to focus.

3 All translations from Plato are from Cooper, 1997.
should have a house or storeroom that isn’t open for all to enter at will. Third, whatever sustenance moderate and courageous warrior-athletes require in order to have neither shortfall nor surplus in a given year they’ll receive by taxation on the other citizens. . . . We’ll tell them that they always have gold and silver of a divine sort in their souls as a gift from the gods and so have no further need of human gold. Indeed, we’ll tell them that it’s impious for them to defile this divine possession by any admixture of such gold. . . . Hence, for them alone among the city’s population, it is unlawful to . . . handle gold or silver. They mustn’t be under the same roof as it, wear it as jewelry, or drink from gold or silver goblets. . . . But if they acquire private land, houses, and currency themselves, they’ll be household managers and farmers instead of guardians—hostile masters of the other citizens instead of their allies. They’ll spend their whole lives hating and being hated, plotting and being plotted against . . . and they’ll hasten both themselves and the whole city to almost immediate ruin. (Republic, 416D-417B)

While the guardians are not so desperately poor as to lack food and clothing, clearly their material wealth is to be extremely low, much like the poor who rule in a democracy. As the end of the passage states, Plato imposes this restriction because wealth can actually become an obstacle to good government, so that it is actually better for the rulers to be poor. Hence, it is not the poverty of the people per se that leads Plato to object to democracy.

Rather, what Plato finds objectionable about the poor who rule in a democracy is their ignorance, in particular their ignorance of what is good. This point is apparent from the famous image of the cave in book VII of the Republic. There Plato makes it clear that only philosophers can grasp the Form of Good, and therefore only they should rule, whereas “the uneducated who have no experience of truth [i.e. the Form] . . . will never adequately govern a city” (519B). Of course, this criticism applies to all forms of constitution other than philosophical aristocracy, but Plato seems to have in mind especially democratic rule. For in talking about the prisoners in the cave, Socrates says, “as for anyone who tried to free them and lead them upward [i.e. through philosophy], if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn’t they kill him?” (517A) which seems an unmistakable reference to Socrates’ demise at the hands of the Athenian democracy.

One must note that the ignorance of the Good of which Plato speaks involves not merely ignorance of what constitutes good government, but also of a person’s own good. This, too, is implied in the image of the

4 At this point in the dialogue, the distinction between auxiliaries and philosopher-kings has not yet been drawn, but when the distinction is drawn later, this restriction on wealth clearly applies to the philosophers as well.
cave. In particular, the prisoners fail to realize that they are prisoners and lead a miserable life. Consequently, they will attempt to kill the philosopher who tries to free them, because they do not understand that he is trying to give them a better life. Thus, the ignorant are incapable not only of governing a city well, but also of running their own lives well.5

This last thought is especially important for understanding Plato’s rejection of democracy. In his view, since the ignorant cannot achieve their good on their own, they should submit to the guidance of those who know better, much like how sick people submit to a doctor’s medical judgment. The clearest expression of this view is perhaps Socrates’ remark that “agreement between the naturally worse and the naturally better as to which of the two [i.e. the better] is to rule . . . in the city” (432A) is a virtue, namely “moderation” (σοφροσύνη).

However, the mere fact of people’s ignorance would not by itself justify a non-democratic constitution. For if everyone could be equally educated to grasp the Form of Good, there would be no need for some to submit to the guidance of others. Rather, as the last passage cited shows, one further important assumption underlies Plato’s view, namely that some people are by nature incapable of grasping the truth, and therefore should not make important decisions about their own welfare or that of others.

In sum, Plato’s opposition to democracy depends heavily on his views about people’s capacity for knowledge and ability to live well guided by their own judgments. Thus, when examining Xunzi’s ideals, we should consider to what extent he shares Plato’s views, if at all.

II. Xunzi’s Un-Democratic Ideal

In early China, democracy was an unknown option—none of the various states had a democratic constitution, nor did any of Xunzi’s philosophical rivals suggest anything like it. Thus, in articulating his political ideals, Xunzi is not consciously rejecting democracy as Plato does. Instead, democracy is something he overlooks, and therefore it would be misleading to call him anti-democratic. Nonetheless, his ideal government is a form of dynastic kingship, so it does not seem unfair to say that he is un-democratic. Since Xunzi does not explicitly reject democracy, anything we say about how he might have reacted to proposals for democratic government must be

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5 The myth of Er at the end of the Republic can also be read as dramatically illustrating the idea that ignorance of the Good hinders the individual’s pursuit of his or her own well-being. For a persuasive statement of this interpretation, see Bobonich, 56-58.
somewhat speculative. Still, he appears unlikely to have been very open to the idea. Let me try to explain why.

First, Rosemont is right that Xunzi has a dark view of the conditions from which society arose, though I would suggest that for Xunzi the dire quality of the situation perhaps has less to do with poor economic conditions such as “harsh meteorological, topographic and soil environments” and more to do with other pressures and our inability to cope with them because of a tendency to fall into contention that Xunzi attributes to us. Xunzi envisions human beings as engaged in competition with animals, a competition that we as individuals cannot win alone:

[Humans] are not as strong as oxen or as fast as horses, but oxen and horses are used by them. How is this so? I say it is because humans are able to form communities while the animals cannot. Why are humans able to form communities? I say it is because of social divisions. . . . [If they] make social divisions, they will be harmonized. If harmonized, they will be unified. If unified, they will be strong. If strong, they will be able to overcome the animals. . . . And so human life cannot be without community. If they form communities but are without social divisions, they will struggle with each other. If they struggle, there will be chaos. If there is chaos, they will disband. If they disband, they will be weak. If weak, they cannot overcome the animals. (HYIS 29/9/70-74, HKCS 9/39/10-12)

This passage emphasizes the need for “social divisions” (分 fen), and the rest of Xunzi’s text makes clear that the divisions he conceives require a hierarchy, including the establishment of a single ruler over the entire state. However, hierarchy itself is not incompatible with democracy; in American democracy, for instance, we have designated “leaders” with decision-making powers that are denied to others. Such hierarchy is compatible with democracy, because the citizens themselves still determine (directly or indirectly) who occupies these positions. Thus, there is apparently a gap in Xunzi’s argument; the need for collective efforts and hierarchy does not itself entail that society must be un-democratic.

Xunzi does have a way to fill the gap, though, and it closely resembles Plato’s view. The crucial step is that Xunzi thinks sound government requires a certain kind of knowledge:

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6 All translations from Xunzi are my own. References follow the numbering in the two main concordances to the text, the Harvard-Yenching Index Series (HYIS: Hung 1950) and the Chinese University of Hong Kong Institute of Chinese Studies Ancient Chinese Texts Concordance Series (HKCS: Lau and Chen 1996).
If the heart does not know the Way, it will not approve of the Way, but will rather approve what is not the Way. . . . If one chooses people using a heart that does not approve of the Way, one is sure to accord with people who do not follow the Way, and one will not know to accord with people who do follow the Way. To use a heart that does not approve of the Way and join together with people who do not follow the Way when judging people who do follow the Way—this is the root of chaos. . . . I say: the heart must know the Way, and only then will it . . . be able to keep to the Way and reject what is not the Way. . . . Thus, the essential thing for good order rests in knowing the Way. (HYIS 79/21/30 – 80/21/34, HKCS 21/103/18-25)

Here Xunzi probably has in mind a king trying to choose his ministers, but the point applies with equal force to anybody. Hence, if the common people are given a choice of leaders, but are ignorant of the Way, they will not choose well, and chaos will result. Furthermore, on the view presented in this passage, since those ignorant of the Way should be excluded from government, so too the common people should be excluded from power, if they do not know the Way.

What does Xunzi think about the common people's ability to know the Way? More optimistic than Plato, he insists that “Anyone on the streets can become a Yu [i.e. a sage]” (HYIS 89/23/60-61, HKCS 23/116/6). Since becoming a sage requires knowing the Way, this claim implies that anyone can come to grasp the Way. However, even if in principle it is possible for anyone to know the Way, Xunzi does not expect that everyone will in fact achieve such knowledge. He repeatedly stresses that understanding the Way requires a long and arduous process of cultivation, and he clearly thinks that few people will actually engage in such learning and successfully carry it through to the end. Xunzi’s statement that “The people can easily be unified by means of the Way, but one cannot share one’s reasons with them” (HYIS 84/22/34, HKCS 22/110/1) further supports this point. Xunzi explicitly denounces secretiveness as a general method of governing, so the most plausible explanation for this remark is that he thinks even under the guidance of a sage, the common people simply will not be able to

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7 It is uncertain whether this claim includes women, because in classical Chinese the word ren 人, here translated as “anyone,” sometimes refers just to males, and sometimes to both sexes. If Xunzi intends only the former, he would be less optimistic than Plato in a way, since in the Republic Socrates clearly does include women among the class of philosopher-rulers. The Xunzi simply does not offer a clear judgment of women’s moral potential, so for the remainder of the paragraph “anyone” is meant to include at least all men, but not necessarily women, holding in abeyance a final judgment of Xunzi’s view about women.

8 Cf. HYIS 65/18/1-10, HKCS 18/83/11-21.
understand the ruler’s reasons, i.e. the Way, so trying to share these reasons will be ineffective or even counter-productive.  

Ultimately, Xunzi’s demand that the ruler must know the Way, together with his view that even in the ideal state the common people will not grasp it, explain his preference for an un-democratic rule. To this extent, his reasoning mirrors Plato’s. For both, the ignorant cannot be allowed to rule or to determine who will rule, because otherwise chaos will result and society will collapse, which would endanger human survival.  

Rather, those with the appropriate knowledge must rule, and only they should determine who participates in the government, because only they can adequately distinguish the wise from the ignorant, whereas the ignorant cannot. This last fact, combined with the fact that the wise will be few and far between, rules out democracy, and only rule by wise aristocrats and/or monarchs—be they sage-kings or philosopher-kings—is left.  

While Plato’s and Xunzi’s views share this general structure, their political ideals also differ significantly in numerous ways. Given the complex multitude of factors influencing their positions—cultural background, economic situation, intellectual environment, etc.—it seems unwise to isolate a single difference as the one point that accounts for all divergences between them. Nevertheless, since the problem of ignorance plays an important role in explaining their adoption of un-democratic ideals, below I want to consider how their different views of ignorance help explain at least some differences in their political views.

III. Ignorance and its Consequences

When we examine the relations between ignorant subjects and wise rulers in the ideal governments of Plato and Xunzi, we find that in some ways a much greater gulf separates them on Plato’s side than on Xunzi’s. To see this point, we must inspect more closely the objects of people’s ignorance and the consequences of ignorance for those lacking wisdom.

As noted earlier, in Plato’s case the crucial item that people fail to know is the Form of Good. For Plato, it is participation in this Form that makes anything else good, so those ignorant of this Form understand nei-

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9 Cf. also HYIS 12/4/69, HKCS 4/16/13-14. Xunzi is apparently not the first Confucian to adopt such a stance, for Analects 8.9 reports Confucius as saying, “The common people can be made to follow it [i.e. the Way or proper rule], but they cannot be made to understand it.”

10 Although not discussed above, for good evidence that society is necessary for human survival in Plato’s thought, cf. Republic 569B-C.
ther the property of goodness in general nor what particular things are
good. Consequently, they make two kinds of mistakes. First, they fail to
rank goods appropriately, rating lesser goods over greater goods. Ordinary
people’s judgment of the relative value of justice compared to goods of the
body and other, external goods such as wealth, power, and fame exemplifies
this kind of mistake. As Glaucon and Adeimantus state (cf. Republic 357A-
358A), most people regard justice as good only for its usefulness in secur-
ing these goods, and would never sacrifice these goods for the sake of jus-
tice, save for the penalties of being caught acting unjustly. The second kind
of mistake is erroneously identifying goods, by regarding some things that
are not at all good as good, and treating other things that are good as not
good. The way the prisoners in the cave think philosophy is bad for them
and so try to kill the philosopher attempting to free them can serve as an
instance of this second mistake.

Correspondingly, insofar as Socrates represents the perspective of
the wise person who has grasped the Form of Good, such knowledge
seems to entail two particular views. First, the wise person knows that most
goods valued by ordinary people are worth little in themselves, but espe-
cially so in comparison to a good state of soul, for the whole point of Soc-
rates’ answer to Glaucon and Adeimantus is that the proper functioning
and harmony of soul that constitute justice make the just person’s life better
than the unjust person’s life, no matter how many other goods the unjust
life contains. Second, the wise person knows that the most fundamental and
greatest good is philosophizing and the knowledge of the Forms it brings,
as the story of the cave implies.

These views about goods play an important role in the political phi-
losophy of the Republic. On the one hand, the low ranking of material
goods underlies Socrates’ description of the guardians’ “poverty” noted in
section one above. For one reason why the guardians can consistently en-
dure such an austere life is that they regard the goods they have sacrificed as
worth little in comparison to the goods they have gained.11 Indeed, in the
passage from Republic 416D-417B quoted earlier (p. 334 above), part of the
“lie” Socrates proposes to tell the guardians to get them to accept their aus-

11 The auxiliaries share this austere life, too, but are not philosophers and do not know the
Form of Good, so strictly speaking knowledge of the Good is not required for their ability to
forego the things Plato denies them, and rather true opinion that honor and victory out-
weigh material goods suffices. However, this does not undermine my primary point that the
content of the guardians’ knowledge, part of which is that material goods are worth little,
enables them to endure their austere life. The auxiliaries can share this much of the guardi-
ans’ views, without believing it the same way the guardians do, i.e. through knowledge.
tère lifestyle is precisely that they have *divine* wealth in their souls and so have no need of mere human wealth. In turn, since they can forgo such goods, those things are left to the craftsmen, and the lack of contention over these goods between the rulers and the ruled thereby promotes political stability. Likewise, the view of philosophizing as the greatest good plays a crucial role in the *Republic*’s political program, for it is supposed to help explain why the philosopher-kings will not become tyrants. Namely, they regard ruling “not as . . . something fine, but rather something that has to be done” (540B). Hence, they would rather spend their time philosophizing and will not cling to power, thus avoiding divisive struggles.

Yet, notice that this view also opens up a wide gap between the rulers and the ruled. For one thing, the rulers have a very different scheme of values than do the ruled. The rulers value things that the ruled do not (e.g. philosophizing), and they value those things over the goods valued by the ruled. Furthermore, the text suggests in various places that the rulers will actually disdain the ordinary goods valued by the craftsmen and producers. Returning to *Republic* 416D-417B once more, there the guardians are told to regard ordinary wealth not only as unnecessary, but moreover as *defiling* (*miainein*) the divine wealth in their souls, and thus they are encouraged to look down on such things. Similarly, the image of the cave suggests that the things valued by those ignorant of the Good are mere shadows, likewise fostering disdain for those “goods.” Along with this divergence in values, the image of the cave also implies not merely that the ignorant are missing the greatest good, but moreover that their ignorance itself renders their lives miserable, even if they are unaware. Insofar as the guardians adopt this perspective, they must regard the lives of the other citizens as pitiful, and since those others cannot participate in or appreciate the goods of philosophizing, it seems that they in turn can have only very limited sympathy for the lives and judgments of the guardians.

With these points in mind, let us consider Xunzi. As we have seen, Xunzi worries about ignorance of the Way, rather than ignorance of the Good. I will discuss the significance of this difference shortly below, but I want first to note that in one important respect, ignorance of the Way is just like ignorance of the Good. In Xunzi’s view, following the Way is the greatest good for the individual. The gentleman and sage who grasp it value it above all else, and in the same vein, Xunzi says that the cultivated person treats the Way as “heavy” (重要), while treating external goods as

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“light” (qìng). To that extent, those who do not understand the Way fail to identify at least this one good appropriately, or mistakenly rank it lower than other goods, and so they fail to have the proper ultimate end, like those ignorant of the Form of Good.

In a very important way, though, ignorance of the Way is also unlike ignorance of the Good. To appreciate this difference, one must understand that classical Chinese has no single term covering the same range as the Greek term agathos or the English word “good.” The nearest equivalent, 善 shàn, can mean “good” in a moral sense, e.g. “good” behavior, or “good” in the sense of skillfulness, i.e. being “good at” doing something, but it is generally not used to refer to what is “good for” someone. That idea is normally expressed by the word 利 lì (“profitable,” “beneficial”). Moreover, the term for the Way, 道 dào, is not synonymous in classical Chinese with either shàn or lì, and thus the Way is not the same as the general property of “goodness.” Instead, it is the proper way—an ideal pattern—for organizing the government and the lives of all individuals in the state.

One consequence of all this is that Xunzi does not infer that people who do not understand the Way are thereby seriously ignorant of what is good for themselves in the way that Plato seems to infer that people who do not know what Goodness itself is are seriously ignorant of what is good for themselves. Rather, Xunzi seems to allow that ordinary people who are ignorant of the Way do adequately grasp the value of at least some goods, and therefore this means that the goods they value so highly really are well worth pursuing, though they are still not the greatest goods, as the ignorant may think. Examine, for instance, the following remarks from Xunzi:

With regard to endowment, nature, intelligence, and capabilities, the gentleman and the petty man are the same. Both like honor and hate disgrace. Both like what is beneficial (利 lì) and hate what is harmful. In this the gentleman and the petty man are the same, but they differ in the ways (道 dào) by which they seek these things. The petty man works at boasting but wishes others to trust him. He works at deceiving people but wishes others to love him. His conduct is that of wild beasts, but he wishes others to consider him good (善 shàn) . . . . In the end, he is sure not to get what he likes, but is sure to encounter what he hates. On the

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14 For a more detailed defense of this characterization of the Way, see Hutton 2002.
15 In fact, Xunzi mainly complains that uncultivated people focus too much on 利 lì while overlooking or disregarding moral considerations (e.g. HYIS 9/4/16-19, HKCS 4/13/13-16), rather than complaining that they do not understand what things are lì.
other hand, the gentleman himself is trustworthy, and wishes others to trust him. He himself is loyal, and wishes others to love him. He himself is cultivated and well-ordered, and wishes others to consider him good. In the end, he is sure to get what he likes, and sure not to encounter what he hates. (HYIS 10/4/32-37, HKCS 4/14/17-22)

First, although this passage speaks of the “petty man,” rather than ordinary people, the petty man can also represent the desires of ordinary, uncultivated, ignorant people, because Xunzi thinks that “By birth, people are petty people” (HYIS 11/4/49, HKCS 4/15/14) and that they improve only through education. Second, the passage clearly states that the gentleman endorses the same goals as the petty man, and thus by the preceding argument, the goals of ordinary people as well. In turn, since the gentleman is someone who grasps the Way, this implies that these goals are indeed proper ends to have, and the process of cultivation that leads to becoming a gentleman does not require fundamentally denying or downplaying these ends, but rather finding more effective and—most importantly—more humane and moral ways of fulfilling them.\(^\text{16}\)

Moreover, this judgment of ordinary people’s grasp of goods also extends to the value they place on material goods, and here the contrast between Xunzi and Plato is most apparent. As noted previously, the auxiliaries and guardians in the Republic eschew the goods valued by the craftsmen as “defilements,” and the image of the cave suggests that non-philosophers are fundamentally misguided in their pursuit of goods. Xunzi, on the other hand, regards it as very important to “nurture” (養 yang) the desires for such goods that both cultivated and uncultivated people have equally as part of human nature. Indeed, he claims that this is a primary purpose the sages had in mind when establishing ritual, which is central to his philosophy.\(^\text{17}\) The fact that the sages valued this “nurturing” in turn has two ramifications. First, it implies that a cultivated person should in general value such goods for the “nurturing” of his own desires that they provide, and second, since Xunzi accords great importance to nurturing these desires that by nature the cultivated person shares equally with the uncultivated, it again implies that the uncultivated are not seriously misguided in the goods they adopt as ends.\(^\text{18}\) Hence, although Xunzi says the cultivated person

\(^{16}\) As per my previous discussion, for Xunzi the process of cultivation is not merely one of gaining instrumental knowledge, but also of coming to adopt new ends (most significantly, the Way itself) in light of new understanding of what is good for the agent.

\(^{17}\) Cf. HYIS 70/19/1-5, HKCS 19/90/1-8.

\(^{18}\) There is also another factor at work in this difference between Plato and Xunzi that I can only briefly mention here. Namely, Plato identifies what is most human about us with our
treats goods other than the Way as “light,” those statements are best understood as emphasizing that the virtuous person can be satisfied with little and so will not be tempted to do wrong by the prospect of gain, rather than implying serious disparagement of the goods valued by ordinary, uncultivated people.

At the level of politics, these views lead to a striking contrast with Plato’s ideal. For Xunzi claims that rulers should enjoy the utmost luxury and comfort:

[The sage kings] understood that a ruler . . . who lacks beautiful things . . . will be incapable of uniting the people, one who lacks wealth . . . will be incapable of managing his subordinates, and one who lacks strength and the power to inspire awe will be incapable of stopping violence and overcoming brutality. Thus, [the sage kings] were sure to strike great bells, beat sounding drums . . . to fill up their ears. They were sure to have carving . . . and inlay . . . to fill up their eyes. They were sure to have fine meats and good grains . . . to fill up their mouths. Only afterwards did they . . . set up official posts, promote rewards, and establish strict punishments, in order to make the people’s hearts watchful. They thereby caused all the people in the world to know that what they . . . desired lay here with the kings. Thus, their rewards worked. They caused the people to know that what they . . . dreaded lay here with the kings. Thus, their punishments inspired awe. When rewards work and punishments inspire awe, the worthy can be gotten to advance and the unworthy can be gotten to withdraw, and the capable and incapable can be accorded their proper offices. When it is like this, the myriad things will obtain what is appropriate to them. (HYIS 34/10/60-66, HKCS 10/45/16-21)

Here Xunzi’s explicit justification is that the king should control the things that the common people desire and fear in order to motivate them. However, as we have seen, on Xunzi’s view the virtuous king also values these goods himself, and this would seem necessary for Xunzi’s idea to work. For were the king to have wealth and luxury but regard these things as de- filements or nearly worthless, it would imply a disdain for the common reason (cf. Republic 588B-590D), which has its own distinct aims, learning and truth, and that helps explain why he downplays all other goods. (Indeed, the Phaedo suggests that desires for other goods derive mainly from physical embodiment and are not originally part of the human soul itself. Cf. Bobonich, 2002, 25-28.) Xunzi does not share Plato’s psychological picture or Plato’s ranking of the parts of soul, and this partly explains why he does not come to the same position as Plato on human goods.

19 Indeed, Xunzi would probably go even further to argue that it is the virtuous person who is most capable of enjoying these goods. Cf. HYIS 86/22/78-88, HKCS 22/112/9-21. Similar ideas can be found in Mencius (cf. 1A2) and in the Analects (cf. 4.2).
people and their values, but in that case it seems unlikely that the people
would have the high regard and affection for the king that Xunzi clearly
expects of them and that he regards as crucial for effective government. In
light of these points, there seems to be a much smaller gap between the
values of the rulers and their subjects for Xunzi than for Plato.

Furthermore, the disparity between the ignorance of the subjects
and the wisdom of the ruler does not seem to create as many obstacles for
mutual understanding and sympathy between rulers and ruled on Xunzi’s
view as it does for Plato. On the one hand, in Xunzi’s philosophy the
common people’s ignorance of the Way does not itself entail that they live
bad lives, because he does not regard knowledge and contemplation
divorced from practical matters as the most fundamental and important
goods, like Plato. Rather, Xunzi considers the best life, i.e. following the
Way, as primarily involving close engagement with one’s fellow human be-
ings to ensure their well-being, the harmonious operation of society, and a
proper balance between human activities and the functioning of nature.
Under the proper government, the common people will participate in these
activities to a large degree, though not at the highest level, and without fully
understanding the justification for acting in these ways. Thus, in Xunzi’s
view they live quite well, though their lives are still not as good as that of
the gentleman or sage, and in contrast to Plato’s analogy with prisoners,
Xunzi repeatedly describes the attitude of the rulers toward the ruled as
being “like caring for a newborn” (如保赤子 ru bao chizi), a far less negative
comparison. On the other hand, from the perspective of the common

20 Of course, since the king plays a critical role in holding society together, he deserves the
goods he gets. Furthermore, these goods are necessary for performing his ritual duties,
which Xunzi considers crucial for the stability and functioning of society. Rosemont makes
both these points quite nicely in his essay (Rosemont, 20-21).

21 For more on this last point, see Ivanhoe 1991.

22 Someone might object that for Plato, too, the craftsmen and auxiliaries will act virtuously
under the proper government, and to that extent they also live well, so no strong contrast
exists between Plato and Xunzi on this point. However, the Republic distinguishes being
virtuous through philosophy and being virtuous through habit, and the text implies that the
habituated virtue of non-philosophers does not make their lives worthwhile (cf. Bobonich,
2002, 56-58). Xunzi similarly distinguishes a highest kind of virtue (i.e. that possessed by the
gentleman and sage) from lower kinds of virtue, but he does not seem to think that those
having only the lower kinds of virtue lead lives that are bad or vastly inferior to the lives of
those with the highest kind of virtue. It is this contrast to which I am pointing here.

23 HYIS 35/10/83, 41/11/94, 43/11/125, 57/15/96; HKCS 10/46/22, 11/54/11,
11/55/25, 15/73/17. Such language is a long-standing Confucian tradition; cf. Mengzi 3A5.
However, let me also note a possible problem. The Xunzi may present a more sour view of
ordinary folk when it says, “The gentleman looks upon [ritual] as proper form, but the
common people look upon it as connecting with spirits. If one looks upon it as proper form,
people, the ruler's practice of the Way does not rest mainly upon activities so far removed from their lives that they can barely appreciate the ruler's lifestyle and motivations. In this respect, too, the gap between subjects and rulers again seems smaller for Xunzi than for Plato.

**IV. Conclusion**

From a modern democratic perspective, both Plato's and Xunzi's political ideals are still quite difficult to accept, and the preceding discussion is not intended to justify either of their views over a democratic state. Given the fallibility of human beings, it is quite worrisome to put the people's well-being in the hands of a few without allowing the people any substantive political power to direct their own lives. However, that situation will seem even more worrisome and ripe for abuse the further the rulers' conception of the good life diverges from that of ordinary people and the more negatively the rulers regard the people. Since the values of Xunzi's sage-king do not depart radically from those of ordinary people or lead him to regard them poorly, his philosophy seems to lessen this particular concern. To that extent, the differences sketched above seem to me to give Xunzi's political ideals a more palatable character than Plato's *Republic*.24

one will have good fortune. If one looks upon it as connecting with spirits, one will have ill fortune” (HYIS 64/17/39-40, HKCS 17/82/7-8). This apparently implies that the common people will have “ill-fortune,” which would indicate that there is something undesirable about their lives. Due to constraints of space, I cannot discuss this problem fully here, but I will offer the following comments. First, even if read straightforwardly, the passage still falls short of implying that the lives of the common people are fundamentally miserable, as Plato's analogy with prisoners seems to do. Second, the rest of Xunzi's text inclines me to think that on his view, while the common people may experience certain kinds of worries and errors because they fail to understand ritual fully, when a gentleman or sage who does properly understand ritual runs the government, the occasions for such troubles will be minimized, so that the common people will still live fairly well by Xunzi's standards.

24 Of course, this is not to deny that more might be said in defense of Plato's position. In particular, one might worry that if rulers covet the same goods as the ruled, but those goods are limited in quantity and the rulers' position gives them a large advantage in pursuing them, the situation is also ripe for abuse, a problem Plato is rightly trying to avoid. While I cannot reply to this in detail here, if one adopts the view that the things needed for a good life are in fact fairly modest, to which both Plato and Xunzi agree and which seems quite plausible generally, then the possibility of the rulers misusing their powers and amassing an unfair, excessive share of limited goods may still seem less worrisome than the abuses to which the rulers might subject the people in the name of some misguided conception of the good far removed from what the people themselves recognize.
Un-Democratic Values in Xunzi and Plato

In turn, this is one point wherein Xunzi may stand up well against Popper, perhaps even better than Plato. Popper outlines his own view of the proper approach to politics, which he calls “protectionism,” thus:

What I demand from the state is protection . . . . I do not wish to live at the mercy of anybody who has the larger fists or the bigger guns. In other words, I wish to be protected against aggression from other men. I want the difference between aggression and defence to be recognized, and defence to be supported by the organized power of the state. I am perfectly ready to see my own freedom of action somewhat curtailed by the state, provided I can obtain protection of that freedom that remains . . . for instance, I must give up my “freedom” to attack, if I want the state to support defence against any attack. But I demand that the fundamental purpose of the state should not be lost sight of; I mean, the protection of that freedom which does not harm other citizens. (Popper, 109)

It is important to understand that in order for government to perform such a function—especially in a democracy—there must be a wide consensus among both the rulers and the ruled of what constitutes “harm” and “aggression,” as well as which instances of these are worse than others. Otherwise, if the rulers “protect” the ruled against “harm” that the ruled themselves do not recognize as harms, while tolerating other things which the ruled do regard as harms, the situation risks slipping into the kind of totalitarianism and tyranny that Popper wants to avoid.

Popper presents Plato as against protectionism. He is right that Plato does not consider this the “fundamental purpose” of government, but his case is overstated. In the Republic, the upper two classes do protect both themselves and the lowest class from various kinds of threats, especially from those outside the city; this protective function is an explicit reason for calling the rulers “guardians” (phulakes) at 414B. Furthermore, at 463B Glaucon says that the lowest class will call the rulers “preservers” or “saviors” (sō te réi), presumably out of gratitude for saving them from enslavement by other cities. Popper would likely dismiss this point, since he thinks the lowest class is really just composed of slaves (cf. Popper, 150, 48-49). Regardless of whether Popper is right, though, the gap between the conceptions of the good held by the rulers and the ruled that we have noted in the Republic does seem to entail that the citizens’ view of harms and their relative degrees will vary widely, which would seem to put Plato at a far remove from Popper’s desired “protectionism.”

For Xunzi, on the other hand, the rulers and ruled agree more on the matter of goods and evils and their relative values, and thus there is a
much stronger basis for something like Popper’s “protectionism.” At certain points Xunzi even seems to endorse “protectionist” concerns explicitly:

People desire the same things and hate the same things. But while their desires are many, the things to satisfy them are few, and since they are few, people are sure to struggle over them. Thus, the products of the hundred crafts are means to nurture a person, but even the most capable cannot engage in every craft . . . . If they live apart and do not help each other, they will be impoverished. If they live together but have no social divisions, they will struggle with each other. Poverty is a catastrophe, and struggle is a disaster. If you wish to save them from disaster and eliminate calamity, nothing is better than to make clear social divisions and so employ the masses. If the strong threaten the weak, if the wise terrorize the stupid, if the people below disregard their superiors, if the young bully their elders . . . then the old and the weak will face the worry of losing their means of nurture, and those in their prime will face the disaster of divisive struggle. Work and labor are what people dislike, and merit and profit are what they are fond of. But if there is no division of occupations, people will face the catastrophe of trying to complete their work by themselves and the calamity of struggling over merit. . . . And so, the wise person makes divisions for these things.

(HYIS 31/10/4 – 32/10/10, HKCS 10/42/16-21)

To the extent that Xunzi shares Popper’s concerns about protecting people, Xunzi would thus seem somewhat less susceptible to Popper’s criticisms, and the substantive disagreement between the two would concern mainly the best means of ensuring such protection.

With regard to this last matter, Popper claims that since “rulers have rarely been above the average, either morally or intellectually, and often below it,” we ought “to adopt, in politics, the principle of preparing for the worst as well as we can, though we should . . . at the same time try to obtain the best” (Popper, 121). In particular, he thinks we should “so organize political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented

25 This is perhaps not so surprising. For Popper claims that “protectionism” is at the root of social contract theories like that of Hobbes, but he thinks Hobbes and others have obscured the idea of “protectionism” by presenting it in a “historicist” manner. Since many scholars have noted that Xunzi’s political views resemble Hobbes’ ideas, one might expect that insofar as Hobbes escapes some of Popper’s strongest criticisms, so should Xunzi.

26 Popper here makes almost the same point as Xunzi’s renegade student Han Feizi, who argues that the proper model for government is one for “mediocre rulers” (Han Feizi, HKCS 40/129/7-11, translated in Ivanhoe and Van Norden, 314-315). Ironically, however, in Chinese history Han Feizi is usually regarded as espousing the kind of despotism that Popper despises, and instead the Confucian ideal is considered more appealing and humane. This difference highlights that Popper needs further assumptions, beyond the idea of preparing for less-than-stellar rulers, in order to arrive at a palatable democratic ideal.
from doing too much damage” (120, italics in original). This means limiting the ruler’s power in various ways, but especially instituting measures whereby the people can replace the ruler peacefully, for according to Popper, “only a state which is controlled by free citizens can offer them any reasonable security at all” (110).

In contrast, Xunzi believes that only when the ignorant are excluded from governing can there be any such security, and it seems hard to deny that regardless of the political system, sufficiently massive, foolish errors by the ruler(s) will cause the downfall of the government and the security it provides. Certainly, the Athenian democracy’s mistaken Sicilian expedition, resulting in its defeat by Sparta, seems a clear example of ignorance leading to loss of security, even in a state controlled by free citizens. Moreover, Xunzi might add that “preparing for the worst” does not preclude formulating procedures for preventing the ignorant from participating in government. Indeed, modern American democracy imposes restrictions of age, etc. both for voting and holding office, and these qualifications have been established in part to mitigate the potentially bad effects of ignorance.27

To this extent, the disagreement between Xunzi and Popper must ultimately turn on the questions of what sorts of ignorance are tolerable in government and what measures are reasonable in trying to deal with the problem of ignorance. Here, there are no sure and easy answers. It seems that if we still prefer democracy, in part that is because we are willing to tolerate the dangers of ignorance for the sake of other benefits, for example the stability achieved by extending political rights and so giving more peo-

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27 On this issue, one can hardly improve on the words of Alexis de Tocqueville, who long ago noted that democracy requires not only freedom and equality, but also knowledgeable and informed citizens. In *Democracy in America* (v. 2, pt. 4, ch. 4), he writes:

> At all times education helps men to defend their independence, but . . . especially so in ages of democracy. . . . [A] great deal of intelligence, knowledge, and skill are required . . . to create, among independent but individually weak citizens, free associations which can resist tyranny.... In democracies ignorance . . . will increase the concentration of power and the subjection of the individual. . . . However rude a democratic people may be, the central power that rules them is never without some enlightenment, for it easily attracts to itself any skill to be found in the country and can if necessary call in assistance from outside. So if a nation is both democratic and ignorant, there is bound soon to be a huge difference between the intellectual capacity of the government and that of . . . the governed. The government can easily get all power into its hands. (Mayer, 676)
ple a stake in seeing government maintained. I cannot explore such matters further here, but insofar as ignorance remains a threat to democracy, the dialogue between Plato, Xunzi, and Popper seems quite relevant even today.

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If We Are Not by Ourselves, If We Are Not Strangers

David B. Wong

My title is taken from two lines quoted by Henry Rosemont, Jr. (2004, 68) to illustrate the spell cast upon us by the concept of the autonomous individual. The first line is from Aldous Huxley: “We live together, we act on, and react to, one another; but always and in all circumstances we are by ourselves” (Huxley, 12). The second is from A.E. Houseman: “I, a stranger and afraid/In a world I never made” (Houseman, Poem XII). An enduring theme of Rosemont’s work has been that we are not by ourselves, that we are not strangers, and that we enter into each other’s identities. I believe with others that Rosemont has fastened on a truth that is central to understanding the source of our responsibilities to each other. I have sought in some of my own work to clarify the relational nature of human identity, arguing that in Confucianism this relational nature is consistent with the most important kind of autonomy. In this essay I seek to go a step further and clarify the ways in which autonomy is both exercised and cultivated in relation to others. I will draw from the teacher-student relationship in the Analects and the Mengzi to make my points. The focus on this relationship is another way I want to pay homage to Henry Rosemont. He has never been a formal teacher of mine, but I have been his respectful student all the same.

The Relational Confucian Self

Rosemont has written that “there can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others. . . . Taken collectively, they weave, for each of us, a unique pattern of personal identity, such that if some of my roles change, the others will of necessity change also, literally making me a different person” (Rosemont, 1991, 90). While I think there is considerable truth in this suggestion, a
question that needs to be answered is, “If I am simply the sum of my relationships, then who or what is the entity standing in each of these particular relationships?”

A possible answer is to take the one who stands in all the self’s relationships as a biological organism. We begin life embodied as biological organisms and become persons by entering into relationship with others of our kind. This interpretation fits nicely with the composition of the character for ren, the most central and most comprehensive of Confucian ethical virtues, variously translated as “humanity,” “benevolence,” “goodness” or “authoritative [conduct or person].” The word is composed of the radical for person 人 and two 二, suggesting the achievement of personhood in relationship. This interpretation also fits with one of the central claims of the Mengzi: that anyone lacking the four innate “beginnings” of goodness—the feelings of compassion, shame, courtesy and a sense of right and wrong—is said not to be human (2A:6). For Mengzi, then, being human means possessing those inborn capacities to enter into a network of responsibilities one has toward others and others have toward oneself. Let me call this the social conception of personhood. The social conception, however, need only imply that having such relationships is a necessary condition of being a person, not that the relationships we have enter into the particular identities we have.

Another sense in which persons are relational starts with the fact that we are born helpless and ready for nurture. Whatever we become, we become through the help and hindrance of others. If we are fortunate we have a teacher who knows what we need as individuals, as illustrated through Confucius’ teaching of Zilu and Ranyou in 11.22. Zilu asked, “Should one immediately practice what one has learned?” Confucius replies that he must consult with father and elder brother. Ranyou asked the same question, but to him, Confucius replies that he must immediately act. Why? Ranyou was diffident and needed urging forward. On the other hand, Zilu had more than one man’s energy and needed to be kept back.

Let me call the sense in which persons need the help of others to develop as agents the developmental sense of relationality. Such a sense represents an important truth about human beings to which I shall return later in this essay, but it does not entail that our identities are intrinsically relational. For the latter to be true, we need not only for our constituting

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traits to be *developed in* relationship with others but also to be *constituted by* our relationship to others.

I have suggested elsewhere a way to understand such a constitutive sense of relational identity: that at least many of our constituting traits involve dispositions that are triggered by specific persons in specific social contexts. To say what these traits are, then, we must say which people, and in what context, trigger the relevant dispositions. For example, people might manifest certain traits, such as warmth and generosity, to family and close friends, but manifest very different ones to those with whom they work. Perhaps, then, other people may be thought to constitute one’s identity if these others form part of the context in terms of which one’s constituting traits are specified. I am not warm and generous *simpliciter* but warm and generous to certain people, and other ways to other people. If warmth and generosity are part of who I am, then so are the people to whom I am warm and generous. Who I am partly depends on the situation I am in and on the company I am keeping.

Does Confucianism display a conception of traits as context-specific? Consider that *Analects* 10.1 describes Kongzi as most deferential and seemingly at a loss for words in his home village, while articulate in the ancestral temple and at court, though he spoke with deliberation. In 10.2, he is described as congenial at court with lower officials, straightforward yet respectful with higher officials, reverent though composed when with his lord. These passages might reflect a cultural difference in the way people are conceived. Westerners, and especially people in the U.S., tend to describe character in terms of global traits that manifest themselves across a wide range of contexts, while people in Asian societies such as China, Japan, and Korea tend to think of character in terms of context-specific traits. Asian conceptions of identity might more *accurately* reflect people as they are. Gilbert Harman and John Doris have recently argued that the folk belief in the existence of global character traits is in fact false, and that we are better off recognizing the existence of traits of a much more local nature. They point to a body of experimental work in psychology purporting to show that behavior is a lot more influenced by situations than is

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2 Here I rely on the translation by Ames and Rosemont, 134.
3 See Edward T. Hall (1976) for a distinction between “high-context” (where context is seen as very relevant to personal attributes) and “low-context” (where context is not seen as so relevant) societies; also Ara Norenzayan, Incheol Choi, and Robert E. Nisbett (2002) for a study indicating that Koreans are more likely to recognize relevant information about situational factors that influence behavior.
commonly thought. For example, they cite the Milgram experiment (Milgram, 1974) in which the majority of subjects were willing to administer severe and dangerous electric shocks to other people for the purpose of testing the effect of punishment on learning. The situational variable thought to be responsible for the surprising willingness to hurt others is the authority of the experimenter in charge. In another experiment, seminary students were set up to encounter a person slumped in an alleyway, and the experiment was to see what factors influenced a student’s decision whether to stop and offer aid (Darley and Batson). It was found that by far the most influential variable was whether students were in a hurry for the next appointment, rather than the nature of students’ commitments to religion or the nature of the tasks in which they were engaged at the time, even if the task was preparing a sermon on the Good Samaritan!

These experiments lead Harman and Doris to express skepticism about the viability of virtue ethics, since they conceive virtue ethics to presuppose the existence of global character traits. But, as has just been noted, the Analects recognizes context-specificity in at least some traits of Kongzi. Even the Western folk notions of character traits incorporate some degree of context specificity. A person commonly regarded as friendly would not exhibit friendly behavior in all contexts whatsoever. Such behavior would be extremely odd, to say the least, in a war zone directed at enemy combatants.

A more disturbing feature of the studies that Harman and Doris cite is that many of the situational factors that make a great deal of difference to behavior are factors that from an ethical perspective ought not to make the kind of difference they make: the word of an authority figure can influence many people to do what they otherwise would judge to be quite wrong; being late for an appointment stops many people from helping someone in trouble.

A natural reaction from the virtue ethicist is that the experiments, rather than providing a reason to be skeptical of the prospects for virtue ethics, instead give us a more realistic idea of the distance between most actual people and virtue ideals. After all, some people in the Milgram ex-

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5 It is open to Doris to suggest, on the other hand, that the distance makes virtue ethics a psychologically unrealistic ethic. His fair demand of virtue ethicists is to show why the best ethic is one that asks people to emulate a character ideal that may be very distant from the way they actually are. I think there are good answers to this (some of which take us into criticisms of principle-based ethics and the alternative to principle-guided decisions that virtue ethics provides; and others of which involve the argument that the empirical evidence is not as negative about the existence of global traits as Doris thinks), but it takes a longer story than I can tell here.
experiments did refuse to apply apparently painful shocks to others, and some seminary students did stop to help the apparently ill person, even if that meant being late. The experiments also give us a reason to identify and promote more specifically those local environments that help to cultivate and sustain the context-specific traits that are ethically desirable.

The Autonomous Confucian Self

Though Harman and Doris do not explicitly discuss it, such issues also bear on the existence of individual autonomy, at least in one important sense of this multi-faceted concept. If traits that are relatively invariant across context are much less important for explaining behavior than we thought, then it might be concluded that we are much less the authors of our actions than we thought. In fact, classical Chinese moral psychology shows a keen awareness of the way that most people are not the sole authors of their actions. However, this observation is usually made in the context of noting how far ordinary people must travel to get to the destination of becoming an exemplary person, a 君子 junzi.

The Analects 17.13 has Kongzi characterizing the “village worthy,” the kind of respectable person who would do the right thing as long as it brings social approval, as displaying counterfeit excellence (德 de). In 11.16 Kongzi denounces Ranyou as no student of his when Ranyou enriches the coffers of the Ji clan without trying to reform their conduct. The Mengzi, as pointed out above, asserts the presence at birth of the four “beginnings” of goodness. For example, one of the beginnings is to respond with compassion when seeing a child about to fall into a well (2A:6). But this tendency to respond, which is the basis for the development of the virtue of 仁 ren (perhaps best translated as care or benevolence as it occurs in Mengzi), is a beginning precisely because it is manifested erratically in comparison to how it should look when fully developed. King Xuan in 1A:7 spares an ox being led to ritual slaughter because he sees in the animal’s eyes a look that reminds him of an innocent man being led to execution, but he does not, as Mengzi points out, spare his people from suffering. The feeling of shame is the beginning of the virtue of 義 yi (righteousness, doing what is right or fitting to the occasion), and is manifested by a refusal to accept food given with abuse, even when one is hungry, but a person not yet fully yi would do something shameful for the sake of beautiful houses or wives and concubines (6A:10). Or consider what is said in 1A:7: that only a scholar can have a constant 心 xin (heart or mind or heart-mind) without a constant
means of support. The people, on the other hand, without constant means, will go astray and fall into excesses, stopping at nothing. The ren person in authority, instead of punishing the people, will determine what means of support they should have. It is only when people have sufficient food in good years and escape starvation in the bad that the ren person will drive them toward goodness. To punish them for falling afoul of the law when these conditions are not in place is to lay a trap for the people.

The Mengzi is pointing to a context-dependence of our natural traits that is not so different from that which gives rise to skepticism about virtue ethics. The difference is that the Mengzi upholds an ideal in which the innate tendencies get developed or “extended” to those contexts in which they should manifest themselves but do not naturally so manifest themselves. Not implausibly, he points to the need for certain kinds of contexts in order for those extensions to take hold. But once having taken hold, they can attain a significant degree of independence from context.

Care must be taken in stating how the junzi's traits are context-independent. Their traits include dispositions to act and to feel in ways that are ethically appropriate to the context, guided by right judgment. This traditionally is taken to be the meaning of Analects 4.10, where Confucius says that in making their way in the world junzi are not bent on nor against anything. They are on the side of what is appropriate (yi). Their virtues have a built-in relativity to context that tracks the right. As 4.10 implies, relativity-to-context may itself be a relative notion, depending on how we define the sort of conduct (or attitude) that is to be judged as variant or invariant against context. Junzi are not invariably for and against this or that type of action, and the action taken by junzi will accordingly vary from context to context, except when the type of action is defined as the right action. Yi, as the trait of reliably doing what is appropriate, is a global trait. It is a trait junzi display across all contexts. Therefore Confucianism may recognize that most and perhaps nearly all people (depending on one’s estimate of how rare junzi are) fail to be the sole authors of their actions. However, it upholds as an ideal a global trait, even if it is a trait that adjusts with the finest sensitivity to the type of context in order to produce a consistent result—appropriateness. In a very real sense, junzi are much more the authors of their own actions as the rest of us are.

Analects 9.14 upholds something like this ideal global trait, and then some. In that chapter, it is said that Confucius wanted to go live among the nine barbarian clans of the east. Someone asked how he could think of doing so, given the crudeness (lou) of the barbarians. Kongzi's reply is to question how there could be crudeness among the barbarians
once a junzi settles there. It seems that part of the achievement of exemplary persons is this ability to retain ethical excellence and, what is more, exert influence over others wherever they go and with whomever they live.

Something like this theme is applied to the virtue of ren in 4.1 and 4.2 of the Analects. In 4.1 the imagery of finding one’s place, one’s home, in ren is used. How could one be wise and not choose to settle among ren people? In 4.2, Confucius says that those who are not ren cannot remain long in hardship, nor long in happy circumstances either, implying of course that the ren person can remain settled in either kind of condition. Finally, there is Kongzi’s description of the stages of his own life journey, the last stage marked at age 70 by his being able to follow his heart without overstepping the boundaries (Analects 2.4).

To summarize our inquiry so far, the social conception of personhood and the developmental sense in which we become particular persons with the help of others are notable and significant features of the conception of personhood, but do not provide by themselves the sense in which we are constituted by our relationships. When we consider the context-specificity of traits as possessed by most people, perhaps we can say that in a real and significant way, most are constituted by their relationships to others. Many of the traits possessed by junzi also exhibit this context-specificity, but the virtues under their descriptions as virtues have a global character. In this global conception of a junzi’s virtues, the Confucian ideal upholds the ideal of being the sole author of one’s actions, in the sense that one resides in one’s ethical excellence through hard and easy circumstances, and is able to judge and act in accord with what is right independently of context, even though one’s judgment of what is right very much takes context into account. In the Mengzi, junzi are able to have constant hearts in materially adverse circumstances, and in the Analects junzi carry their excellence and its power wherever they go. If such persons are autonomous, then we must say that for the Confucians, autonomy is an ethical achievement, a rare one at that, and one that must come about through the right circumstances and the help of others.

If it is not apparent already, let me announce my own subscription to Confucian autonomy. It is plausible as an ideal in its own right, independently as an interpretation of Confucianism. It is the ideal of a person who on the one hand is sensitive to the difference that circumstances make to what is right and best, and on the other hand, affirms the possibility of reliably judging and acting in accord with the right. It affirms the possibility of global traits where such traits are most desired ethically while correctly affirming what rare achievements such traits can be. To uphold autonomy

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in this sense is not to value sole authorship of one’s actions for its own sake. It is to value it for the sake of reliably doing what is right, for the sake of helping others when such help ought to be given, and for the sake of according respect to others when it ought to be given and in the form it ought to be given.\(^6\)

**Autonomy Squared with Relational Identities**

Some will object that autonomy is not a good word for the kind of authorship I am attributing to the Confucian virtue ideal, because they associate the word with other dimensions of the concept as it has developed in the West. In particular, it would be a mistake to associate the Confucian ideal of authorship with autonomy as freedom from influence. This kind of metaphysical autonomy ultimately requires the existence of ghostly agents who lack causal input from a world that is governed by natural laws and yet somehow are expected to have causal impacts on such a world. In other words, metaphysical autonomy requires a libertarian conception of free agency.

Metaphysical autonomy finds its conceptual home in a series of valuations: that humanity finds its dignity and worth in being apart from nature, superior to it. Humanity finds its worth and dignity in being exempt from the process of change, birth and death. It is our eternal and immaterial souls that are free and our truest selves, not our vulnerable and impermanent bodies. By contrast, Confucianism, and Daoism also, find their conceptual home in valuations asserting that humanity belongs to nature. Landscapes depicting the Confucian valuations typically feature human beings with each other, by streams and under trees, their dwellings and other structures nestled in mountains, while landscapes depicting the Daoist valuations typically feature lone human figures, very small compared to the mountains, streams, and valleys. Both show humanity belonging, and differ only in the relative importance they attribute to humanity’s place in the scheme of things.

Despite these major differences between Western and Confucian autonomy I choose to use the word to describe the Confucian ideal of authorship, precisely to indicate that a dimension of the Western concept worth preserving has become conflated with dimensions with considerably

\(^6\) This section has been based on the argument I gave in Wong 2004.
less appeal. The Confucian ideal is compatible with the way that human beings are of the world and of the human community, in the sense that the ability to reliably judge and act according to what is appropriate for the situation is exercised and cultivated only in relationship with others, in guiding others as they seek to cultivate themselves and in being influenced by others when cultivating oneself. The kind of autonomy worth prizing, in other words, not only is compatible with relational identities, but also depends on and emerges from relationship.

Doing the Right Thing in Relation to Others

Consider how it is that junzi are able to identify the right thing to do in the situation at hand. The situation at hand involves other people. To identify the right thing to do in relation to these other people, it is necessary to be attuned to their needs, desires, and feelings. One must have 恕 shu, sympathetic imagination (Analects 4.15, 6.30), the ability to project oneself into the circumstances of others, but not just their circumstances. To go back to the differing advice Kongzi gave to Zilu and Ran You, the advice he gave to each student was appropriate in light of what he knew about the temperament and tendencies of each. Zilu tends to act impulsely upon an idea, while Ran You lacks the decisiveness to act in a timely manner. The advice he gave to each student was suited to each because he knew how they would react to the same situation, and therefore, he knew how to compensate for each one’s weaknesses in the form of the advice he gave to them. Junzi, then, are attuned to other people through sympathetic imagination so as to be able to act appropriately toward them. Junzi know which people need to be prodded and which ones need to be held back.

Mengzi’s conversations with the kings of Chinese states also illustrate the way that a good teacher discourses with others in a manner that is suited to who they are. The Mengzi opens in 1A:1 by reporting a conversation with King Hui. The king asks Mengzi whether he has a way of profiting the state. Mengzi answers, that if those in power think of profit foremost—how can the state be profited, how can my family be profited, how can I be profited, subjects will emulate their concerns, it will be everyone for himself, and the state will disintegrate. On the other hand, if one puts ren and yi foremost, one’s people will also, and one will gain their trust and loyalty. There is an interesting pragmatic dimension to this argument. If the king thinks of profit, it will ultimately lead to the king’s downfall. Mengzi is not directly condemning the king for focusing on profit rather than on his
people’s welfare, but giving a reason that the king, at his present level of moral development, should find persuasive. He is building a bridge from the king’s preoccupation with profit to a concern for ren and yi. Later steps in the king’s education, hopefully, will bring him closer to an intrinsic appreciation of the Confucian virtues.

Such a later step, in fact, appears in 1A:2, where Mengzi introduces the king to a new theme. He mentions the historical example of King Wen, his building of the Sacred Terrace and the Sacred Pond, and his opening these nature preserves to the people. Mengzi remarks, “It was by sharing their enjoyments with the people that the ancients were able to enjoy themselves.” The more general implication might be that our human nature is such that our happiness increases as we share our enjoyments with others. The first lesson is a purely pragmatic argument for moral virtue in the ruler. Virtue brings loyalty. The second lesson brings the king to a closer connection between virtue and happiness. Sharing with others increases happiness.

Such passages show how teachers do the right thing in relation to the particular students they have. Some of their traits must be specified relationally in that how they act depends on the other people involved. However, how they act also exemplifies the global trait of doing the right thing for those other people. The different forms of advice given by teachers and their different ways of connecting with students exemplify the kind of relational identity that is consistent with autonomy as true authorship of one’s own actions.

How Teachers Help to Grow the Ethical Beginnings in Human Nature

Another very important theme in Mengzi is that teachers get students to focus on their four beginnings of goodness, to recognize the pleasure they have taken and can take from the exercise of these dispositions, and therefore to nurture them. This theme clearly brings out an aspect of the teacher-student relationship that is complementary to the one I have been emphasizing up to now. I have been focusing on how teachers do what is suited to the particular students. In the kind of teaching with which Confucianism is most concerned, the student is learning self-cultivation. Students are forming selves, or reforming selves, in relationship to their teachers. Students form and reform their selves in relation to the particular teachers they have. How does this happen?
In 1A:7 Mengzi converses with King Xuan, suggesting that he can become a true king by bringing peace to the people. To Xuan’s question as to whether he could become such a king, Mengzi answers yes, and asks whether a certain story about Xuan is true. The story is that King Xuan was sitting in the hall when someone led an ox through another part of the hall. The king learned that the ox was going to be sacrificed for the consecration of a new bell. The king said, “Spare it. I cannot bear to see its frightened appearance, like an innocent going to the execution ground.” He ordered that a sheep be substituted for the ox. Compassion is one of the four beginnings of goodness, and when “extended” to other situations in which it should be felt and acted upon, becomes the virtue of ren. Mengzi is drawing the King’s attention to the presence of this beginning in his heart, guiding him to nurture it and the other beginnings. The fact that the King spares the ox but has not yet spared his people from suffering shows that the beginning of compassion is not the full-blown virtue of benevolence. But Mengzi insists that he can extend this beginning. If the king were to say that he can care for an ox but not for his people, it would be like saying that his strength is sufficient to lift 500 pounds, but not enough to lift a feather. His failure to act on behalf of his people is due simply to his not acting, not to an inability to act.

The story of human nature presupposed by this passage starts with certain primitive predispositions, such as compassionate reactions manifested in this or that situation, but not in every situation where they should appear. The desired form of extension has two dimensions: cognitive on the one hand and conative and affective on the other. The cognitive part is coming to know that a certain reaction is required, e.g., that one has reason to help in a certain situation. But extension also involves being moved by feeling and acting, in the case of compassion, being moved by feeling for another’s plight and helping.

In 1A:7 Mengzi seems to view the conative and affective extension of compassion as something that the King can just do, especially given Mengzi’s analogy to lifting a feather. As David Nivison (1980) has pointed out, this seems puzzling, given that Mengzi seems only to have impressed upon the king the purely cognitive recognition that he should spare his people suffering, and such recognition does not seem enough to accomplish conative and affective extension. Mengzi cannot merely be advancing some logical argument that Xuan ought to feel compassion for his people, for what would such a logical argument do in actually getting him to feel compassion? But if he is not doing that, what is he doing? How can he expect the king to start feeling compassion for his people right away?
In some previous writing (Wong 1991, 2002), I have advanced the interpretation that the King, because he has the four beginnings in his human nature, already has some degree of concern for his people, but that the intentional object of that concern is largely indeterminate. Mengzi’s reminder of the ox incident serves to crystallize in the king to a greater or more determinate degree his concern for his people by focusing his attention on the suffering he is causing them. Mengzi helps the king to cognitively extend his compassion by focusing on his people’s suffering as a reason not to overtax them and inject them into territorial wars, but at the same time this cognitive extension helps the king to focus and channel his incipient compassionate feelings toward his people.

Let me explain what I mean by saying that feelings such as compassion are typically indeterminate in their intentional objects. The different moral feelings are in part distinguished by the distinctive perceived features that they concern. The innate feeling of compassion is typically concerned with the suffering of some sentient creature—of some animal or human being. To say that the intentional object of innate compassion is partially indeterminate corresponds to the earlier point that it is in the nature of our innate compassion to sometimes respond to someone in distress but not to so respond whenever and always when we should. We may intellectually recognize that we should respond when we don’t naturally respond, but unless it is part of the intentional object of compassion to respond on the relevant occasions, the intellectual recognition will not get us very far. However, the innate feeling of compassion is plastic, which means that further determination of the intentional object of compassion can bring about the appropriate emotional responses. It is to say that the motivational energy of this feeling has the potential to be directed in certain ways through the further determination of its intentional object.

Suppose that we have no difficulty feeling compassion for a child about to fall into a well, but not for homeless persons we pass in the street, asking for change. As we approach such a person, as our eyes meet with his, and as we realize what he is asking, we may feel a vague feeling of discomfort. Further suppose that at this point we do not know what we are feeling: annoyance at being accosted, or fear of being attacked, or indignation that this person isn’t working for a living, or compassion for him. It is quite possible that we are feeling the beginnings of more than one of these, and one of the possibilities is the beginning of compassion.

The vague feeling of disturbance we are feeling might be the fact of the other’s suffering impinging on our consciousness. That feeling may not yet be compassion. The other’s suffering might not register clearly as the
salient feature of the situation to which we are emotionally responding. Or we may perceive the others’ suffering but are unclear on how we want to respond to that suffering. We might desire to try to help in some way, or alternatively to shut out the other’s suffering and go about our business. Yet it also seems true that the sort of feeling we currently direct to the child is directable towards the homeless person. This illustrates what I mean by saying that whatever innate feelings we have are indeterminate and plastic in important respects.

In order for what we are feeling to crystallize more determinately as compassion, the intentional object of our incipient feeling needs to take a certain form characteristic of compassion as opposed, say, to a form characteristic of annoyance. Similarly, King Xuan’s feeling toward his suffering subjects might be indeterminate and plastic. Mengzi is trying to get him to focus on his subjects not just to recognize certain logical consistencies but also to focus in such a way that the feeling he directs toward the ox comes also to be directed at his subjects.

The cognitive part of this extension is getting the king to focus on his people’s suffering as a reason for him to stop doing those things that cause it. The trick is to get this cognitive extension to engage with the king’s compassionate feeling so that its intentional object can be made more determinate and channeled toward his people’s suffering. This engagement with feeling is precisely the point of Mengzi’s getting the King to recall his actions toward the ox. This gets the king to relive the moment—to re-imagine his likening of the look of the ox to the look of an innocent man being led to execution. Mengzi is getting the king to feel again what he felt when he looked into the ox’s eyes, but this time, to redirect that now revived feeling toward his people. In fact, the King says that he was not clear about his motivation for sparing the ox at the time and half-believed those who said he did it out of cheapness, substituting the less expensive sheep. Mengzi, says the King, has helped him to understand his own heart. In fact, Mengzi here demonstrates that much crucial education of the character involves the telling of stories that engage the intellect at the same time they engage the feelings, redirecting these feelings through the intellect, extending and refo-cusing them toward new situations.

**Teachers as Models**

So far I have identified ways that teachers nurture the self-cultivation of their students by means of sympathetic imagination to gauge what kind of
advice is right for them given their particular weaknesses, their most over-
riding concerns, and the cognitive and feeling dispositions that are ripe for
appropriate extension. However, teachers are often at their most influential
when they are just themselves, with no particular intention to influence oth-
ers. The most influential teachers live inside the imaginations of their stu-
dents as models for how to act in this or that situation, and are called up by
their students through the thought, “How would [my teacher] feel/think/act in this situation?” When Zizhang asked the Master about the dao of the sage (shanren 善人), he replied, “Not following in the steps of others, one does not gain entrance to the inner chamber.”

There are various ways in which one might follow in the steps of a
memorable teacher. One can try to follow his pronouncements about how
to act, but general pronouncements need to be translated into specific ac-
tions, and the acts of memorable teachers provide illustrations of concepts
such as respectfulness for which one can seek analogy in one’s own situa-
tions. Thus in 10.13, Kongzi is described as leaving a village drinking cere-
mony only after those with canes had left. In 10.25, Kongzi is described as
taking on a solemn appearance upon meeting anyone in mourning dress,
even those on intimate terms. He would invariably pay his respects to any-
one wearing a ceremonial cap or someone who was blind, even if they were
frequent acquaintances.

No less important is a more holistic way that a teacher can serve as
a model. When one asks, how would my teacher think/feel/act in this situ-
tion, one is relying on a sense of who that teacher is as a person, with a
characteristic set of perceptual and feeling dispositions. Such dispositions
involve feeling and thinking responses to certain kinds of features as the
most salient in this or that kind of situation. As Kongzi says in 2.8, it is the
demeanor that is difficult in being filial, while the outward acts of material
support for one’s parents are not difficult to manage. It is the demeanor of
a teacher as model that often influences us the most profoundly, the kinds
of activities this person takes most joy from, the events that distress this
person most deeply. In 10.18 Kongzi rushed back from court when his sta-
bles caught fire, asking, “Is anyone hurt?” He did not ask after the horses
[the horses in this passage are conceived as valuable property]. On the posi-
tive side, Kongzi’s eagerness to teach and learn is witnessed in 7.19: while
engaged in these activities, he forgets to eat, forgets to worry and does not
realize old age is on the way.

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7 Translation from Ames and Rosemont, 146.
The way a teacher regards himself can be extremely influential. Kongzi in 5.28 says that in a town of ten thousand households, there will be those better than he in *zhong* (doing one’s utmost) and in *xin* (living up to one’s word), but none who surpass him in *haoxue* (love of learning). In 14.28 he notes three conditions of the *junzi* he is unable to find in himself: the *ren* person not being anxious, the wise person not in a quandary, the courageous not timid (14.28). Kongzi’s tempered self-assessment does not display false modesty. He recognizes that no one can surpass him in his love of learning, but identifies the three major respects in which he still falls short.

One of the most striking and frequently mentioned dispositions of Kongzi’s is his steady focus on self-cultivation rather than winning acknowledgment or approval of others. He knows that these two things can lead one in contrary directions: “Don’t worry about failing to be acknowledged by others; worry about failing to acknowledge them” (1.16); “to go unacknowledged by others without harboring frustration. Is this not the mark of a *junzi*?” (1.1); “Do not worry that no one acknowledges you; seek to do what will earn you acknowledgment” (4.14); “*Junzi* make demands on themselves; petty persons make demands on others” (15.21); being prominent is not the same as being known. Being prominent is being true in one’s disposition and seeking what is right. Being known is putting on appearances, to win a reputation for being *ren* while one’s conduct belies it (12.20).

It has often been noted that 德 *de* (power/excellence) seems to be a remarkable kind of charisma that draws others to the possessor. Its strength and scope, as described in the *Analects* seems difficult to explain without the presupposition that 天 *tian* (Heaven) lays down an order that resonates with and responds to ethical excellence. 15.5, for example, says that sage-emperor Shun ruled by means of 無為 *wu-wei*, effortless action, simply by making himself reverent and taking his proper ritual position facing South. However, one not need believe in Heaven’s help to the virtuous to see the personal magnetism possessed by Kongzi, as he is described in the *Analects*. Though in his own estimation he does not lack anxiety in the way a *junzi* lacks anxiety, he possesses the kind of marvelous ease with himself that would draw those who desire a similar ease with their own selves but who are uncertain and anxious about who they are. At seventy, according to 2.4, he could give his heart free rein (*cong xin suo yu* 從心所欲) without overstepping the boundaries (*bu yu ju* 不踰矩).
Overcoming the “Paradox of Virtue”

Understanding the ways in which teachers deliberately influence others in their self-cultivation and other ways in which they can simply be themselves and serve as models for self-cultivation helps us to solve the so-called “paradox of virtue,” as David Nivison has dubbed it. Only those who truly love the dao for its own sake can realize the virtue of ren. If one already truly loves the dao, then one is already virtuous (7.30: “How could ren be so far away? No sooner do I seek it and it is here”). As Nivison has put it,

Wanting to be moral—being disposed or being sufficiently disposed to perform the role that you and everyone else knows you should perform—is the essential part of being moral. But if the teacher is to teach this disposition, to impart it, the student must already be disposed to accept the instruction, and so, apparently, must already have it. (Nivison, 80)

Part of the solution to this difficulty lies in Mengzi’s idea that human nature contains incipient dispositions of the relevant kind that occasionally but erratically manifest themselves in certain situations. As Mengzi shows in his conversation with King Xuan, a teacher can stimulate these dispositions and help to focus and channel them so that they are extended in appropriate ways. In virtue of these dispositions, students may want to be moral sometimes, and that may be part of the basis for their accepting instruction, but because it is only sometimes, this is not the same as having full virtue. As illustrated by the story of Mengzi urging ren and yi on King Hui, teachers may appeal to students’ current concerns given their present stage of development. These concerns can lead them to an instrumental appreciation of the virtues in such a way that they might later come to an intrinsic appreciation of them. Finally, as illustrated by the portrait of Kongzi in the Analects, teachers can draw students to them through the people they are and the way they live. Such attraction need not be entirely based on a desire to be ethical but also attraction to the manifest ease with the self that Kongzi displayed. The basis on which students are drawn to their teachers may evolve along with their education.

From Inequality to Equality

The student-teacher relationship is between unequals. The Confucian acceptance of hierarchy in life is often an awkward subject for those Western
liberals otherwise sympathetic to the philosophy. While we need to condemn Confucianism’s tendency to accept the subordination of women to men, we should also recognize that it rightly accepts the necessity of certain other unequal relationships for viable life among human beings. Some feminist philosophers have noticed the tendency of much Western moral philosophy to focus on equal relationships such as contractual ones between “normal” adults, to the neglect of relationships between parents and young children, or adult children to their elderly parents, and it might be added, to the neglect of teacher-student relationships. The result is a neglect of the very processes that make relationships between equals possible, since equals are made and nurtured by those who stand in an unequal relationship to them.

While great teachers often emphasize what they learn from their students, there is an unavoidable symmetry in the relationship. Teachers possess things they wish to impart to their students. It is not only knowledge that is imparted, but also appreciation for living in certain ways that students do not yet possess. To gain that appreciation, they must acquire the knowledge and competences to live in those ways and so come to appreciate them. And so they must trust their teachers will guide them in a fashion they will ultimately appreciate but cannot during the earlier periods of learning in which they are investing much of their time and efforts. Confucianism, as demonstrated in the texts of the *Analects* and *Mengzi*, sheds much light on how students might become drawn to teachers without being able to fully appreciate what it is they must learn. They are drawn to teachers as persons with qualities they desire to have, such as Kongzi’s unwavering focus on self-cultivation independently of recognition of others. While students have not experienced and therefore do not fully appreciate the states of being a teacher such as Kongzi has attained, they can be attracted to his tranquility, his secure sense of self. They can be drawn to those such as Mengzi, who can help them read their own hearts and nurture that which has given them joy.

If students are especially committed and gifted, great teachers may eventually help bring into being their equals. That will not lessen the sense in which they author their own actions, but they will have co-authors, friends, who spur each other on in the continuing project of self-cultivation. That is why Kongzi’s laments for the loss of his student Yanhui (11.8-11.10) take on a special poignancy, for it seems that this student was beginning to assume the position of equal:

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8 See, for example, Annette Baier 1985.
The Master remarked to Yan Hui, “Advance when given office; Hold yourself in reserve when removed from office. Is it only you and I who can do this?” (Analects 7.11, translation from Ames and Rosemont, 113)

This passage is especially instructive for the manner in which it expresses appreciation for equality: to be an equal with someone else is to join that person’s company in a way that is not possible otherwise. Confucians prize equality not because it is having as much as others or having the same status as they do, but because of the nature of the social relationship it makes possible with them.

Those of us who have learned from Henry Rosemont, from his rare ability to combine deep ethical commitment with scholarly rigor, can aspire to join his company.

REFERENCES


PART IV
Responses to the Contributors

Henry Rosemont, Jr.

Introduction

I feel deeply honored so many colleagues and friends have come together in this Festschrift to take note of some of those dimensions of my philosophical career that have dealt largely with Chinese and comparative thought, which, although I have written in several other areas of philosophy as well, has nevertheless been the dominant focus of my philosophical endeavors for the past quarter-century.

I want to acknowledge first, with deep gratitude, the work that Marthe Chandler and Ronnie Littlejohn have done in putting this volume together. Little did I suspect, when they were faculty fellows in NEH Summer Institutes I directed on Chinese philosophies and religions in the past, that one would later become my biographer and the other my editor. Ronnie’s editorial skills are visible for all to see. The depth and beauty of Marthe’s biography will be somewhat harder to discern for those who do not know me as well as she does. Ni Peimin also knows me well, and I owe him, too, a great deal: for being a graduate student of whom I could be immensely proud, for his sensitive efforts, as with Marthe’s, to explicate and enhance some of my views, and for the assistance he rendered to Ronnie and Marthe in seeing this work through to publication. Combined, their hard work and multiple skills have resulted in a book I will forever treasure, all the more for having it begin with the brief reminiscence by Noam Chomsky. Revered mentor and cherished friend, his life and writings have long inspired me, and been the basis of my belief that the junzi ideal is not confined to China, or to the past.

My debt to the contributors is also large. Their essays have been much appreciated, as I hope to make clear in the remarks that follow, even when I have not been in agreement with some of their conclusions. I will not, however, be responding to them one by one, seriatim or otherwise,
for several reasons. First, many of my comments and reflections — especially on rights, the self, autonomy, and the nature of morals and religion — will be applicable to more than one of the essays that comprise this volume. Second, and relatedly, several of the contributors have focused on one or at most two essays of mine that deal with some of the above issues, and have not considered related arguments I have made on these issues in similar work, not discussed by them. Third, some of the essays can, in part at least, be seen as responses to claims made in others of these essays. Finally, several of the remaining essays are not directed to any aspect of my own work at all, but are simply appreciated scholarly writings celebratory of a colleague, in the best European tradition of Festschriften.

There is, however, a logic to the order of my remarks, which I hope will become clearer as they unfold. I do want to reply in some detail to one individual paper, by Bao Zhiming. It is the only one dealing almost solely with linguistics, and is semi-technical, requiring commentary in kind. His insightful analysis of processes of word formation in Zhou Chinese takes up some language work I did in the 1970s, and again with Roger Ames in the 1990s, and it is the only essay in the collection that deals with my general perspective on language, even though it bears on others of my views as well.

My comments on Bao will be followed by a short account of how I have seen myself in the tradition of Western philosophy, in the context of responding to the overly generous but appreciated comments by Roger Ames and Fred Dallmayr about me and my place in the discipline, both Western and Chinese. It is heartwarming to find two distinguished scholars who not only have a sense of what I have been trying to do philosophically, but why as well. (Chandler does this with skill and sensitivity too.)

Then I will turn to issues methodological and substantive that deal with concerns that have long occupied my attention: concept-clusters centering on the nature of morals, of rights, and autonomy, commenting as I go along on aspects of those contributions to this volume which take up these themes.

Against the background of the papers on democracy by Ní Peimin and Eric Hutton I will attempt to focus both philosophically and politically, but always critically, on those aspects of the United States Constitution and other ostensibly democratic dimensions of the country that have been at the focal forefront of much of my recent work.

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1 In addition to the introduction here, she has also done me the honor of taking up my work in another paper, Chandler 2006.
“On Religion” comes next, first attending to some of the claims made in the papers by Ronnie Littlejohn and David Jones, broadened thereafter to include the Daoist meditations of Harold Roth and Jeffrey Dippmann, and then extended, in useful ways I hope, by insights from Mencius ably provided by Michael Nylan and Harrison Huang.

To conclude the responses to these essays I have been asked to provide for the volume, I will respond to what P. J. Ivanhoe has correctly seen as a central thread of my philosophical efforts, namely, advocacy of the view of human beings as concrete role-bearing persons, as distinguished from more abstract individual selves. Although I will mention the concept of role-bearing persons a number of times throughout these remarks, I will only focus in depth on the concept toward the end of them; it is one of the focal themes of Ivanhoe’s essay. After sketching what I see is at stake in the matter, and whether or how it might be resolved, I will end by defending the use of this concept briefly, as I am wont to do; expressing gratitude, as I am also wont to do, to Ivanhoe for consistently obliging me to upgrade the quality of my arguments to meet the objections he raises to them. If neither of us has yet convinced the other of the rightness of our views in those instances where they diverge, it will certainly not be from a lack of trying.

I must apologize in advance for what some readers (I hope not many) might see as too much repetition in what follows. Because the Confucian persuasion does not neatly sort out the moral from the political, and either of these from the religious, a number of my views will be seen to have implications in all three areas, hence I have been obliged to restate or paraphrase them in more than one context.

How to Noun a Verb

BAO Zhiming’s essay was a pleasure to read on a number of counts, not the least of which was pride: he was one of the very best graduate students I have had the privilege of instructing over a 40-year period. His essay was also fitting with respect to our history together, because much of the work he did with me was in the philosophy of language and linguistics, formal logic, and set theory. It was equally pleasurable to see how a professional linguist could profitably employ the claims that I (and Roger Ames) have made about the nature of the Chinese language (eventful), world view (dynamic), and the relation between the two as evidenced in patterns of
thought (correlative).² And philosophically Bao’s essay has strengthened not only conjectures I have made with regard to language and world view in China, but also my views on relationality, and consequently the role-bearing nature of the early Confucian person.

It is thus unsurprising that I am in close agreement with the two major claims Bao advances. The first, that Conversion – a productive method of word formation in all languages – is most commonly applied to verbs in Zhou Chinese, another piece of evidence for the eventful, rather than substantial nature of the language. I would hazard the guess that English words like “walk,” “hunt,” “sleep,” and many other nouns were derived from their verbal sense, and this origin would be just the opposite of what we find in Chinese if my guess is correct.

By his method of analysis Bao also points up the importance of semantic considerations for syntactically interpreting Chinese sentence patterns. Not knowing the meaning of a graph in an early Chinese sentence usually makes it difficult to clearly determine its grammatical status, whereas in English this is not generally the case. “The qualks quingle quickly,” for example will generate two, but only two, precise questions even from a five-year old native speaker who wishes to ascertain the meaning of the sentence: “What are qualks?” and “How do you quingle?” That is to say, one of the syntactic rules native speakers of English acquire at an early age – with no explicit instruction – is that the basic sentential pattern for English is NP VP.

Bao’s notion of the ACTIVE form of Conversion is, I believe, correct, and insightful, although I am not convinced the sentences he uses from Analects 12.11 have to be parsed N-V rather than the reverse. His argument is basically that the N-V order works much better for interpretation when the sentences are negated, and the argument strengthened in light of the fact that Chinese authors had a special fondness for parallel construction.³ In our translation of the passage, Ames and I did interpret “ruler rule, minister minister, father father, son son” as N-V, just as Bao does. And he is surely right that the concept of appropriateness is embedded in these sentence constructions, yet the concept can be retained under a V-N reading. “Father the father,” would then be interpreted as “treat fathers as fathers

² On correlative thought we are all indebted to the work of Angus Graham. See especially Graham 1986.
³ Parallel construction may not be only stylistic in nature. Given four parallel sentences, some will be less syntactically/semantically ambiguous than the others, and it is thus a useful heuristic device to parse the more ambiguous structures on the basis of those which are less so.
ought to be treated,” and similarly for the other three roles. That is to say, as Bao, Roger and I have interpreted the four sentences, the imperatives were directed toward the ruler, minister, father and son respectively. But on a V-N reading, the first two imperatives would be directed toward everyone, the third toward sons (children) and the fourth imperative “son the son” would be directed at fathers (parents).

This reading can also be carried over to the sentences under negation: if you father (V) those not your father, behave in a manner appropriate to ministers to those who are not ministers, and so forth, trouble will ensue, as 12.24 goes on to conclude. Support for this particular reading of this type of role-appropriate behavior comes from at least two other passages in the Analects: “Do not plan the policies of an office you do not hold” (8.14), and 2.24: “Sacrificing to ancestral spirits other than one’s own is being unc- tuous (cian).”

In sum on this first claim of Bao’s: while I believe he will be borne out in seeing an ACTIVE category in word formation from verbs, and that the pattern is indeed N-V, I am not yet entirely convinced on the latter score; more evidence and argument will be needed. What is noteworthy, however, from a philosophical standpoint congenial to both Bao and myself, is that whichever pattern it turns out to be, N-V or V-N, the interpretation must be the same with regard to appropriateness, which goes a long way toward showing the normativity of roles in classical China, especially in Confucianism, and that the roles cannot therefore be altogether subjective. In each culture there are models of what parents, children, teachers, etc. are to be, and they are for the most part externally known, or, to put it another way, objectively determinable when culturally contextualized. If this be so, it weakens a criticism of Confucianism by the distinguished Confucian scholar Xu Fuguan on this score (See Ni Peimin’s essay herein, especially 95).

Bao’s second important claim is that in addition to endocentric compounding as a means of forming disyllabic expressions, basically Adj–N, parallel compounds are more accurately described as “relational compounds,” and can be subjected to set-theoretic formulation and analysis.

I endorse fully everything he says on this point, quibbling only about how he wishes to construe the Type I pattern of relational compounding formulaically (184). To illustrate, using a slightly different initial symbolism, given Word 1 and Word 2, then 1 v 2. How should we interpret the sign (v) of disjunction? If it is the exclusive “or,” Bao’s 10c (parallel to his 8c) would logically entail “If it’s a road, then it’s not a path,” or “If it’s a path, then it’s not a road” – depending on which disjunct is negated – and such readings are surely counterintuitive. On the other hand, if we interpret
“or” inclusively, it collapses into the set symbol $\cup$ for “union,” in his Type II formula, and becomes superfluous: $1 \cup 2$ will do all the work that $1 \lor 2$ does logically, and then some.

These comments, however, are meant only to supplement and not in any way undermine the highly original and incisive work Bao has been and is doing in semantics and logic, complementing his extensive work phonology, dialects, the interstices between linguistics and philosophy, and in philosophy proper.

**Philosophical Bedfellows**

Both Roger Ames and Fred Dallmayr have directed attention to my work on Leibniz in their semi-biographical essays, and I am grateful for that, because I have indeed resonated with a number of his ideas and concerns, beginning with his writings in logic, binary arithmetic, and his views on infinity. I never understood his metaphysics as a student, and knew, but only vaguely, that he had written on Chinese thought, with no idea of what he said in those writings. It was not until the early 1970s that my colleague and friend Daniel Cook called my attention to the *Lettre de M.G.G. Leibniz sur la Philosophie Chinoise à M. de Remond*, (as the *Discourse* was entitled by all cataloguers at that time), telling me that there was no English version of this lengthy work, and inviting me to join him in a translation and commentary on it. I was quickly persuaded to do so, not only because of the length and quality of the text, but also for its historical significance. I believed I knew what motivated him to write it (as well as his other reflections on Chinese thought), and Dallmayr incisively describes this motivation. It is also a motivation which I have also had for almost all of my professional career, namely, in the context of the highly troubled times of Leibniz’s and my own generation, to move educationally from a concern to learn about the Chinese to show the probability that we in Europe and the U.S. also had many things we could learn from the Chinese. Much of what Dallmayr says about my affinities with Leibniz also apply to himself, I believe, and although the country shifts to Japan, equally to the life and work of my cherished friend William LaFleur; I am proud to be in the company of such distinguished non-denominational missionaries for peace and intercultural understanding.

Although he is in large measure coming from the other direction, TU Weiming also has a place in this categorization. He makes no reference to my work in his paper, but as will be clear to the reader of his, we have been working in the same areas for many years. My work has been directed
first to the fellow inheritors of my philosophical tradition and secondarily to his, while his work has often run the other way; but we are of a piece, as are most of us gathered herein, in believing Confucianism too vibrant and important not to play a significant role in the international marketplace of ideas today.

By his use of the logic he knew so well, and to which he contributed so much, Leibniz was able to analyze the missionary writings of the Jesuit, Franciscan, and Dominican fathers and brothers opposed to Matteo Ricci’s “Accommodationist” position with respect to – especially – Confucian ancestral sacrifices, to point out the non sequitur, ad hominem, tu quoque, and other forms of fallacious reasoning that infected so many of their anti-Confucian writings, and thereby open up conceptual space for taking the Confucians seriously.

My goal has been the same, but the style somewhat different, because most Western intellectuals of my times, especially philosophers, have not paid any attention to Confucianism as a viable system of thought today. Consequently, they have never written anything about it, and accordingly there have been virtually no anti-Confucian diatribes for me to submit to logical analysis. Instead I have endeavored to focus on the “half-empty” nature of Western liberal moral and political philosophy, endeavoring to point up the mischief abroad in the world today, owing in no small measure – a highly controversial claim, I admit – to a dominant philosophy of liberalism undergirded by a metaphysical view of the self that insists on its individuality, or to use an uglier term, its “unencumberedness.” Proponents of the “half-full” view of the heritage of the Enlightenment, especially as embodied in the American Revolution and later Constitution, admit that there have been problems with the development of the Enlightenment ideal, but they have not regarded these problems as serious enough to need perspectives from beyond the Western intellectual heritage to solve. I have always believed such a view was flatly wrong, and worse than that: an impediment to international discourse and understanding, more sorely needed with every passing day, just as Dallmayr makes equally clear in his essay.

He also captures well how my training and embeddedness in the history of Western philosophy, my philosophical journey into Chinese thought, and my subsequent philosophical and political concerns to encourage cross-cultural dialogue for a more peaceful world are reminiscent of what Leibniz attempted to do. Like Confucius, I also share with Leibniz a concern that philosophical discourses not become divorced from the social, economic, political and religious questions of the day. Dallmayr clearly has this concern as well, and I am grateful for having him as my companion.
on our common journey, all the more so as he understands so well that our goals are identical.

I am similarly grateful to my long time friend and frequent collaborator Roger Ames for emphasizing the fact that I am altogether an American. From long before the Vietnam War to the present I have been called a number of names because of things I have written in progressive political journals or said at teach-ins, church gatherings, demonstrations, union meetings and at other venues, the most common of which, after “dirty commie” has usually been “un-” or “anti-American.” Such names, I must hasten to add, have never been as much in evidence when I have had the privilege of addressing students, church-goers, or working people as when I have spoken to the supposed intelligentsia of the local area, often, unfortunately, including some of the faculty of the school or church I was visiting. I note this fact now, and will return to it again, to underscore my deep and abiding faith in the simple intelligence and decency of the great majority of the American peoples. They are regularly led astray by slogans, propaganda, outright lies from those in power, and much more. Who can blame average Americans for putting “Support Our Troops” ribbons on their automobiles when the President of the United States, the Commander-in-Chief, tells them, on the basis of virtually no evidence whatsoever, that the invasion of Iraq will significantly reduce the threat of terrorism in this country, bring democracy to a people waiting for us to liberate them, and moreover, can be done in a matter of a few weeks at relatively little cost?

My purely philosophical genealogy, however, is not quite as purely American as Roger suggests. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and *Walden* are two of the ten books I would want if cast off on a desert island, to answer the old question. But American philosophy was not taken seriously when I was a graduate student (except for a little Peirce). Further, there is much about the anti-rationalism and individualism of Emerson and other Concordians of the time that I do not feel comfortable with, although I must confess at the same time that I have never read the more philosophical writings of the transcendentalists carefully, and hence may have only a caricature of them in my head. In addition, because of my extremely limited experience with formal religion while growing up, I have always been as skeptical about a transcendental realm anywhere at all as Ames has justifiably been with respect to China. Moreover, while I have been learning much from Roger as he deepens his research, writing and lecturing on the writings of John Dewey and his affinities with certain dimensions of Confucianism, I have not yet abandoned a perspective on the Progressive Education movement which I studied and wrote about jointly with another dear col-
league and friend Walter Feinberg many years ago. I continue to believe that Dewey’s fathering of the movement contributed greatly to its acceptance by ruling groups in America to maintain a stratified and segregated culture and society. And no one distrustful of nationalist inclinations could applaud Dewey’s position in his exchanges with Randolph Bourne about the morality of U.S. participation in World War I. Ames has already shown me that my reading of Dewey on related issues is fairly wooden; whether he can convince me that they are mistaken will occupy future conversations between us.4

I cannot close these comments on Roger Ames and his work without adding that the intensive and extensive collaboration between us that resulted in our *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* will always remain one of the most rewarding and pleasurable highlights of my academic career.

Language and Concept-clusters I: “Morals”

For good or ill, the context in which the central issues in the history of Western philosophy were viewed (when not dismissed) when I was a graduate student came from within the domains of formal logic, and both “ideal” and “ordinary” language perspectives. Consequently, linguistic analysis has been a very important tool in my philosophical kit despite my having much uneasiness about the analytic enterprise more generally. This methodological orientation later led me to develop the idea of “concept-clusters,” and I am deeply grateful to Sumner Twiss for calling attention to the importance I attach to that idea for doing cross-cultural research and comparative philosophy, and which he employs himself, to good effect (58-64).

Concepts, and the words that denote them, do not dwell in isolation any more than normal human beings do. Thus, if we describe the Confucians as doing “moral philosophy,” we will look, at the least, for other terms we see associated with “moral” in the familiar writings of Western moral philosophers, terms like “objective,” “freedom,” “dilemma,” “choice,” “private,” “rational,” “autonomy,” and so forth. Not finding any of these terms in the early Confucian writings, it can very easily be concluded that if they were indeed doing moral philosophy, they certainly were not very good at it. This line of reasoning goes far, in my view, toward ex-

4 My work with Feinberg on Dewey is listed in the Bibliography at the end of this volume. On re-thinking Dewey, I have profited from hearing a few of Roger’s lectures on Pragmatism, and from his *Democracy of the Dead*, written with the late David Hall.
plaining the continuing shameful neglect of the Confucians in contemporary Western philosophy. Attempting to block such facile dismissal of their views – which is ongoing – I argued in several articles that they should not be described as moral philosophers to the extent “moral” suggests deontological or consequentialist ethics, the two traditions I have criticized in much of my work.

In his simultaneously appreciative and critical essay on this aspect of my work P. J. Ivanhoe notes that contractarians and utilitarians are no longer the only ethicists in the game (34), and goes on to list several new players. I applaud both the fresh approaches he mentions, and also some he does not, because they have clear Confucian resonances. Such works as James Kellenberger’s *Relationship Morality* and Kathryn Addelson’s come quickly to mind.5 But my point about the continuing neglect of Confucian thought in mainstream Western philosophy remains, for in none of the works either one of us cites is Confucianism included.

I myself have turned to one of the alternatives – radical feminist ethics of care – as a complement to early Confucian thought. But these alternatives do not introduce non-Western moral theories, specifically Confucianism, into the discussion any more than the followers of Kant and Mill have ever done. Now given that one of my major goals throughout my career has been to bring about greater philosophical dialogue within the discipline itself, my work can be seen to be pretty much a failure, evidenced even more vividly by counting the number of U.S. universities where a student can pursue a Ph.D. in philosophy concentrating in Chinese thought. To count these you will only need one hand, and still have fingers left over. Thus I am all the more grateful for not only the kind words Ivanhoe has for the influence of my work, but also for the successive generation of students he has been training to succeed me, and later, himself.6 I do believe comparative philosophy is on the cusp of philosophical respectability as the field continues to grow around the edges of the discipline. My optimism, however, is largely based on the number of young scholars who wish to study the Asian philosophical and religious traditions, not because of any changes in the mainstream of philosophy itself. Thus, if asked, “When will

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5 I would also include the work of Robert Solomon here. Not merely because he is one of the few major Western philosophers who takes non-Western thought seriously, but because his effectiveness in closing the gap between the cognitive and the affective in Western thought opens the way for thinking about the *xin* (heart-mind) epistemologically and ethically. I especially recommend his *A Passion for Justice*.

6 I am of course also thinking of Roger Ames at Hawai‘i, David Wong at Duke, and Chad Hansen at Hong Kong. Much philosophical quality here, but quantity is sorely lacking unless one moves to departments of Religious or East Asian Studies.
all philosophers take Asian thought seriously?” I can only reply by quoting Max Planck, who, when asked when all physicists would accept Einstein’s theories replied “when all those who don’t have died off.”

I am less sure that Ivanhoe is correct in characterizing Confucianism as a “virtue” ethics in contrast to Kantian or utilitarian approaches, even when *aretai* is more properly translated as “excellences.” Setting aside the not inconsequential fact that Aristotle’s excellences were first and foremost those befitting a warrior aristocracy, and thus at wide variance with the Confucian *junzi* ideal, we should note that if a virtue ethics is to have cross-cultural applicability, it must assume universal character traits (which David Wong well brings up in discussing the views of Harman and Doris, 335). But then my taking together the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Xunzi*, and *Li Ji* as forming the core of classical Confucianism becomes even more problematic than Ivanhoe suggests (35, n.7), because I, at least, cannot find a consistent set of character traits described in these texts that I could even begin to argue were universal, either in their own terms then or mine today. *Social* traits may indeed have much cross-cultural validity, which is one reason I press the Confucian persuasion today, but if such there are, they are sociological and cultural uniformities, not biological ones.7

An equally important and even more basic reason for not wanting the Master and his followers to be grouped too closely with Aristotelians is that for the latter, social interactions can often be sufficient for the cultivation of excellence, but they are almost never necessary. The great majority of the Aristotelian *aretai* may be cultivated in solitude, at least after reaching one’s majority; especially is this true for the three excellences Socrates (Plato) earlier saw as the most important for tuning the soul: temperance, courage, and wisdom. The reverse is more nearly true of the Master and his followers. Whatever unique contribution classical Confucianism may, in the end, make to the development of more comprehensive moral theories, surely its thoroughgoing sociality will be part of it. This will also be a unique sociality inasmuch as it is an outgrowth of the concept of the intergenerational and extended family. (It is because of this familial orientation that Confucian communitarianism differs from its Western counterparts old and new.) I have noted in earlier work that although “self-cultivation” is at the heart of Confucian education, one does not do it by oneself and to the extent that self-cultivation also has spiritual dimensions, Confucianism is the only one of the major world religions to have no monks or nuns, anchorites or anochoresses, or hermits in the tradition. It is largely for this reason that

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7 Donald Munro, 2005 has incisive things to say in this area.
whenever possible I exploit the concept-cluster of feminist care ethics in elucidating the distinctiveness, as I see it, of the Confucian persuasion; an ethics of care requires others to care for.8

I urge the Confucian concept-cluster in part because of the number of insights into the human social condition it reveals. I also believe it will be a necessary ingredient in developing a more comprehensive concept-cluster of morality in future cross-cultural dialogues, and in lessening the distance between what is usually held up as the beautiful ideal for which America abstractly has always supposedly stood and the rather more ugly realities that have consistently been the norms of its domestic and foreign policies. Ewing Chinn gently criticizes me for implying (which I may well have done, albeit unintentionally) that the future concept-cluster I envisage will “be a true theory that the world should accept.” Rather, he says, “We will take him to be saying that this will be a true theory because (we hope) all reasonable people who constitute the vast majority of the world will accept it” (71; italics in the original). Such is indeed the way I want to be taken.

I will have more to say on the language(s) of morals in later sections of these remarks, but want now to note the decidedly mixed reception the idea of concept-clusters of morality has received. By pointing out the lack not only of a close Chinese lexical equivalent for “moral,” but also for almost all of the other terms that fall within the contemporary American concept cluster today, I have not infrequently been misinterpreted. While Chad Hansen has seen my claims and their implications clearly even when he has not agreed with them, a number of others have not, reading me at times as either demeaning the Confucians for not having a morality, or as a Western cultural imperialist condescending to them. I thus do not seem to have furthered cross-cultural dialogue any more than I have fostered dialogue within the discipline of philosophy anywhere near as much as I should have liked to have been doing.

Language and Concept-clusters II: “Rights”

Ewing Chinn, later in his paper says any contemporary concept-cluster of morals, or moral theory, “must address the question of human rights, a concept that did not exist in Confucius’s time. That is to say, the idea of

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8 An earlier article of mine on feminism and early Confucianism is listed in the Bibliography. My contemporary work in this area is reflected in “Humane Family Values,” written with Michelle Switzer and recently submitted to the Radical Philosophy Review for publication.
human rights must lie at the heart of any ethical theory that has a chance of being accepted by all of the world’s peoples” (71).

I believe there is something right in what Chinn says here, and something wrong. He is right in that the language of human rights captures an intuition almost every reflective person will have about the importance of conceptual as well as legal constraints on the authority of governments to coerce their citizens with the threat or actual use of violence. Along this dimension of Chinn’s thinking I am in complete agreement with him.

Where I am more inclined to disagree is if he wishes to maintain that the present concept-cluster, of which the vocabulary of civil and political human rights is a central component, is the best, or only way to conceptually check authoritarian-inclined governments. I would like to explore alternative clusters. Believing as I do that for most people, especially U.S. citizens, hearing the expression “human rights” calls quickly to mind the Bill of Rights and the concept of the bare individual existing prior to society, I have argued that we do away with rights language, because in my view the bare (autonomous, rational, free, self-interested) individual cannot serve as a basis for a politics and morality to which all persons of good will might subscribe, which is Chinn’s and my goal. But here, too, I have been misinterpreted, even by people who have read several articles of mine spanning a number of years.

Sumner Twiss, for instance, claims that I have changed my position on human rights over the course of writing about the subject for some time (50). In her splendid Introduction to this volume Marthe Chandler correctly surmises that I have not (8), but I acknowledge that Twiss has warrants for his view from the letter of my remarks.

What has changed is the analytic critique I now employ, focusing on “second generation” economic, social, and cultural rights (Articles 22 – 27 of the Universal Declaration), in the context of which I can continue to challenge the foundational idea of the autonomous individual and proffer a Confucian alternative. I have made this change in part because of Twiss. His present paper is not the first in which he has gently criticized me, implicitly and explicitly, on tactical grounds, if I understand him. He has correctly maintained that whatever conceptual foundation human rights may have or lack, the idea of human rights itself has now gained widespread acceptance the world over, and needs even more approbation. He has thus suggested thereby that my worries about the individualistic foundation of the idea might be used to undermine an acceptance of human rights, and in that way provide aid or comfort to dictators and other authoritarians who dismiss or ignore human rights when dealing with other human beings.
Rather, he urges, should I join his commendable effort of developing a more comprehensive, cross-culturally sensitive concept-cluster in which human rights are embedded (57).

The activist in me endorses this argument: the more human rights are respected, the sooner will all Guantanamo Bays disappear. But at the same time, my philosophical side wants a grounding for human rights, and the only candidates currently on offer are God, and the individual qua rights—holding individual (which is circular). The first of these is a non-starter in a diverse world, and it is the second, as definitive of the American ethos today, that I believe a hindrance to furthering social justice, and consequently, peace. Accepting the thrust of this argument at the tactical level, I have ceased suggesting the abolition of the standard U.S.-dominated human rights discourse, for, as Twiss seemed to be predicting, it can be relatively easy to infer, as Heiner Roetz and some others have done, that if I wish to do away with the language of human rights I must want to soft-pedal the condemnation of governments that violate what the language of human rights is designed to protect. Such an inference is simply wrong, but, sad to admit, if even some fellow comparative philosophers can read me in this altogether leaden manner, then surely the public can as well. Hence I no longer recommend we stop using the language of human rights altogether in my writings, and do so in my public lectures only when I know I will have ample opportunity to make my position clear.

At a more strategic level, I now employ the language of “second generation” human rights in order to show how concern for social justice, especially as embodied in Articles 22-27 of the Universal Declaration, cannot be realized so long as first generation rights insisted upon to the exclusion of others by the U.S. government – on behalf of the transnational corporations which benefit most from them – dominate the legal, legislative, and overall intellectual discourses on virtually all domestic and foreign policy issues. This is a claim I will defend below at greater length in my remarks on autonomy, and then on democracy.

As has often been the case throughout our careers, Herbert Fingarette’s work and mine have been linked, both by ourselves and by others. I have always found these links altogether agreeable, even when, as in the present instance, we do not see eye to eye. In his essay in this collection, he proffers a new (or at least surely different) definition of “rights,” one which does not just conjure up the civil and political rights listed in the first ten

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9 See especially his Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age. Hall and Ames, and Fingarette, come in for similar criticism from Heiner Roetz; at least I am in good company.
amendments to the U.S. Constitution, but in which the connotation of entitlements in the definition of “rights” gives way to duties. If I was confident Fingarette could make his revised definition pervasive I would be willing to help him do it, for I believe the altered concept-cluster in which he embeds the term is much more culturally sensitive (and sensible) than the more abstract and/or legalistic terms with which “rights” has been associated for so long, especially in the United States.

But in another sense his suggested reorientation of what we think of as a right does not do what I think it should, namely, not be construed merely passively. I agree that what it means to say “He has a right to speak” means I have a duty not to prevent him from doing so, and refocusing from the individual rights-holder to the other members of his or her community is a step in the right direction. But it is a small step, I fear, and keeps us in the realm of first generation rights only, unless I have misunderstood what Fingarette is about on this point. Ever since the International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights was promulgated by the United Nations, the U.S. has refused to ratify it, claiming that the rights specified in the Covenant were not really “rights” at all, but merely “ambitions,” or “aspirations,” (the Senate), or even more dismissively, “a letter to Santa Claus” (former UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick). The only true “rights,” on this account, are the civil and political (which include property rights), and they are passive, in keeping with the “negative” liberty argued for by Isaiah Berlin. To ask a question I will raise several times during the course of my remarks here: on this account of rights, how will we ever get to the second generation rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration?

Moreover, coming from a differing perspective, I believe others, too, will be skeptical of Fingarette’s analysis, for he is maintaining that it may well be immoral to exercise a right if doing so involves a dereliction of duties as prescribed by the community, and uneasiness with such a view would not just be confined to legalists, libertarians, or laissez-faire capitalists. I believe the good folk of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International will be uncomfortable with this position as well. Many people, not alone universalists, will either not understand what Fingarette means by “rights,” or will take sharp exception to his meaning, as a great many feminists – most U.S. feminists, at the least – surely would when he explains that “…the extent of women’s liberties, as with the liberties of all of us,

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10 I have used these quotations before. “Two Loci of Authority,” listed in the Bibliography of this collection, contains the references.
11 Four Essays on Liberty.
depends on the deepest and most ubiquitous values and practices in the culture” (122).

I will return to the discourse on human rights in another section of these remarks, but want for now to turn to another key component of the concept-cluster in which rights are a major feature.

**Language and Concept-Clusters III: “Autonomy”**

Readers of my work know well – and have probably groaned about at times – the extent to which I use “autonomy” and “autonomous” when describing the bare individual who has been the consistent conceptual target of my critiques of the modern western liberal (and conservative) tradition(s). On the one hand, it is very difficult to denounce autonomy, especially if the alternative is perceived to be slavery; who, after all, would want every dimension of their lives to be under the control of others? The concept is thus linked closely to another in the cluster of modern Western morals, reflected so well in Mary Bockover’s welcome contribution, “The Virtue of Freedom.” She claims that a workable “‘rights theory’ would have to seriously qualify the meaning of autonomy to be something that applies to individuals *qua* interdependent persons, not *qua* independent persons” (134, italics in the original). She then goes on to say that morally linking the concepts of autonomy, freedom and independence to individuals is “a fundamental mistake” (135). Clearly we two are of one mind on this score, and Twiss would probably join us: “…this modest notion of autonomy is sufficient to ground an understanding of rights…that is inherently relational” (56). But we would still be a distinct minority. A very large number of philosophers, politicians, jurists, op-ed page columnists and many others have made this “fundamental mistake,” beginning with our founding fathers in the U.S. (as I will suggest in the “Democracy Now” section, below).

Hence I am not persuaded that David Wong is correct in trying to keep the term “autonomy” in play during our political and moral theorizing. As with Fingarette and “rights,” so with Wong’s “autonomy:” I do not believe his sense of the term is going to take hold, although I agree that the Confucian *junzi* does have the quality he describes as being “autonomous.” I have been following the development of Wong’s thought with interest and appreciation for the past several years. The combination of his knowledge of all forms of contemporary moral theory together with his equal understanding and sensitivity to classical Confucianism is resulting in a
body of work in comparative ethics that strengthens considerably my belief that the days of marginalizing comparative philosophy are about over.\footnote{12}{Please see Wong's new book from Oxford University Press, \textit{Natural Moralities}. This view seems consonant with some of the arguments Robert Solomon offers in \textit{A Passion for Justice} (see n. 5), see also Wong 1991.}

In the present essay, Wong says “I choose to use the word ['autonomy'] to describe the Confucian ideal of authorship, precisely to indicate that a dimension of the Western concept worth preserving has become conflated with dimensions with considerably less appeal” (338). His description well meets Bockover’s demand for inter- rather than independence in accounts of autonomy, for as he goes on to say, “the kind of autonomy worth prizing, in other words, not only is compatible with relational identities, but also \textit{depends on and emerges from relationship}” (339, italics in the original). If I understand him correctly, autonomy is for his view what freedom has been for me in the Confucian context (and, I believe, for Bockover). It is something achieved, not given, and achieved in the company of others.\footnote{13}{I have taken this insight (and many others) from the work of Eliot Deutsch. See especially his \textit{Personhood, Creativity and Freedom}, and \textit{Creative Being: The Crafting of Person and World}.}

It is exemplified in the \textit{junzi}'s ability to do what is appropriate in relation to others “independently of context.” (Moreover, I endorse fully Wong’s claim (333-34) that roles are \textit{constitutive} of who we are, in contrast to Ivanhoe’s view (42-44) that in Confucianism, and in fact, there is an individual self at least semi-independent of social roles.)

Unfortunately, however, many of the dimensions of the concept of autonomy which Wong believes have “less appeal” than others, are embraced by a great many people \textit{just because} of those dimensions. To see how and why this is so we must first look at the concept as John Rawls does, according to Erin Cline. In her challenging and engaging essay, she insists that Rawls has not made the “fundamental mistake” Bockover alleges so many others have made. Cline argues he is concerned solely with autonomy as it pertains to the political, and not the moral dimensions of justice. In elaborating his views, she says she will focus on “political as opposed to moral autonomy” (82). In the past, I have not as clearly distinguished the moral from the political dimensions of my (brief) critiques of Rawls as paradigmatic of one major dimension of liberal thought as I perhaps should have, and I acknowledge a debt to Cline for gently but firmly intimating that I should do so. I do not believe the two realms can be kept as distinct as Rawls attempts to do, but arguing for that claim would take much time, and deflect direct attention away from the moral dimensions of my argu-
ments that were always their foundation. I have not found Rawls even a political ally philosophically, for I, too, have long been struck by a passage from *A Theory of Justice* Chinn quotes: “we need not suppose...that people never make substantial sacrifices for one another, since moved by affection and ties of sentiment they often do, but such actions are not demanded as a matter of justice by the basic structure of society” (72, italics added).

Thus I can surely admit that Rawls acknowledges the importance of family and community moral values for inculcating the virtues of responsible citizenship, for he is clear that without such, no state is ever going to be just, or truly democratic. As Ni Peimin also notes, “The ideal of democracy has to rely on the moral quality of the participants” (99). But, as the quote from Chinn makes clear, these considerations do not play a role in the political state Rawls outlines in his work. The *political community* he has in mind, I believe, is a community of people who have nothing in common.

If I find any sexual behavior whatsoever outside of holy wedlock morally loathsome, and if it is possible that a majority of my fellow citizens shares this view, what might stop me from attempting to get laws passed forbidding any such behavior, with sure incarceration the certain consequence of transgression? Enter the “veil of ignorance” in one of the uses to which Rawls puts it. Something I cannot know behind the veil is the extent to which others may share my views. I can know that I am proud to note on my driver’s license that I am an organ donor, but know as well that my neighbor, who has been deeply affected by the very cogent and compelling analyses in William LaFleur’s writings on Japanese bioethics, finds organ transplants as morally troublesome as I find fornication in any form. Worse, my doctor tells me my kidneys are slowly failing, and I may one day need a transplant myself. Now if we anti-fornicators are in the majority, no problem. But if my neighbor is in the majority, I am in very serious trouble. And it seems to me, if I am not misreading Rawls, that it is this reasoning I must keep in mind that can lead me to not seek anti-fornication laws if I see I am indeed in the majority once the veil is lifted. My neighbor must keep the same reasoning in mind, and if he does, then we have the “overlapping consensus” of the importance of just political institutions, which dictates that I eschew the possibility of coercing my neighbor’s private behavior on the basis of majoritarian coercion, and that he do the same. We each have a good reason, if we are to live in the same state, to insure that this just dimension of it stay in place.

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14 See especially – but not only – LaFleur 2001.
Ignoring the extent to which it is plausible to think such reasoning can hold majorities in check at the purely political level, it remains that in every other way we each find the other a *moral* monster, hence have nothing at all in common except citizenship; we agree to ignore each other, retaining our deeply held moral views on the basis of the political autonomy we both derive from the just institutions of the state. In concluding her essay herein Cline calls attention to the importance of traditions in ascertaining “who we are and who we should be” (87), and I hope she might follow up on that insight in thinking about how both my neighbor and I might endeavor to make our overlapping consensus about the importance of just political institutions traditional – make them a part of who we should be – and in that way prepare the next generation for true citizenship.

But if I have sketched a fair picture of the Rawlsian position as it stands, my uneasiness with it carries over, *mutatis mutandis*, from the moral to the political. In both cases my independence is crucial for autonomy, and it is very difficult to see how my neighbor and I might ever come together in the *interdependent* way Bockover correctly argues would be necessary for a true moral theory to be widely applicable. In my example, we each find the other morally disgusting, and thus moving from the moral to the political does not solve my problem, it only shifts it slightly. It is just the concept of independence that I find troublesome, reinforcing as it does the concept of the bare *individual* whose primary civic duty is simply to not interfere in the lives of other individuals, a most minimal duty which does not become any more demanding on Fingarette’s account of rights than on Rawlsian accounts of autonomy. This explains why I have so often pressed the case for the alternative view of human beings as role-bearing persons. Endow bare individuals with freedom, rights, and autonomy, and you get a splendid justification for “blame the victim” arguments that block the pursuit of social justice in this country: nobody has interfered with “those people” to keep them from bettering themselves, and if they have not done so, whose fault can it be but their own?

This view is not one that only a few arch-conservative have advanced. Even in the field of medicine it is pervasive:

> When [AIDS] arrived … epidemiologists were unwilling to run the political risk of naming the social forces that drove people into the circles and venues where they were likely to contract the AIDS virus. [They] didn’t speak out about racial discrimination, poverty, neglect of urban problems, unemployment, and sexual intolerance. Instead, they turned the discussion to what people *do* …. Behavior, especially unpopular behavior, was the perfect focus … for a national administration thick with moralists, eager to do nothing to save the lives of gays and poor non-
whites ... Now individual behavior is the focus of almost all American epidemiology.

Of course, the epidemic of obesity is a consequence of Americans' taking in more calories than they expend, and a lot of those calories come from fast food. Good epidemiology would focus attention less on our lust for French fries and more on fast-food companies' increasing their profits by advertising their products to children and locating their restaurants in poor neighborhoods. We should recognize that HIV can be spread through sexual contact but go on to look for underlying causes, like the way global capitalism forces many young women into prostitution by offering them too few other jobs and too little education and child care.\(^{15}\)

To look closely not only at disease control, however, but also at the problems of drugs, crime, poverty, misogyny, race hatred, and obvious maldistribution of wealth, would oblige us to take second generation social, cultural and economic rights very seriously. Obviously the elites in the U.S.—liberals and conservatives alike—have not done so; not necessarily because they are cold, cruel, or indifferent to suffering, but because, in my view, the individual continues to loom so large in their vision and conceptual framework, keeping alive this “blame the victim” orientation despite its absurdity. The result of this conceptual excuse for ignoring the plight of the less fortunate is that even though the Bill of Rights is now over 215 years old, 13 million young children in the U.S. live in families whose income is below the poverty line, more and more workers are being obliged to take second jobs in order to make ends meet, almost 50 million people in the U.S. have no health insurance, and almost four million are homeless. Meanwhile, the top 400 income earners last year earned more than the entire populations of the twenty poorest countries in Africa. And, as I mentioned earlier, although 137 nations have ratified the U.N. Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the U.S. is not among them, the only developed nation conspicuously absent from the list.\(^{16}\) In sum, U.S. history provides no warrants for optimism that first generation civil and political rights, grounded in the concept of human beings as first and foremost autonomous individuals, will ever lead to embracing second generation social, cultural and economic rights either in practice or theory.

Role-bearing persons, on the other hand, take second generation rights very seriously in significant measure because they do not define themselves as morally autonomous, and yet they do not need to ignore, or even

\(^{15}\) Alcabes 2003. For discussion, see “Humane Family Values,” f. 8.

downgrade, most of the freedoms that civil and political rights are designed
to defend. If we are at all times to do what it is appropriate in order that the
other flourishes, then surely they (and we ourselves) will flourish more as
we let them speak freely and we listen to them. We might disagree with
what they say, we may remonstrate with them for speaking too harshly; but
until their speech acts directly hurt and diminish other human beings, why
would we want to prevent them from speaking? Similarly with their having
other friends, some of whom we might not particularly like; or of holding
and disposing of their property as they see fit, or more qualifiedly of their
acceptance of a particular faith tradition, again, so long as it does not harm
others. When these freedoms contribute to the other’s flourishing, we must
act appropriately to support them—and thereby contribute to our own
flourishing as well. In sum: based on the concept of human relatedness and
sociality, it is easy to move conceptually from second to first generation
rights, but not the other way around. Role-bearing persons can be far more
inclusive in acknowledging the full spectrum of first and second generation
human rights adumbrated in the U.N. Universal Declaration than propo-
nents of individualism have done thus far, or seem capable of doing in the
future, especially in the United States, democratic though it is supposed to
be.

Democracy Now

By focusing on, but not confining themselves to the concept of democracy,
Ni Peimin and Eric Hutton have extended my work in political philosophy
– and in Hutton’s case, Xunzi’s too – in ways I find very congenial overall.
Ni has been a superb defense counsel in responding to several prosecutors
of my work at least as well as I could do, and Hutton has elaborated a di-
mension of Xunzi’s political orientation that I believe fully consonant with
the text, and of contemporary philosophical significance, especially with
respect to developing models of democratic government for countries with
low per capita incomes and, in most cases, a concomitant low rate of liter-
acy as well.

Just as challenging the language of rights can earn one a fascist or
Stalinist label, being called “anti-” or “un-democratic” is always pejoratively
understood. Everyone wants to be on the side of democracy. MAO Zedong,
for example wrote “On Democracy” while vying with JIANG Jieshi and the

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17 With a tip of the hat to Amy Goodman’s well-known Pacifica radio program.
Guomindang for parity of leadership and U.S. support during the early years of the Anti-Japanese War. The Democratic Republics of Vietnam, North Korea, and Kampuchea were not named unintentionally by the authoritarian governments that ran them. Similarly, we tend to think more highly of the periods of democratic than tyrannical rule in ancient Athens, despite the fact that it was in the former that Socrates was tried and executed. And while we are strongly inclined to uniformly celebrate honest democratic elections, we do not do so for the German one in 1933.

If living in a democracy means that everyone in it has a say in matters that directly affect their lives, our focus changes as it becomes sharper. Such a definition is somewhat vague to be sure. It does not specify how much of a “say” people should have, nor who they can say it to; nor does it define the notion of “directly affect” the persons’ lives. But we do have a sense of what such an account of democracy is, and surely want to give it some credence. How much credence, however, will be disputed, because on this account the United States is not much of a democracy, and to simply say that it is more so than North Korea is not saying very much, except, perhaps, to the average North Korean.

Working Americans, for a first example, spend a third of their weekday hours at work, yet very few of them have anything to say about where they will work, when they will go to work, how much variation there will be in the work they do, what they will wear to work, what they will be paid for their labor, and how much, if any, security they will have with respect to being able to work next week, month, or year. How democratic is this economic system? Given how very many of the American peoples are obliged to take jobs they do not like, or find satisfying, largely in order to buy things they do not need and do not ultimately find satisfying either, how many of them might democratically vote for an alternative economic structure if honestly and openly presented with one?

Over and above purely economic concerns, our choices at the ballot box have been pretty much reduced to Tweedledee or Tweedledum. In the presidential campaign of 2004, one candidate promised to keep the troops in Iraq throughout his first term if elected; the incumbent hinted the troops might be there even longer, if re-elected. What democratic choices did citizens have who strongly opposed the war?

I do not intend this question to have rhetorical force only, for it is the kind of question that has been central for the way I see and have been doing philosophy for much of the past quarter century. I believe, with respect to foreign policy, the United States has been increasingly a bully since the cold war was initiated by the U.S. in 1946, and domestically, the hard-
won economic and social advances of the New Deal began to be withdrawn when the postwar economic boom began to slow in the 1970s. I also believe that had the American people been aware of these activities and trends in their true lights, these policies would have been changed. But they have not, and their consequences grow more obviously unjust and destructive every year. Why?

The United States claims to be a representative democracy, but the modifier must be stretched considerably in meaning to fit the U.S. case. To take only the simplest of cases, suppose there were only to be five bills before the legislature in the next congress, and only yea or nay votes were allowed, with no amendments or abstentions. Even with this highly oversimplified example, the unrepresentative nature of our elections becomes clear. In order to represent all possible positions on just five straightforward issues, thirty-two candidates would have to stand for election in order to insure that all positions were represented to the citizens. But that never happens. Two is the most that Americans get to choose between 99% of the time, and thus many citizens – perhaps a majority at times – will be obliged to vote for a candidate with whom they disagree on four of the five issues because they disagree with the other candidate on all five. What kind of representation is that? How democratic?

Other non-representational structures permeate U.S. political institutions. Two senators from Wyoming, with less than a million people, can cancel out the votes of two senators from California, who “represent” thirty-six times as many citizens. This is not very representative, nor meaningfully democratic. The same can be said for the Electoral College, the lack of proportional representation in elections, the lack of instant runoffs in elections, egregious gerrymandering, lobbying run riot, and more.

We must note that none of these impediments to democracy can be justified by the legitimate concern of both liberals and conservatives to place institutional constraints on the ability of majorities to tyrannize minorities. Wyoming has almost no minorities, while almost everyone in California is one. Instant runoff elections favor neither majority nor minorities strongly, but surely aid minorities politically. Gerrymandering tends to work

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18 In his little book In Defense of Anarchism (1970), Robert Paul Wolff argued forcefully that the type of representative democracy I have sketched here can be justified only by surrendering the ideal of moral autonomy, and conversely, if we wish to keep a strong sense of moral autonomy, we must abandon the political idea of representative democracy. To the best of my knowledge, only Jeffrey Rieman (1972) has attempted a reply to Wolff. His view is also well argued, but does not, in my opinion, vitiate Wolff’s major argument. In Defense of Anarchism was reissued in 1998 with a new preface by Wolff.
against minorities, and proportional representation is obviously far superior for minorities than the current “winner take all” election method. I am thus doubly grateful to Ni Peimin for arguing on my behalf that “Rosemont does not make a sweeping rejection of democracy” (92). On the contrary, I’ve always wanted more democracy, worldwide; it is rather the sorry substitute for authentic democracy in the U.S. that has always been the target of my criticisms.

If there is agreement that these undemocratic features of American government ought to be eliminated, how is it to be done? In the first place, valuing an increase in everyone’s ability to have a say in decisions that directly affect them cannot be seen as a personal value or private concern, or the situation for Rawlsians and similar liberals is hopeless. To return to an earlier theme, even though many persons might sincerely believe that all sexual relations outside of marriage, or all organ transplants, are sinful, these are matters of private and personal choice, and hence all good liberals must say that the moral issue is not about sex or transplants, nor does the moral issue reside in persons, but rather rests in the institutions of government that protect personal choices, and thus no governmental mechanisms may be justly employed to reflect the moral values of these persons, no matter how deeply held. Hence, if seeking more democratic governmental structures is seen as involving personal or private values (choices), no extant democratic governmental structures could ever be employed in the U.S. to realize them; revolution would be the only option.

Put another way in the Rawlsian context, if I strongly desire a universal health care program for the almost fifty million of my fellow Americans who do not have health insurance, is my desire a political or moral one? Is it a first or second order principle? In a nation like the U.S., which does not recognize second-generations rights, the distinction collapses. Moral and political autonomy alike only oblige me not to interfere with the first-generation rights of others, which I can do quite easily by not paying any attention to them.

Assuming, then, that seeking mechanisms for increasing democratic participation in American governments – local, state, and federal, but especially federal – would be seen by Rawls as a public matter, the situation does not seem to be much better. How, publicly, effect the changes? Ignoring the purely political unlikelihood of ever getting senators to vote to abolish their offices, such a vote would run afoul of Article V of the Constitution, which concludes: “[N]o State, without its Consent, shall be deprived of its equal Suffrage in the Senate.” Might we then attempt to get state legislatures to surrender their two U.S. Senators? This would be only slightly
more likely than getting them to stop gerrymandering their congressional
districts to favor the party in power every decade (or in the case of Texas,
whenever). Instant runoff elections, and proportional representation, would
courage the formation of third, fourth, and fifth parties which would
surely be a step in the right direction toward truly representative govern-
ment, but they would unfortunately not be in the self interest of either
Democrats or Republicans; why, politically, would any of them vote for
such measures?

It would be of some help toward encouraging democratic participa-
tion if all citizens knew they could check off “None of the above” on their
ballots when they voted, in order to register their unhappiness with not be-
ing represented. But that is not likely to become an option anytime soon for
a number of reasons, not the least being that it would prove very embarr-
sassing to the candidates if that option won a majority of the votes cast,
thus undermining the legitimacy of their “election.”

Think also: how easy is it for politicians to justify their antipathy to
these democratic ideas on liberal moral or political grounds, pragmatic or
otherwise? Does not God bless America just because it is already the greatest
democracy in the world? No checks, balances, or separation of powers
can be invoked as a way of redressing these hindrances to popular self-
expression because they are themselves among the most significant of the
hindrances Nor can the present vile administration, vile though it surely is,
be blamed for them. All of these problems are structural and/or procedural.
So, at the least, I have argued for some time. Although the U.S. is not in any
way to be compared to innumerable totalitarian regimes of past and present,
it is by no means anywhere near as democratic as it could or should be, es-
pecially considering the unbelievable wealth and power that defines the na-
tion, and permits it to foist its own definition of “democracy” on the rest of
the world – by any means necessary.

I admit that it is logically possible for people to come together in
large numbers and begin to make the country more genuinely democratic.
This liberal rejoinder to my criticisms is technically correct. Formal legal
and other institutional mechanisms are in place to effect significant change
in the country peacefully, if the majority of the American peoples can come
together to do so. But in one sense – just about the only sense – I am a “re-
alist” about these matters: the task would make even Hercules blanch; I
believe, and so remains overwhelmingly improbable. But not, I hasten to
add, because of any fundamental laziness or stupidity on the part of the
American peoples.
Here it is important to think about what Eric Hutton has taken to be the focal point of his comparative analysis of Xunzi and Plato: their attitude toward the ignorant masses which make up the bulk of the populations in each of their states. Like Hutton, I prefer Xunzi’s stance to Plato’s, but as he also notes, that is not much of a compliment. Neither one of the thinkers are friends of democracy, either representative or participatory (Confucius might have been more friendly with regard to the latter form; cf. Analects 2.3 or 9.26). Xunzi and Plato would not trust the common people to vote for the right or the good, but only for what the commoners believed was useful to them, especially in the material realm of physical desires.

Matters are not really very different now. No day goes by without one or more members of the intelligentsia, liberal and conservative alike, bemoaning the dumbing down of the citizenry, the number of hours spent each week watching television, their lack of knowledge of their elected officials, self-absorption, or rank materialistic interest, perhaps best summed up by Joel Kupperman as Ni Peimin quotes him in his paper: a workable democracy “scarcely can flourish if most voters have short attention spans and are easily captured by slogans” (99). Neither Ni nor Kupperman are castigating the American electorate in these pages, but simply noting what everyone must accept, namely, that democracy requires informed active citizens.

In my opinion, however, Plato and the contemporary elite intelligentsia in the U.S., and Xunzi to some extent, are just wrong in their low opinion of the so-called “common” people, as I suggested earlier. The three recent tax cuts for the super rich were not at all in the self interest of the overwhelming majority of the American peoples. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are not in their self-interest. Subsidizing the oil companies for their explorations while they garner record profits at the pumps is not in the people’s best interest. Running roughshod over privacy concerns on the part of the government is not in their best interests. Why, then, are the American peoples not more up in arms about what is happening to them?

First answer: because they are decent, and moral. They support or do not support the government largely on principle. The problem is that providing bad information can wrongly suggest a good principle, and bad principles can be advanced in the same way, or by withholding information. Think of how often the Bush administration has had to consistently lie, mislead, and suppress facts in order to have obtained, and sustained, support for their murderous adventures in the Middle East. If everyone had been told there was no solid evidence of WMDs in Iraq, nor links between the country and Al Qaeda, but we needed to secure a stranglehold on cheap
oils supplies, and use that not only for ourselves, but also for coercing China and Japan, dependent on that oil as both countries are, it is inconceivable to me that the American peoples would have supported the invasion. Tax cuts for the wealthy supposedly “trickle down” and stimulate the economy. Never mind that the economic evidence for this is negligible. If the people were told that thanks to Bush’s 2003 tax cuts, the average family making $50,000 would save $215 in taxes in 2004 while the 6,126 taxpayers who made more than $10 million dollars each received approximately $520,000 in tax cuts, who else but those 6,126 would still support the cuts? The problem, as I see it, is not at all that most of our fellow Americans are stupid, lazy, or self-interested; rather is it that they should like to do the right thing, but are poorly informed about what that might be. How can this be changed?

An unbending and unquestioning attitude toward the Bill of Rights will make any changes extremely difficult. Clearly the free flow of a good deal of information is necessary; communication systems must be numerous, efficient, and reliable. Statements of facts should be checked, analyses of them proffered, differing schools of opinion broadcast on suggested courses of actions, and propaganda obviously minimized. All of this should be pursued in a variety of media. Clearly that is not happening now.

It is supposedly a virtue of the United States that the government does not control the media. Pointing at such propaganda newspapers as the old Pravda or current Renmin Ribao, or state-run TV and radio, capitalist cheerleaders decry state-run media as simply a mechanism for the government to extend its control through the manipulation of the media as it wishes, in accordance with its own agenda. These criticisms are usually underwritten by “Freedom of the Press” arguments, which are in turn based on the free speech clause of the First Amendment. Of course they ignore clear counterexamples like the BBC, and tend not to explain well why the American public should have faith in the likes of Ted Turner or Rupert Murdoch to convey accurate information, analysis and evaluation to the electorate, but not a governmental agency. To be sure, most liberals support NPR and PBS, and no one in their right mind would want the Bush administration to rule over the airwaves. But the point remains: the U.S. media are overwhelmingly in private hands, and more than that; they are increasingly in fewer and fewer hands, hands belonging to persons who are very, very, wealthy, and want to increase their wealth still further, or at least, keep what they already have. Surely most of the participants in this volume are fully

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aware of these circumstances, and at least to some extent condemn them as I do. But I do not believe I am merely “carrying coals to Newcastle” in these criticisms, because I am trying to locate the problems in the heart of liberal political philosophy in the U.S., pretty much unbroken in its imagery of a “city on a hill” account of the purity of the country, most of its leaders, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights early on attached thereto.

When the threat of the “tyranny of the majority” is discussed, for example, the image of the minority is usually some small religious sect, with beliefs that differ measurably from those embraced by the majority of their fellows, as a recent quote from Ronald Dworkin shows: “If weak or unpopular minorities wish to be protected from economic or legal discrimination by law – if they wish laws enacted that prohibit discrimination against them in employment …”\(^{20}\) That is to say, we must be sure that minorities are, in their vulnerability, protected from the absolutist zeal of the majority who have so clearly understood what God has commanded for everyone. But that is not the history of the U.S. now, nor has it ever been, with a few exceptions, such as when the puritans who were persecuted in England began to do the same to dissidents in the colonies the moment they were able to do so. Some religious and other minorities have indeed been helped by constraints on majoritarian coercion. However, first and foremost the system of checks and balances, and other impediments to democracy I have discussed earlier, were designed to insure that government of the wealthy, by the wealthy, and for the wealthy, shall not perish from this earth. In less than three minutes Lincoln did an outstanding job in attempting to put a noble face on the carnage he was commemorating, but it was surely rhetoric; very beautiful and stirring rhetoric, but rhetoric nonetheless. With respect to the concept and reality of government in the U.S. no one was more candid than “the Father of the Constitution” James Madison: “In England, at this day, if elections were open to all classes of people the property of landed proprietors would be insecure. An agrarian law would soon take place.” Therefore, he went on, “Our government ought to secure the permanent interests of the country against innovation.” And this could best be accomplished by a system of checks and balances “…so as to protect the minority of the opulent against the majority.”\(^{21}\)


\(^{21}\) Qtd. in Chomsky 117. I saw Chomsky’s new Failed States only after finishing these responses; he, too, has a number of cogent criticisms of democracy in the U.S. Later, Madison came to be appalled at the unconscionable greed of the “opulent minority,” but the deed was done. See Wood 7.
How does the “opulent minority” protect itself, and how is it aided in its efforts by liberals? The freedom of speech clause in the First Amendment helps. To quote Dworkin again, “Free speech is a condition of legitimate government….and a process is not democratic if government has prevented anyone from expressing his convictions about what those laws and policies should be.” In his novel reinterpretation of rights as duties of others, Fingarette says pretty much the same thing, shifting the focus from government to the citizenry: “All others have the duty to refrain from interfering with my speech” (115). This is all well and good, but there is a catch: in the U.S., free speech is not free. Warren Buffet, Bill Gates and I can all take out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* expressing our views on a public matter, the only difference being that they pay for the cost of their ads out of petty cash funds while I have to sell my home in order to pay for mine. “Money talks” is unfortunately a truism, and so, therefore is its logical implication: the more money you have, the more you can talk – and be heard; and the converse holds as well.

Given rights to property, cities and unions who wish to sue major corporations to purchase plants that the corporations have closed – even, at times, while making a profit – will invariably lose in the courts, for the right to freely dispose of property legally acquired is almost as sacrosanct as the right of free speech, no matter how much joblessness and community harm is done. First generation civil rights always trump any potential social or economic rights. As Justice Potter Stewart noted, “A fundamental interdependence exists between the personal right to liberty and personal right to property….That rights in property are basic civil rights have long been recognized.”

I am not here merely excoriating the present generation of American robber barons, although there surely are a number of them to be excoriated. Under the skewed American system, people are not alone in being considered individual rights-holding persons. To quote from an official Department of Commerce publication that is also quoted in a paper by my teacher and cherished friend Noam Chomsky in the U.S., a “person” is defined “…to include any individual, branch, partnership, associated group, association, estate, trust, corporation or other organization (whether or not organized under the laws of any State), or any government entity” (Chomsky 2000, 117). What this means, in effect, is that Exxon-Mobil, Boeing, Monsanto and the Bank of America are as free to advance their views with-

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22 See n.19.
23 Cited in Ely 141. One of many examples of corporations refusing to sell plants they were closing to the cities or unions involved was poignantly described by Cooper 1997.
out any interference from government (Dworkin) or me (Fingarette) as are the good citizens of the Ninth Ward in New Orleans. Money talks here, too. The “persons” just defined do not merely take out newspaper, TV, or radio ads. They pay lobbyists vast sums of money to influence legislation that can affect them, and they can pay “spin doctors” to make the legislation misleadingly appear to be of benefit to all, (drilling in the ANWR) or in keeping with some lofty principle (No “death taxes!”)

None of these states of affairs, and many others like them, are at all conducive to enhancing U.S. democracy, or for encouraging the citizenry to work toward an initial goal of insuring that people can talk more than money can in public affairs. But much of the legislation favoring the wealthy, and their ability to affect that legislation unduly because of their great wealth, is not merely about free speech, property, or other civil and political rights issues. All of these are undergirded by the concept of free, autonomous individuals, all of whom must be treated equally. Without such an ideological foundation, the Bill of Rights as the be-all-and-end-all of democratic government would lose much of its plausibility as fair, just, or as the highest embodiment of the Enlightenment ideal of equality. If we cannot discriminate against any individual on the basis of their skin color, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age, or gender, how do so on the basis of the size of their bank account?

For a more subtle example of how easily individual rights can be at odds with democracy – and trump it – consider the tax law that permits deductions to charitable, non-profit organizations. Who could possibly oppose such a law? My reply would be “Any true democrat.” I do not believe the super rich are all evil people. Many of them have charities to which they contribute large sums, and enjoy doing so, some of them anonymously. I am personally pleased that Bill Gates gave $1 billion to the United Negro College Fund, which will put the money to very good use as scholarships for African-American students who are by no means yet unaffected by racism. Either through his foundation or directly, however, a substantial tax deduction was given Gates for the gift. But he would have received the same deduction – i.e., taxpayer monies – had he given the billion dollars to establish a nationwide network of shelters for abandoned ferrets; given that much taxpayer money was at stake, how democratic is it for Bill Gates to decide alone which American institutions are in need of additional funds, without voter input? With all due respect for my Greenpeace and PETA friends, aid to ferrets is not on a par with aid to one’s fellow human beings.

I could multiply these examples several times over, but want to sum them up as specific criticisms of mine. There are many structural and
procedural obstacles to enhancing democracy in the United States, which in large measure serve to protect great individual and corporate wealth, and that several of the civil and political first generation rights enumerated in the Bill of Rights further protect them in their efforts to maintain the status quo. The more we allow the money of the few to overwhelm the hopes, ideas and aspirations of the many in democracies, the less democracy there will be; and in situations where money already does most all of the “talking,” the more rapidly will be the decline. A reluctance to in any way curb this tendency rests, correctly, I believe, on the perception that any attempted curbs would run afoul of one or another of the civil or political rights guaranteed to all individuals – and corporations, trusts, estates, etc. – by the Constitution. I believe the Constitution should continue to be taken very seriously, but needs revamping if the country is to become more democratic, less unjust, less an international bully, and if it is to realize the unfulfilled dream of “liberty and justice for all” that has so far eluded us. It is difficult to imagine, however, a document that could more effectively protect the liberties of free, autonomous, self-interested individuals than the U.S. Constitution. Hence a call for a new constitutional convention will only be heard, in my opinion, when many more people come to see the definition of human beings as most fundamentally individuals as the fiction it has always been, and no longer a healthy fiction conducive to the development of democratic institutions and a just society.

On Religion

In addition to endeavoring to diversify and enhance moral and political dialogue within the discipline of philosophy, I have been equally concerned to do the same cross-culturally, in each instance using the early Confucians as a bridge. I have not been much more successful in the latter effort than in the former, but in the spirit of Analects 14:38, appropriately quoted by Chomsky at the beginning of this volume, want to keep trying.

Let me then rehearse and elaborate a bit on how I see religions in comparative cross-cultural contexts, and the nature of religious discourse in those contexts, as background for making some remarks about the essays on religion by Ronnie Littlejohn and David Jones in this volume, the intriguing Daoist contributions of Harold Roth and Jeffrey Dippmann, and the altogether pleasurable to read essay on Mencius by Michael Nylan and Harrison Huang.
Given that religious leaders speak with at least as much moral authority as philosophers, international dialogues, if they are going to have more substantive results than a proceedings volume, must be expanded to include them, I believe, which is why, at a tactical level, I have written analytically on comparative religion in the manner reflected in *Rationality and Religious Experience*, bracketing metaphysics (and theology) whenever possible in discussing the continuing significance of the world’s spiritual heritages. The metaphysical and theological statements of each tradition are incompatible with the others, which, if dwelt on, could not generate optimism for productive dialogue, cross-culturally or otherwise. And the more such metaphysical and theological statements occupy the stage in international congresses, the less will anyone who does not feel comfortable in any religious tradition take them seriously, no matter how deeply concerned those persons may be about the parlous state of the world.

It is for this reason that I have been disheartened by the extent to which my good friend Ronnie Littlejohn has virtually nothing good to say about the book, either in his lengthy review of it in *Philosophy East and West*, or in his contribution to this volume. David Jones awards the book higher marks, and includes me in the highly rarefied air of Wittgenstein and William James in our views on religion. I do not belong in that company, but am appreciative of the compliment. He also places me, if not in the company, then at least in a context with Heidegger and Bataille. About the latter I know very little, so can say nothing intelligent about the juxtaposition. For Heidegger I have not read too much more, but am somewhat uncomfortable about the association, though my discomfort has nothing to do with the exposition of his views by Jones. Rather is it more personal. I have never been convinced by the arguments of Heidegger’s champions that his philosophy is independent of his Nazi proclivities. I may well just be uncomprehending here, because while I always believed that Wittgenstein and not Heidegger would prove to be the most influential philosopher of the 20th Century, many more people — some of whom I respect highly — are developing the ideas of the latter, while Wittgenstein is being all but ignored even in the narrow analytic philosophical journals for which he was the patron saint not too many decades ago.

Jones’ essay also caused me some discomfort in another sense, but a much more engaging discomfort in this case. He speaks approvingly of Maui, trickster gods, shamans, Coyote, and others who disrupt the normal course of things, whose works consistently are on the edge between order,
and, as he and most others call it, “chaos.” Much of me celebrates these challengers to business as usual. It would be a frightfully boring world without anyone ever overstepping the limits. My only complaint with Jones on this score is that for communitarian anarchists, (with whom I feel an abiding sympathy), doing away with formal limits – i.e., constraints imposed by the rich and powerful – will not lead to “chaos,” which is always negative in connotation, but rather to a more genuine sense of achieved freedom and responsibility for organizing their collective lives in a truly democratic – i.e., participatory – manner without coercion from totalitarians, even if called “philosopher-kings.” In such a society, tricksters and their kin will be consistently applauded for their creative efforts, their roles being necessary for a vibrant community.

My discomfort with Jones’ exegesis on this score, however, does not rest merely on his use of the word “chaos,” but more personally, because I am fairly certain that the role of trickster is not one that Confucius would countenance. I will take a back seat to few in championing the Confucian persuasion today, finding room in it for women on an equal footing with men, minorities with majorities, homosexual and transgendered folk, multiply role-bearing persons. However, for including the trickster in the community of the “Brothers and Sisters of the Dao,” (P. J. Ivanhoe’s warm e-mail salutation), I have as yet no arguments, and no textual sources where my readings would not be question-begging.

I would like to make a final comment on Jones’ pushing-the-envelope essay. On p. 225 he says that my work “has been devoted to changing the ordering of values to which everyone can subscribe.” I am extremely grateful for the precise wording of that remark because that is indeed what lies behind much of my work: value ordering. Even though the expression xi nao does literally translate as “brain-washing,” I have always abhorred the English expression; politically, because of the ease with which it conjures up The Manchurian Candidate and philosophically, because it suggests the possibility of a person’s taking on a whole new set of values, which is not possible. I could only argue successfully for you to replace a high value $x$ with another, lower-ranked value $y$, on the basis of a more foundational value $z$. But unless there was a value $z'$ even more foundational for you, how could I get you to abandon $z$? Everyone mature enough to contemplate moral, political or religious issues already has a set of values, weighted at least roughly in certain ways (albeit not always clearly, except upon reflection.) Logically, then, the most any philosopher could hope to do is provide arguments for changing the weighting or ordering of values already held.
Ronnie Littlejohn has done more than yeoman service in organizing and executing this volume with Marthe Chandler, aided by Ni Peimin, so it cannot but seem churlish on my part to now criticize his contribution to it in a few places I do so not to score debating points, nor to play the professional’s game of going for the jugular, and failing that, nit-pick one’s way from the beginning to the conclusion of an essay one does not like. Moreover, his ideas on a *wu xing* “physic” I find intriguing. But I am concerned to enhance the possibility of cross-cultural moral dialogues in religious no less than philosophical perspectives, and believing that Littlejohn, too, would wholeheartedly endorse this ecumenical effort, I must therefore explore our differences in at least brief compass.

It is difficult for me to put my finger on the basic source of Littlejohn’s unhappiness with my writings that deal with religious themes, but unhappy he is. For example, it was altogether fitting and proper for him to hold my feet to the fire on the extent of agency to be imputed to *tian* in the *Analects* by statements attributed to the Master. But Littlejohn wants to give *tian* a great deal of agency, much more than I believe warranted either by the text, or on the basis of the principle of logical charity. (Which can be invoked even with strong sensitivity to context.) For myself, all early Confucians linked *tian* with agency, even Xunzi in his eloquent opening statement on the subject in the *Tian Lun Pian*. But I read the agency as causal much more than as intentional-causal. Surely the concatenation of genes in a specimen, combined with climatic and other environmental circumstances, jointly cause species change and adaptability; that is what evolutionary theory is all about. Why many fundamentalists are opposed to Darwin is obvious from the name of the alternative they propose: “*intelligent design.*” Darwin is to be placed on the Fundamentalists’ Index because there is no intention for these changes to occur; they just do, that is all.

I believe it is most fruitful to read the early Confucians more or less along these same Darwinian “causal” lines. Some of Tu Weiming’s remarks (154-55) suggest he would endorse Littlejohn’s position over mine, but it remains that “nature” does work for *tian* in a great many, perhaps most, cases. Littlejohn is correct to insist that there are other passages in the *Analects* – especially when a straightforward reading of the text suggests the Master is attributing plans to *tian* – where the concept of agency seems to be accompanied by the concept of intention. I continue to worry and think about these passages, but remain inclined to remember them most whenever I ask “Why me, Lord?” which I not infrequently do when things go badly, even though there is no reference for the noun in my ontology. Thus I continue to believe, as of now, that we will better understand Confucius,
his disciples, and the contexts of the numerous specific passages in which *tian* appears if we do not attribute conscious intention to “it.” I am reinforced in this belief by another aspect of the text which provides an argument from negative evidence, but still has weight. If Confucius truly believed that *tian* really did make plans and then carried them out, it is absolutely incredible to me that his disciples *never asked* him about it in the text that has come down to us.

Turning from the *Analects* to *Rationality and Religious Experience*, Littlejohn suggests that classical *wu xing* physics has something to contribute to an understanding of comparative religious language of referentiality. He may be on to something on this score, but the *wu xing* are not mentioned in my book, which has very different foci. About “the referentiality of religious language” in Littlejohn’s remarks I am not sure what to say. The sentence above the one he quotes *Rationality and Religious Experience* on p. 189 clearly says that references to a transcendent realm permeate the Abrahamic religions; it is only the Chinese traditions I claimed lacked the concept, hence could not “refer” to such. He also suggests (195) that I do not sharply enough distinguish between *my* context and that of Confucius. But this distinction, of course, holds equally between Littlejohn’s context, and that of Confucius (or me). From these and similar comments in his review as well as in the present paper it is fairly clear that I did not write the book Littlejohn wanted to read. Given that he has a good deal of solid philosophical training in metaphysics and religion and seminary training in theology, I cannot but worry about why there is such a distance between us on what the book was about, or should have been about.

To be more precise, I tried to make clear (albeit it in a lengthy endnote) that “I am reluctant to draw a sharp distinction between so-called ‘religious’ and ‘nonreligious’ language, in the form of ‘games’ or otherwise,” despite my Wittgensteinian predilections (Rosemont 2001, f. 35). Hence I must accept that to whatever extent the one kind of language has referentiality, the other must have it, too. But in the case of the Chinese language, as Ames and I argued at length in the Introduction and second Appendix to our *Analects* translation, following on some arguments of Chad Hansen, matters of reference, truth and description are not to be construed as they are with respect to Indo-European languages, with special reference to contemporary English.

Given our account of the eventful nature of the Chinese language in those sections of our *Analects* translation, Littlejohn’s notion of “physic” rather than “metaphysic” for discussing *wu xing*/*five phases* as processual is, as I have said, intriguing, and I hope he pursues the idea in greater depth.
in future work. If he accepts our characterization of Chinese as eventful and dynamic, as Bao Zhiming has so fruitfully explored, Littlejohn will, however, have to rethink what a “theory of reference” would look like for that language. Ames may be more naturally a philosophical ally with him on this score, for they are both more comfortable with a thoroughgoing “process” language that suggests a Whiteheadian ontology than I am. This is not to say I believe this line of thinking is wrong, only that I personally try to convey the eventfulness and dynamism of the language with as few metaphysical commitments as possible.

Because others may also have missed the basic thrust of *Rationality and Religious Experience* I hope I may be excused for wanting to say a bit more about why I want to eschew metaphysical and theological concerns when doing comparative religion. Moving from “metaphysics” to “physic” may well be another fruitful avenue to explore in our efforts to deepen our understanding of ancient Chinese thinkers. But the book is not, in the first instance, about ancient Chinese thinkers, Confucians or otherwise. If I am concerned to engage a Hindu and a Muslim and a Christian and a Jew in dialogue about value orderings from a Confucian (or any other) perspective, the effort will not be advanced by adducing the claim of John Major that:

The Five Phases probably took their numerical correlates from the magic square of three. This being so, however, the integration of *yin-yang* and Five Phase numerology surely must have been enhanced by the fortuitous circumstance that the corners of the magic square are all occupied by even/yin numbers. It is also significant that in the magic square the numeral nine occupies the square corresponding to due north.\(^{25}\)

I concur with these conjectures of Major on the direction of the early linkages between *yin-yang* and *wu xing* theorizing, and I believe the work is important for what it may tell us about certain dimensions – metaphysical, theological, and mythical – of early Chinese thought. But metaphysical (or “physical,” if Littlejohn is right) they are, and not necessary or even crucial for discussing spiritual disciplines, religious experiences or the continuing significance of sacred texts read in comparative contexts.

For China itself I believe Littlejohn may be on to something important, and should pursue the matter further in his efforts to more clearly define and illustrate the nature of Chinese religiosity as he hypothesizes it. But that was not at all what I was about in *Rationality and Religious Experience*, and I hope that he will at least minimally forgive my criticizing his

\(^{25}\) Rosemont 1984.
essay in order to bring out more clearly why I did indeed write what I wrote.

Although both of us have been strongly influenced by Wittgenstein, I do not believe he understood me on this score, else he could not have pressed me so hard on the notion of referentiality, a concept much more appropriate to some language games than to others (the Investigations), or not at all applicable to ethical or religious statements, which are strictly speaking meaningless (the Tractatus). Wittgenstein aside, I did take up issues of language in my book, and accept that a theory of reference is necessary for any theory of truth to be plausible in the history of Western philosophy. But if we attribute too much referentiality to the metaphysical and/or theological statements of the world’s religions, and seek to ascertain whether those statements are true – mirror the world as it really is – we quickly arrive at the problem, which I have mentioned before and often, that they flatly contradict each other on numerous points, hence cannot all be true. If this is so, how can we give credence to any of them except by begging the question in their favor? And if the one whose cause we plead happens to have a number of metaphysical and/or theological statements that are flatly contradicted by the statements of contemporary physics, geology, or biology, what do we do then, except self-consciously endeavor to become schizophrenics as between faith and rationality?

For myself, I do not have any answers to these questions that will allow genuine ecumenical moral and political dialogue to go forward, which is another reason I eschew them. But at the same time, I have attempted to describe authentic religious experience in ways fully consonant with all that we must accept in the way of modern science, in a way that is consistent with the pronouncements of any specific spiritual tradition – or for atheists who abjure all spiritual traditions tout court – and in such a way as to not denigrate those experiences even if they do not transcend the human realm. On the contrary, I celebrate these experiences because they sacralize the secular here and now; they are authentic human experiences, and I rejoice in them, for human is what we are.

Littlejohn’s ideas of a “physic” that might be worked out for describing certain dimensions of early Chinese thought leads me to contemplate the cosmological views I have always been inclined to attribute to the early Confucians, but which closely resemble the vision my cherished colleague Hal Roth portrays so elegantly for early religious Daoism. This cosmology depicts “[A] universe totally infused with inherent divinity, a divinity that is contained in the everyday activities of the phenomena that constitute it as well as in the phenomena themselves.... Human beings are an
integral part of this universe and as a result are subject to its laws.” Moreover, all this “is thoroughly infused by a force that guides the spontaneous activity of all things according to their inherent natural laws. This force is, of course, the Way…” (271). I quote Roth at length because I am coming to believe he well characterizes the Chinese view of the cosmos from roughly the Warring States period through at least the early Han. I do not think his account is incompatible with the wu xing “physic” Littlejohn wishes to flesh out in greater detail, but if the Roth description is correct, and so is my extending that view from early religious Daoism to early China simpliciter, then clearly all three of us, and all early Chinese thinkers, are of a piece in having nothing to do with “dualistic realism.”

26 Roth's account is nicely complemented by Hans-Georg Moeller's (2004) description of the early Daoist view of nature (103-08).

I enjoyed reading Jeffrey Dippmann's article on polite Daoists, in the first instance because he appears to share my tendency to use concrete critical examples from contemporary America in his philosophical writings. I was surprised to learn of the extent to which George Washington was an early Emily Post or “Miss Manners.” But Dippmann's essay re-raises a question he himself mentions in passing, what is it to be a Daoist? Confucianism is the place for manners, customs, rituals, social matters all of them; what could Lao Tan, Zhuangzi, Liu An or Liezi have to do with these?

Of course the question is too glib. There is first of all the matter of chronology. The 180 Precepts of Lord Lao cited by Dippmann were set down long after Confucius was being recognized as “China's First Teacher,” and consequently it should not be surprising that a precept he quotes – “Whenever you enter another state, first ask about the local prohibitions and taboos” (309) – has strong resonances with a number of statements made about Confucius in the Analects: “The Master on entering the Grand Ancestral Hall asked questions about everything” (3.15), which is repeated in 10.21. Analects 1.10 makes the same point, but now by reference to appropriate behavior in place of explicit questioning to learn what it is important to know about an unfamiliar environment.

Further, politeness and courtesy are closely linked to ritual propriety (li), and because ritual (propriety) plays such a major role in all religious traditions, it should not after all surprise us that Daoists no less than Confucians – or Buddhists, or Christians, etc. – will take up these matters as their tradition matures, especially as monasteries and nunneries grow and mature.
There are other areas of Dippmann’s essay where what he says on behalf of Daoism applies equally to Confucianism, in my view. Thus, “Rather than resistance and the creation of a moribund orthodoxy, Daoism has revised its identity through the ongoing adoption of new and vital forms” (305). Think simply of Mencius, then Xunzi, then DONG Zhong-shu, followed by HAN Yu and LI Ao. Or, Dippmann says again, “[Daoism] sees identity as an evolutionary process, adopting a variety of foreign elements into its collective sensibility” (307), which is a succinct account of Confucianism from ZHOU Dunyi and SHAO Yong through KANG Youwei. In short, both of these and other statements Dippmann makes in a similar vein are as descriptive of the Confucian persuasion as they are of the Daoist, as I see it, and if so, then perhaps it is chasing a will-o’-the-wisp to seek an essence for either spiritual tradition. There are only “family resemblances,” as Ivanhoe hints with regard to the early Confucians between the several siblings and cousins in each tradition – and between the two different “clans,” too.

At the same time, there are several not insignificant differences between Daoists and Confucians with respect to the linked ideas of self-cultivation and spontaneity as they contribute to the ego-reduction I claimed is essential for the kind of religious experience described in Rationality and Religious Experience.

As Roth well describes the Daoist case, “The senses’ desire for sense objects generates preferences and enticements and people become so obsessed with them that they lose touch with their innate nature and natural spontaneity” (275, italics added). These arise from the “deepest part of our beings,” he goes on to say, and are “often obscured by the psychological effects of culture that produce a self-consciousness…” (287, italics added). Given his firm command of the texts associated with early religious Daoism I have every confidence Roth is accurately describing the Daoist diagnosis of our alienation from the natural world, preventing us from having a sense of at-one-ment with it, which is how I describe a certain type of religious experience that is amply documented in the writings of every spiritual tradition. Other words I have used to describe these experiences are a sense of “belonging,” or of “attunement,” or, with Wittgenstein, the “experience of feeling absolutely safe.”

For Daoists, the more intensely self-conscious we are, the more difficult it is, as Roth says, to let our inner, spontaneous nature respond to the world as it simply is. Thus we must undergo a de-socialization process, which can take many forms, some of which involve meditation practices of one type or another, and/or devotional exercises, all of which are demon-
strably capable of effecting the reduction of the ego necessary for the spirit to flourish as it did when we were young. We must return to the uncarved block. What we seek here is what Bill LaFleur describes in his essay as highly valued in Japan no less than in China, “immediacy of response” (233).

For the Confucians, on the other hand, the sense of belonging is less with the natural world and much more with the human, and a great deal of self-cultivation – spiritual discipline – is necessary for us to feel an integral part of the human race, past, present and future. We come to this feeling by an intense concentration on observing carefully the social environment and the specific others with whom we interact, beginning with the family; the goal being to become increasingly skilled at doing what is appropriate in each situation in which we find ourselves. This discipline of care-full attentiveness to the social realm, steadily enlarging that realm beyond the family, is a consistent theme throughout the early Confucian writings, most emphatically stated by Xunzi: the junzi “trains his eyes so that they desire to see only what is right, his ears to desire to hear only what is right, and his heart-mind so that it desires to think only what is right.” In short, while I agree fully with Roth’s statements about differences between early Confucians and Daoists (275-76), I would place the locus of the difference on methods of spiritual self-cultivation rather than views of human nature.

One major goal of the Confucian spiritual discipline, like that of the Daoist, is spontaneity, but it is what I have called a disciplined spontaneity, which is not the oxymoron it appears at first blush to be. The autobiographical account Confucius gives of himself in 2.4 is some evidence for this, as is Mencius saying “My heart-mind has not been stirred since the age of forty” (2A:2). It is also the goal of the self-cultivation described in the Xunzi, especially the first two chapters.

Following up on the “aesthetic order” the late David Hall and Roger Ames proposed for early China in their seminal Thinking Through Confucius, if there is a sense in which it is accurate to say that another goal of Confucians is to make their lives works of art, then, in that sense Igor Stravinsky has summed up an important dimension of self-cultivation in the tradition: “The more art is controlled, limited, worked over, the more it is free.”

Confucians, then, no less than Daoists or the Japanese LaFleur describes, value a Mencian “immediacy of response,” except that these kinds of responses come only after much, much practice. To paraphrase the Tractatus only slightly, you must climb the ladder before you can throw it away.

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As is so often the case when discussing Confucianism, the moral, the political, and the religious are often not easily distinguished. We know that Mencius believes the capacity for moral goodness is innate in us, as the “immediacy of [compassionate] response” in seeing the child about to tumble into the well proves. But the highly original argument of Michael Nylan and Harrison Huang on the importance of the concept of pleasure for understanding Mencius shows that the instinct, if we can call it that, must be cultivated at great length if it is to prove efficacious for ourselves, and for society. (Another example of the difficulty of distinguishing what might be called “character” from “social” traits; perhaps the Early Confucians can help us cast the venerable if not venerated question of “nature vs. nurture” in a new light?). I confess that before reading their piece, “pleasure” would not have been a word that came quickly to mind when describing the views of the “Second Sage,” but Nylan and Huang have convinced me to do so in the future. By getting one ruler after another to own up to compassion for something or another (an effective tool of argumentation, as the authors show), Mencius urges them to learn to transfer the feeling from its initial object – an ox, well-stocked ponds, etc. (251) – to the people they govern, and if they do, their government will be secure. But if Nylan and Huang are right, this is not the end of it. The king(s) must first become more willing to provide for the people under their jurisdiction to obtain some pleasures by “seeing the necessity to recognize one’s own desires and to extend that recognition to the desires of others” (253, n18), but then must further practice the self-cultivation necessary for him to feel pleasure in the people’s pleasure as he provides the means to their satisfaction.

I accept the analysis Nylan and Huang give us of the importance of pleasure for deepening our understanding of self-cultivation in the Mencius and see that it has a number of implications, the first of which is political. Confucians have often and correctly been criticized for trusting overmuch to rule by good people rather than good laws. Coercion almost always has and almost certainly will result from less than good people occupying positions of power and authority. But so long as they insist that one of the basic qualities of those fit to rule is that they derive pleasure from the pleasures enjoyed by others, there is no abstract problem on this specific dimension of political theory, and the real question must be re-focused much more concretely: what mechanisms might be developed that would weed out potential leaders who did not have this quality? One immediate response would be a much more effective democracy that was as participatory as possible, and truly representative when direct participation became difficult because of the large number of citizens involved. But I have already made enough
If Confucianism is described as basically a moral stance, if it is construed most fundamentally as an ethical orientation toward the world with political implications, its potential impact for the contemporary world will not be very great, I fear, because, on ethical or political grounds alone I know of no convincing answer to the question of why I should work so hard to extend my humane feelings to strangers no less than kin in order to insure that I will treat everyone in an appropriate caring manner. Such treatment will not initially come easily to most of us, and we almost surely will not derive deep pleasure from our appropriate actions in intercourse with those we know only slightly, or not at all. For myself, there is no solely ethical argument I can muster to exhort others to follow the ren dao of the early Confucians; the answer must be spiritual in its thrust. I must always extend my human circle outward (which includes backward and forward in time) because such continued self-cultivation is necessary to have that sense of belonging, of at-one-ment, with the whole human race, enabling us to more serenely endure life’s sorrows as well as celebrate its pleasures, be able to deal with adversity, confront our mortality with some equanimity, and consequently enjoy a fair measure of contentment with our lives. Without such lifelong effort, our spiritual lives will be much less than they could be.

Who Am I?

It remains to make at least a few more remarks about what has probably been the most eyebrow-arching claim that I have put forward in my work in early Confucianism over the years, namely, that we are the sum of the roles we live in community with others, with little of ontological significance left over with which to piece together an individual self apart from those roles. This theme is a major focus of P. J. Ivanhoe’s contribution to this volume, and it bears on a great deal of what I have already said in the earlier sections of these remarks. Hence to respond to Ivanhoe is a way to bring together the several strands of my thought described herein, and the overall argument structure in which I have placed them. To treat the matter fully would make these replies of mine longer than all of the other nineteen essays combined. But I have already perhaps gone on too long, and so will be brief, and in order to keep my narrative as clear and of as much general interest as possible, will place some secondary and detailed comments on
Ivanhoe’s reading of my work in an even briefer final footnote to these responses, offering at the same time a promissory note of a fuller account of this issue in a future study.

Let me first clear some ground in an effort that may help to establish where and why Ivanhoe and I are, or might well be, in disagreement on the issue(s). There is at the outset the question of the primary audience each of us wishes to address. If I understand him correctly, I believe Ivanhoe wishes to utilize Confucianism in dialogue with fellow philosophers with the goal of developing a maximally comprehensive moral theory that might make some claims to cross-cultural allegiance. I of course applaud this aim, but fear that my concept of the role-bearing person is too far afield from mainstream philosophical ethics to contribute directly to it very much. To even begin to describe well, much less defend the role-bearing model of human beings would make for a much lengthier article than any professional philosophical journal would accept today. As for content, with so much at stake professionally, and so much to do, no one deeply invested in the philosophical or Judaic-Christian heritages of ethics would take kindly, I think, to being asked to entertain seriously the possibility of a thoroughgoing rejection of the concept of the individual self. My primary audience, on the other hand, is much more diffuse, as my remarks in the earlier “Democracy Now” and “On Religion” sections of these remarks must intimate. Of course I want to employ the early Confucian vision to engage in dialogue with my fellow philosophers, but equally with my fellow Americans, with politicians, pundits, jurists, religious leaders, diplomats, and anyone else who believes the United States is in serious moral and spiritual decline, and that this decline, because of the country’s immense wealth, power, and attendant arrogance, is increasingly affecting adversely the rest of the world. It is for this reason that so many of my writings are in the interstices between pure philosophy, comparative philosophy, applied ethics, and political commentary. I should like a comprehensive moral theory, too, but am more immediately concerned to lay the conceptual groundwork for both cultural and cross-cultural dialogues to deepen and begin seriously to attempt a value-ordering that would be agreeable to most people while yet retaining the cultural diversity necessary for human beings to flourish. I believe that pressing the case for the role-bearing person is one small but not inconsequential way to begin this task, not only because it has much to recommend it on its own merits, it captures well the way a great many peoples of this world would describe themselves, and the concept of the role-bearing person is obviously not as deeply embedded in the modern Western
philosophical, religious, and political heritages as is the concept of the individual self, and thus less susceptible to a charge of cultural imperialism.

A second point I want to make is the importance of distinguishing between the question of whether what either Ivanhoe or I have to say is the better interpretation of Confucian writings, and the very different question of whether the positions on the self we each advance are worthy of philosophical attention on their own. That is to say, while I do not believe he is correct in attributing as much of an individual self as he does to the Confucius of the *Analects*, the self he describes is not a bare atom either, and I think it is philosophically valuable and worthy of reflection on its own, call it “P. J. ism” or what you will. Similarly, while his essay makes clear that he believes my role-bearing person reading of the text is mistaken, even if – “counterfactually,” I am inclined to insert – his argument could be sustained, it would not, *of itself*, empty my claim of philosophical import. I could more modestly claim simply that I had arrived at this view of the person by being inspired by the writings of Confucius and his followers, and enter the disputational lists on that basis.

But whether or not what Ivanhoe says about the individual self can be attributed to Confucius and Ivanhoe, or just Ivanhoe, and whether or not what Rosemont says about the role-bearing person can be attributed to Confucius and Rosemont, or just Rosemont, we must ask the same question: what claims can these conflicting views of human beings have on our allegiance? The basic difficulty with this question is to ascertain what would count as a good answer to it. Clearly the issue of whether or not we are more basically individual selves or role-bearing persons is not an empirical one; what would evidence for it be like, and what is the probability we could know how to interpret it correctly even if it was somehow staring us in the face? Important though they are, language and linguistics studies will not help much in answering the question either, for most languages have forms of first-person singular and reflexive pronouns, yet have a fair number of kinship terms too, which are frequently used as forms of address. Obviously neither acceptance nor rejection of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity will move the answer along, except perhaps within a single linguistic community, and I am confident Bao Zhiming and most other generative linguists would agree. Further, I know of no argument, *a priori* or otherwise, that can settle the case. How, then, at the philosophical – not textual – level, might we attempt to answer the question?

“Reasonableness” is a fair answer, but probably will not take us as far as we would like to go. In arguing for an individual self, no matter the Confucian social overtones which distinguish it from many other accounts,
Ivanhoe has the weight of the Western philosophical and Judaic-Christian traditions on his side. And he argues well; thus his answer can surely be a reasonable position to adopt philosophically, all the more so as it seems of a piece with TU Weiming’s, who claims “…the self is unique, and irreducible to its sociality” (148). But no one has attempted to show the wrongness of my account. David Wong has asked what it is that lives all the roles I describe, and then answers his own question well and quickly: the body (332). He then goes much further, appearing to concur with my view of the role-bearing person, by claiming that the roles are *constitutive* of the person. Not surprisingly, I endorse fully his arguments on this score, as when he says “other people may be thought to constitute one’s identity if these others form part of the context in terms of which one’s constituting traits are specified” (333). In other words, if I behave one way in the presence of my older teenage grandchildren, and in another way in the presence of my older teenage students, how account for the difference, except to say that I am not merely “influenced,” but *constituted* by the others with whom I have a constant duty to interact *appropriately*. If what I do, think, and feel differs significantly because of the differing social and natural environments in which I find myself, how could there be a constant self, known only inwardly or otherwise? Moreover, I do not, as Ivanhoe alleges, claim that “…we become the roles we fulfill” (43; italics in the original). Rather, for me we *are* the sum of the roles we *live*, and because our roles are consistently changing, we are all and always in a state of “becoming.” Becoming a father changed me significantly, as did becoming a grandfather. So did ending one role (graduate student) and taking on another (professor). My role as son switched from being beneficiary to becoming benefactor. Becoming a widower would change me greatly.

To make my own case at least somewhat “reasonable” despite the extent to which it goes across the philosophical and religious grain, I have always been willing to “push the envelope” a bit to have it confronted. In my contribution to the *Festschrift* for Angus Graham, which I am sad to say appears to have been read by virtually nobody except Angus, I offered, with not a little irony, the following lexical substitution *salva veritate* for one of the most famous paragraphs in the history of modern Western philosophy, which I repeat here in order to push the envelope a little once again:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular role or other, of son or father, lover or friend, student or teacher, brother or neighbor. I never can catch *myself* at any time apart from a role, and never can observe anything except from the viewpoint of a role…. If anyone upon serious and unpreju-
I do not think this paraphrase of Hume, or anything at all I might say briefly, could make my argument for the Confucian role-bearing person conclusive against what Ivanhoe sketches for the individual Confucian self in his paper. But my arguments might strike at least a few people as equally reasonable, and if so, how would or could they decide between the two accounts? For myself, it would seem that if another premises, more or less empirical, was accepted – namely, that each of these views are eminently capable of becoming self-fulfilling prophecies – it would follow that our criterion for choice must be a moral one. If it is important to choose between the two, and if no purely rational or even eminently reasonable reasons exist for choosing one or the other, and if the choice helps determine later behavioral outcomes, then clearly we must choose the alternative which holds the greater promise for generating, or regenerating a sense of the full human community, and a greater sense of caring for and about our fellows, where that feeling can be defined as anything from the Mencian sense of pleasure described by Nylan and Huang to the sense that must underlie the Rawlsian possibility of an “overlapping consensus” about the importance of just political institutions.

Returning to a line of reasoning I developed earlier, role-bearing persons will of course give great weight to second-generation economic, social and cultural rights, but that does not mean they will slight civil and political rights. On the contrary, if you and I can only flourish as we contribute to each other’s flourishing, why would I not want you to speak your mind, have other friends besides me, and hold whatever religious beliefs that satisfied your spiritual needs? The transition from second to first generation rights is conceptually straightforward. But the converse does not hold. With the concept of the free, autonomous individual as basic I surely must leave you alone to speak, have your friends and believe whatever you wish, but that doesn’t mean I have to help you get a job, decent housing, health care, or any other good delimited in Articles 22-27 of the Universal Declaration. As Chinn knows (72-73) I have been claiming for some time now that it takes a large conceptual leap to feel this positive obligation to assist others, a leap many people cannot, or will not, endeavor to make. Again, U.S. history does not offer much reason for optimism that the situa-
tion will change as long as the individual remains foundational for moral, legal, and political thinking here.

I believe Ivanhoe almost surely feels as frustrated and angry about this state of affairs, but if he continues to hold out for an agent-oriented moral theory in which the agents are individuals, then, on the basis of the criteria just sketched, my position should carry the day unless the grounds of argument are shifted considerably. My claim, obviously, is that a considerable amount of the disease currently infecting the American body politic has been due to a deeply rooted underlying ideology of individualism, rugged or conservatively compassionate, but surely useful for protecting the “opulent minority” Madison sought successfully to protect. This claim has not been disputed by Ivanhoe, or any other of my interlocutors herein or elsewhere as far as I have been able to determine, even though I have been advancing arguments for the conceptual incompatibility between first and second generation rights for two decades.

In passing, it can be noted with regard to this last point that if my concept of the role-bearing person is not applicable to the Confucian classical texts, as Ivanhoe wishes to claim, then that concept cannot be used to account for any of the manifold dimensions of Chinese history which all people of good will can agree were and are deplorable; the explanation(s) must lay elsewhere than in my idiosyncratic views of the nature of personhood as I take them from the classical texts.

I should probably not end these remarks about who I think I am, and what difference it makes, without saying something about how I view the manifold roles I believe we all live. In the first place, I see them as normative. We all have, in my view, a pretty good sense of the kinds of things that grandmothers can and should do, and the same for neighbors, teachers, friends, fathers, and so many more. The roles constitutive of human interactions are very much like the rules constitutive of human languages. They both constrain, but without the constraints no interaction or communication could be effected. There are at least a dozen ways to paraphrase “John broke the window” while retaining identical truth conditions, but “Broken John window was the by” is not one of them. In the same way, there are many ways of being a good parent, but beating your children is not one of them, any more than dogmatism can be a distinguishing mark of a teacher.

It is not, of course, obligatory to be a parent in my view of a Confucianism open to the 21st Century (although it surely was for the Master himself). It is obligatory that our roles involve intergenerational interactions, such that we have dealings with other human beings who are our seniors, our juniors, and our peers. It is obligatory to take our roles with the
utmost seriousness, and learn not only to meet our many and ongoing obligations, but to come to *enjoy* meeting them.

Further, it is only within the constraints of social roles and language rules that freedom and creativity can be expressed. Two four-year olds moving chess pieces around the board might be enjoying themselves, imitating elders they have been watching play a game. But the children are not playing creative chess, because they do not know the rules; Kasparov and Fischer play creative chess. Without the rules (roles), our behavior, linguistic or social, is simply random, or arbitrary. In the same way, all of the creativity we express in our language conforms to its grammatical rules, except when one of them is violated for special effect, as in a poem.

Some people want to suggest that if all we are is the sum of the roles we live, then none of us is very different from each other. Now there are two ways this point can be understood. First, it can mean that significant degrees of cultural diversity notwithstanding, many social roles — grandmother, friend, healer, parent, child, teacher, etc. are fairly invariant across cultures. This is the meaning I believe correct, and can form one basis for the cross-cultural dialogues I discussed earlier for finding a more common rank-ordering of values. Social roles, in their normative dimensions, should not be seen as subjective. If not fully objective *sub specie aeternitatis* they surely are within each cultural context, because everyone therein knows what they are, and how they ought to be performed. It is one of the most important lessons parents transmit to their children.

The other meaning is quite different, and false, in my opinion, for what it implies is that there would be, on my account, a drab sameness to us, being defined pretty much by a single small set of roles and attendant norms. But this reading misses the point of the specific form of ethical particularism in the Confucian concept of role-bearing persons as I interpret the texts. To give a highly particularistic example, I am not just a grandfather, I am Sebastian Rosemont’s grandfather, and Timmy Healy’s grandfather, too, and the grandfather of ten additional unique young persons. I have not just been a teacher, I have been, in particular with reference to this volume, a teacher of Mary Bockover, Erin Cline, NI Peimin and BAO Zhiming, but we have switched roles now to become colleagues and good friends; I am fairly certain I am the only person who could identify himself uniquely in this manner.28 In more ways than one, we are known by the company we keep.

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28 There are a great many points Ivanhoe argues in his essay that I have not touched on, but most of them do hinge, in one way or another, on our different conceptions of personhood. A number of his criticisms I have dealt with in other writings, but the two most important of
REFERENCES


them with respect to P. J.’s arguments are not commonly known or cited. Thus, for much of what he says criticizing the role-bearing person logically and ontologically, and, citing Wenzel, his views on Greek notions of the self, I have taken up in an article which has only appeared in German, “Zur Unabgegrenztheit…” cited in the Bibliography. Therein I explored these and related themes utilizing complementary original material from colleagues whose scholarship I have always admired: Sivin, 1995; Deborah Sommer, Body, Spirit and Image in the Iconography of Confucius (forthcoming); and David Keightley, 2002. Several other virtues Ivanhoe posits for the concept of the individual I have criticized and contrasted with the role-bearing person in “Who Chooses?” cited in the text above. Relatedly, Ivanhoe has read closely the Review Article I wrote of Fingarette’s Confucius: The Secular as Sacred. The review prompted a lengthy but pleasurable exchange between the two of us – response by him, reply by me – but was only published in October, 1978 in Philosophy East and West, a full two years after the original review. In that exchange, however, we did take up the issues of the self, including the seeming behaviorism (Rylean, Skinnerian) of Fingarette’s account, and readers of the exchange will see, I believe, that Ivanhoe’s concerns in these areas were taken up by us. Fingarette made clear the extent to which he wished to distance himself from any form of behaviorism, but that his writings might convey the appearance of sympathy for the position because of his unhappiness – which I share fully – with the mind-body dichotomy that still plagues much contemporary Western philosophy a full four centuries after Descartes passed to his reward. With his concern for the “inner” person (27, for example), it is clear to me that Ivanhoe and I disagree on this point, which is altogether unsurprising, given, again, our different conceptions of personhood.


PART V
Henry Rosemont, Jr.
PUBLICATIONS

I. BOOKS

Radical Confucianism. In preparation

II. BOOKS (EDITED)

IV. BOOKS (CONTRIBUTIONS TO)


“From *shi* to *jun zi* to *sheng* in the *Lun Yu*,” in the *Proceedings of the 1989 Fudan Conference on Confucianism*. Shanghai, 1991. (Text in Chinese, Abstract in English.)


V. ARTICLES AND REVIEW ARTICLES

Articles


“A Reply to Professor Fingarette.” *Philosophy East and West*, 28, no. 4, October 1978.


“Now is the Time to Resist,” in Foreign Policy in Focus, July, 2005.


**Reviews**


**Miscellaneous**

“Shanghai Journal,” periodic column for In These Times, 1982-84.

Approximately 50 articles and book reviews of varying length have appeared in the Resist Newsletter from 1969 to the present.

A number of review notices were published in Choice, 1966-69.


Interview, conducted by Olga Lamova and Mary Bockover, translated and published in the Czech journal, Literarni Noviny, 14, May 2005.

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