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Chinese Metaphysics and Its Problems ed. by Chenyang Li and Franklin Perkins (review)

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philosophy. Bai explores the Confucians' treatment of social cohesion, harmony, state identity, the public and private sphere, the question of just war, and the role of the people in government. He concludes more directly than any other author in the collection (excepting perhaps Li) with the advocacy of a specific position: the Confucian ideal regime (a.k.a. hybrid regime) is preferable to liberal democracy.

Yan Zhonghu explores the concept of *tian* as a way of getting at the notion of Ultimate Reality in classical Confucianism and its relation to self-cultivation. Yan's argument is that the expression of Ultimate Reality through one's personhood is best embodied in the *shengren* 聖人 (sage). He holds that the sage who expresses Ultimate Reality is a person who is able to transcend the drive of his ego and take the interest of the world as his own personal interest.

Chenyang Li's essay concludes the collection by addressing the concept of harmony in the period. I am not aware of any philosopher of classical Confucianism who has given more careful study to the question of harmony among these thinkers than has Li. His book *The Confucian Philosophy of Harmony* is the most comprehensive work on the subject. His essay in this collection considers not only the formation and structure of this concept in the classical period, but also its implications and relevancy in the present day. In this essay, as in his larger work, Li maintains that harmony rests on the primacy of moral force, an empathetic understanding of others, and the overcoming of combativeness.

The various essays in this collection are certainly not free of controversy, and no scholar will agree with all that is stated. Additionally, some essays reprise well-worn lines of argumentation and take very traditional views on the source and chronology of several classical texts. Even so, this collection is highly recommended. The authors set out the historical terrain of classical Confucianism, generally making an effort to pay attention to the most recent findings and most current scholarship. The division of the text devoted to philosophical issues gives the reader an opportunity to see the development and change in understandings of even the most cherished of Confucian notions.

Chinese Metaphysics and Its Problems. Edited by Chenyang Li and Franklin Perkins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. x + 242. Hardcover \$95.00, ISBN 978-1-107-09350-8.



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Roger T. Ames begins his contribution to Chenyang Li and Franklin Perkins' edited volume *Chinese Metaphysics and Its Problems* (chapter 5) with this scene from Charles Dickens' *Pickwick Papers*, chapter 51:

"They [a set of literary articles written for the *Eatanswill Gazette*] appeared in the form of a copious review of a work on Chinese metaphysics, Sir," said Pott.

"Oh," observed Mr. Pickwick; "from your pen, I hope?" "From the pen of my critic, Sir," rejoined Pott, with dignity.

"An abstruse subject, I should conceive," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Very, Sir," responded Pott, looking intensely sage. "He crammed for it, to use a technical but expressive term; he read up for the subject, at my desire, in the *'Encyclopedia Britannica.'*"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Pickwick; "I was not aware that that valuable work contained any information respecting Chinese metaphysics."

"He read, Sir," rejoined Pott, laying his hand on Mr. Pickwick's knee, and looking round with a smile of intellectual superiority—"he read for metaphysics under the letter M, and for China under the letter C, and combined his information, Sir!"

Chinese metaphysics, as a contemporary topic, has no better luck in the *Britannica* 2015 edition than it did in the edition of Dickens' day. As the editors discuss in their introduction to this book, the Chinese had no metaphysics at all if it is defined narrowly as what Aristotle did, or what postmodernists reject, or as the search for unchanging ultimate realities. But if you expand your notion of metaphysical philosophy to be something like Wilfrid Sellars' famous definition, quoted by Ames on page 86—"The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term"—then of course Chinese philosophy has a full plate of metaphysics. The twelve chapters of this volume, plus its subtle introduction, amply demonstrate the existence as well as philosophical value of metaphysics in Chinese philosophy. The authors are all substantial scholars, several being among the most senior students of Chinese philosophy; although other scholars might dispute some of the interpretations, these authors are authoritative, and I recommend that anyone interested in Chinese metaphysics, or China, or metaphysics, should read it.

Robin R. Wang's "*Yinyang Narrative of Reality: Chinese Metaphysical Thinking*," deals with a text that might suggest there is a transcendent abstract reality "above" the flow of things, but argues that the *yinyang* cosmology from the *Yijing* and elsewhere is the basic reality, which is always changing. She explains how that cosmology undergirds important Chinese metaphysical terms: *maodun* (contradiction and opposition), *xiangyi* (interdependence), *huhuan* (mutual inclusion), *jiaogan* (interaction or resonance), *hubu* (complementarity or mutual support), and *zhuanhua* (change and transformation).

JeeLoo Liu's "In Defense of Chinese *Qi*-naturalism" explores the notion of *qi*, and she says that a *qi* narrative is compatible with the *yinyang* narrative in Wang's chapter. She argues that all the origins of things, including the cosmos, are functions of the changes in *qi* and that there are no transcendent supernatural entities other than the *qi* as the stuff of the world.

Franklin Perkins' "What Is a Thing (Wu)?" does for *wu* as a basic metaphysical idea what Wang and Liu did for *yinyang* and *qi*, arguing that *wu* is to be understood

as changes toward individuation. He discusses the many senses of this in pre-Qin material.

Chris Fraser's "The Mohist Conception of Reality" contends that the Mohist texts present a naturalistic philosophy in which all changes are naturally caused. Heaven (*tian*), though having intentions somewhat like a god, is just a name for the whole of nature, and it has important ethical elements that are metaphysically naturalistic. That is, norms are built in to the nature of things.

Roger Ames' "Reading the *Zhongyong* 'Metaphysically'" is a splendid metaphysical reading of that text, and very surprising coming from a prodigious author who has been famously allergic to metaphysics. He stiffens his metaphysical backbone with the slogan "only becoming is," and proceeds to read the *Zhongyong* as giving metaphysical weight to the ethical elements in the human situation in nature. Ames is particularly helpful in sorting through the various terms that have metaphysical significance, for example in the first line of the *Zhongyong*, and relating these to some of the newly discovered manuscripts in the ancient Confucian cluster.

Jiyuan Yu's "Logos and Dao: Conceptions of Reality in Heraclitus and Laozi" picks up on the previous authors' concern to emphasize change and compares the West's first "process" philosopher with the Chinese conception of universal change as found in the *Laozi*. He untangles the various senses in which both *logos* and *dao* are the sources of order and the interestingly various senses in which both terms can mean speech. He also develops epistemological aspects of order in change.

Michael Puett's "Constructions of Reality: Metaphysics in the Ritual Traditions of Classical China" argues that the ancient Chinese used ritual to unite "all under heaven" when in fact social life had become fractious. He suggests that some of the metaphysical ideas of ancient China arose from or were at least related to the reality-ordering of ritual.

Hans-Rudolf Kantor's "Concepts of Reality in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism" begins with the clear sentence: "The conceptual context in which Buddhists discuss the ontological and epistemological implications of truth, reality, and falsehood concerns the soteriological process of our liberation from suffering" (p. 130). He then argues that for several of the Chinese Buddhist schools, truth is never separable from falsehood, only distinguishable from it. Learning to keep that distinction in mind is close to the aim of liberation from suffering.

Vincent Shen's "Being and Events: Huayan Buddhism's Concept of Event and Whitehead's Ontological Principle" is a highly original and entirely plausible interpretation of Whitehead based on questions arising from Huayan Buddhism's treatment of process, one, and many. Whereas Huayan ultimately subordinates the many to One Mind, Whitehead is lauded for his conception of the "generosity" of each event to give rise to many more events.

Brook Ziporyn's "Harmony as Substance: Zhang Zai's Metaphysics of Polar Relations" characterizes Zhang Zai's philosophy as a "monism of harmony," noting that harmony supposes a plurality of things to harmonize. Of particular interest is that Ziporyn bases his argument on his translation and analysis of Zhang Zai's "Eastern Inscription," which is usually neglected in favor of attention to his famous "Western Inscription."

John Berthrong's "A Lexicography of Zhu Xi's Metaphysics," after reviewing some suggestions by Roger Ames and David Hall, presents a detailed analysis of four metaphysical domains within which Zhu Xi developed his philosophy, each domain embracing an array of concepts. The domains are (1) states, conditions, fields, formats, and textures; (2) dynamic functions or processes; (3) civilizing cultural outcomes; and (4) axiological values and virtues.

John Makeham's "Xiong Shili's Understanding of the Relationship between the Ontological and the Phenomenal" shows how Xiong's movement from his original Yogācāra Buddhism to developing the founding ideas of twentieth-century New Confucianism brought him to identify the ontological with the phenomenal. Makeham neatly traces Xiong's changing interpretations of what the ontological and the phenomenal mean.

To a remarkable degree this volume displays exciting and subtle metaphysics in the Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist strains of Chinese philosophy, from the earliest texts to Xiong Shili in the early twentieth century. Of course, each of these essays is but a sample of metaphysical problematics that might be analyzed. But there is one glaring omission that deserves comment. There is no sample here of contemporary Chinese metaphysics, only essays about other thinkers. Several of the authors—Vincent Shen and Roger Ames, for instance—are known for their own metaphysical views, but these are not expressed here. What would contemporary Chinese metaphysics look like? As the New Confucians have known, contemporary Chinese metaphysics needs to reformulate the classic language to take into account both recent science and the engagement with non-Chinese traditions of philosophy. The metaphysical themes so neatly analyzed in this volume need to be given contemporary language and argumentative forms to engage in the current global philosophical dialogue. As Ames says in his essay here and in many other writings, Chinese philosophy excels at *ars contextualis*, the art of thinking in context. The context for any contemporary metaphysics is the global situation with its multiplicity of cultures and raw wounds of intercultural brutalization. A study of past metaphysics is incomplete for a contemporary metaphysics whose context is the global situation. Can we not expect from the Chinese metaphysical traditions a new metaphysician?

Rethinking the Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception. By Eviatar Shulman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xviii + 206. ISBN 978-1-107-06239-9.



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Eviatar Shulman's *Rethinking the Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception* offers an important reminder to take early Buddhist texts seriously as