

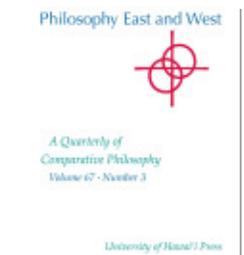


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The Philosophical Challenge from China ed. by Brian Bruya
(review)

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Schopenhauer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 171–212; Cooper, “Schopenhauer and Indian Philosophy,” pp. 274–277; and the three articles by Urs App cited in the previous note.

- 4 – Arthur Schopenhauer, *Manuscript Remains: Early Manuscripts (1804–1818)*, vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (Oxford: Berg, 1988 [1804]), p. 467.
- 5 – As App points out, Hans Zint was the first to recognize this important shift in Schopenhauer’s thinking, but Zint did not claim that Schopenhauer’s study of the *Oupnek’hat* played any role in accounting for this shift. See Hans Zint, “Schopenhauers Philosophie des doppelten Bewußtsein,” *Schopenhauer-Jahrbuch* 10 (1921): 3–45.

The Philosophical Challenge from China. Edited by Brian Bruya. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015. Pp. 432. Hardcover \$45.00, ISBN 978-0-262-02843-1. eBook \$32.00, ISBN 978-0-26-232361-1.



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The Philosophical Challenge from China, edited by Brian Bruya, undoubtedly occupies an important place in the discourse about what practices and authorities are relevant to Philosophy as an academic discipline. Its confident reorientation of philosophical relevance in the context of Anglophone academics will hopefully speak meaningfully to any remaining skeptics of the usefulness of Chinese philosophy. The intended audience of this effort, however, is shrinking, or, more accurately, those willing to be convinced are increasingly few, and what remains is simply and happily the staunch traditionalists of the so-called Western paradigm. This evokes the thought that anthologies that strive to show relevance, while at the same time being philosophically nuanced enough to please a moderately specialized audience, are without appropriate readership. Most readers, I think, will appreciate the alternately playful, scoffing, earnest, and inventive essays that comprise this volume from the meta-philosophical perspective of comparative methodology, and in so doing overlook the challenge that is the supposed force of the collection. That said, whether a particular comparative methodology is advantageous and oriented toward the complex future that comparative philosophy gives way to is a conversation that this anthology is specially poised to host.

Following an introduction from the editor chronicling the crisis of Anglophone Chinese philosophy, namely the sore lack of institutional recognition, respect, and support, this volume is divided into three sections, each featuring a handful of pieces with little overlap in terms of authoritative material, though each makes dutiful reference to the formative texts of the Chinese philosophical tradition.

The first section, Moral Psychology, speaks to those familiar with moral and ethical theory as well as contemporary cognitive science and psychology about

the benefits of including perspectives from Chinese philosophy. The first essay, contributed by Hagop Sarkissian, "When You Think It's Bad, It's Worse Than You Think: Psychological Bias and the Ethics of Negative Character Assessments," begins with Susan Wolf's account of the demands on the potential moral saint. The call for a person to be categorically good seems to go a little far, by Wolf's estimation, and this author searches for remediation amid the *Analects*. With its concern for context and self-scrutiny, the *Analects* yields license to consider the implications and causes of acts that may on the surface not be moral. What Chinese philosophy provides is a nuanced view of others that is not merely the sum of their acts, but an assessment of their character, which may or may not be charitable. The ability to assess others is part of what it is to be moral, and it requires consistent self-directed scrutiny. This depth of inward- and outward-directed morality is compared to contemporary experimental psychology and game theory in hopes of clarifying the problems of giving someone the benefit of the doubt in a social context.

In the second essay, "Growing Virtue: The Theory and Science of Developing Compassion from a Mencian Perspective," David B. Wong squares its view on the *Mencius* and brings in select insights from contemporary psychology to bolster a theory of compassion. Interestingly, the *Mencius* is shown with relative ease to align with new findings in cognitive neuroscience more so than the philosophical perspectives on self proffered by Kant and Hume, which embrace the dichotomy between body and mind.

In the third selection, Bongrae Seok's "Proto-Empathy and Nociceptive Mirror Emotion: Mencius' Embodied Moral Psychology" also makes use of the *Mencius'* embodied perspective on morality, but hopes to uncover insights for theories on empathy. Empathy is not something that is learned in a social context, but, as in the *Mencius*, is a spontaneous upwelling of concern. Seok presents cognitive theories of nociceptive mirror emotions, which provide insights into the uniquely painful feeling one has when exposed to the suffering of someone else, to develop a theory of embodied proto-empathy, a moral emotion that may preempt social concerns about caring for others.

The second section, Political Philosophy and Ethics, offers up the delectable bread and butter of Chinese Philosophy. The first essay, "A Criticism of Later Rawls and a Defense of a Decent (Confucian) People," by Tongdong Bai, is framed as a critique of the later John Rawls' toleration of a decent, though non-liberal political forum, and engages liberal thought in contemporary and ancient Western paradigms before moving to the model of hierarchical, meritocratic political thought found in Confu-China. The author suggests that the consultation model of governing in Confu-China, which depends on a politically informed and educated selection of the general populace, is more realistic than Rawls' so-called realistic utopia.

In the second essay, boldly titled "Unequal Human Worth," Donald J. Munro promotes the ideal of familial emotion that permeates Confucian social morality. The partiality we show to our family or clan is a more honest appraisal of ethical conduct than utilitarian or religious views that demand equal consideration of all persons. Yet, when considered from the political and civil perspective, all should be considered equal under the law with regard to rights and benefits. Munro holds the personal and

the civic to be separate realms of separable concerns that a commonsense notion of moral wherewithal can easily navigate between.

The third essay also contributes to the discussion about political and private ideals of ethics. This contribution by Stephen C. Angle, "Virtue Ethics, the Rule of Law, and the Need for Self-Restriction," engages Aristotle and Hume, and their respective neo-counterparts, about the problem of conciliation between ethics and law. Namely, what reason does an agent have to forego private concerns for the sake of the polis? Where does virtue fit into a holistic, integrated society? Angle finds an answer in the modern Confucian philosopher Mou Zongsan, whose concern was not to bring the two realms together but to pry them apart by emphasizing the role of self-restriction in navigating the complexities of a politically engaged, but still moral, life.

Turning to the self, in "Ethical Self-Commitment and Ethical Self-Indulgence" Kwong-loi Shun orients individual ethical concerns within a network of a life lived among others, and whose appraisal has a role in the decision to perform ethical acts. This reflectivity, and the clarity of mind necessary to attain authenticity in reflection, may prevent the urge to egoistically privilege one's own ethical views.

The final essay in this section, contributed by Owen Flanagan and Steven Geisz, "Confucian Moral Sources," charges monotheistic sources of moral exemplariness as providing license for unsolicitous behavior toward others. Where Judeo-Christian rationales tend toward oneness in belief and in good deeds, contributions from the Chinese Confucian tradition emphasize the importance of acting appropriately in a specific context in a way that promotes harmonious dynamics in society.

The final section, Metaphysics and Epistemology, is a venue for the more experimental essays in this volume. While these themes are rarely brought to the fore in the canonical sources of Chinese philosophy, the cosmological configurations necessary to ground their prescient philosophical concerns prove to be valuable topics for exploration. In the first essay, "Sense and Values of Oneness," Philip J. Ivanhoe explores the potential relationship between oneness and altruism. If one feels a visceral connection with the items that populate a holistic and interconnected world, is one more likely to act selflessly as opposed to selfishly? With its numerous different explanations of oneness, Chinese philosophy proves a valuable interlocutor in this psychological query.

The second contribution, "What Does the Law of Non-Contradiction Tell Us, If Anything? Paradox, Parameterization, and Truth in Tiantai Buddhism," by Brook Ziporyn, emphasizes the untenability of essentialist ontologies in representing the world. In order to make the assertion that something is true and so cannot be false, one must take for granted the rigidity of one (prevaillingly Western) mode of ontological categorization of things. Once this impulse is pushed aside, let's say by bringing into focus the interconnectedness of things and processes, and actual truth must share the stage with provisional truth, the practice necessary to assert that what is cannot not be is shown to be merely one among many methods for understanding the world.

The third essay, Stephen Hetherington and Karyn L. Lai's "Knowing-How and Knowing-To," darns the hole worn between *epistêmê* and *technê* by integrating timing into the display of knowledge. Traditional views of knowing how fail to recognize

the importance of how one knows to perform an act at the appropriate moment. This enhancement of knowing how imports the Chinese philosophical ideal of attentiveness to context. This focus draws epistemological concerns away from general concepts, softening the abstractness of knowing that and making room for fruitful conversations about the mingling of epistemology and conduct.

In "Quine's Naturalized Epistemology and Zhuangzi's Daoist Naturalism: How Their Constructive Engagement is Possible," Bo Mou hopes to motivate pan-perspectival views of the world to ameliorate concerns about the incommensurability of scientific truth and context-dependent discovery. In answer to the question of whether it is possible to reconcile the scientific predilection for truth in singularity with the potentially infinite interpretations of nature from the perspective of the individual, Mou cites the *Zhuangzi* as the appropriate model. Attempting to transcend one's perspective by imagining those of others gets away from the problematic singularity of a scientifically gleaned world.

The final contribution, editor Brian Bruya's "Action Without Agency and Natural Human Action: Resolving a Double Paradox," travels the increasingly smooth road between contemporary theories in psychology and Chinese philosophy. Systems theory in modern psychology emphasizes the irreducible entwining of seemingly individual elements, and this maps eerily onto Chinese philosophy's focus on the complexity of dynamic processes that shape the world. These ideas, used in tandem, undermine the historic dichotomy of free will and determinism by placing agency within an organized, natural system that to some extent shapes the exercise of the will, but not in a way that deeply limits freedom.

This anthology is advertised in the introduction as a clarion call to those (stodgy, perhaps) Philosophy Department Chairs and (also stodgy, perhaps) dedicatedly analytic philosophers to acknowledge the enhancement that Chinese philosophy lends to familiar philosophical quandaries. The tidy glossary of Chinese terms and pronunciation guide are responsible additions to further this effort. Make a gift of it to your department's ardent critics of inclusion, and its lovely cover, pleasingly streamlined formatting, and range of familiar tropes and topics will hopefully warrant at least a side-eyed perusal. However, the true treasures found in this book are the different techniques for doing comparative philosophy that may be used to catalyze a reflective and critical conversation among those who need not be convinced of its relevance. Preferable techniques make Chinese philosophical authorities indispensable voices in conversations that speak to urgent problems, rather than making facile expressions about how they can speak to their Western counterparts about roughly similar historic concerns or chime in on already overwrought debates. Comparison of comparative methodologies, however, is not the mission of the anthology and so there is no guide to follow in this respect. A Zhuangzian roam through the pages will yield unsought insights, which are the most valuable kind, as well as a tenuous meta-narrative that may prove to be as challenging to critics and newcomers to the field of comparative philosophy as to its inhabitants and ought to be shared with all three.