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The Status of Asian/Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies

Vrinda Dalmiya & Xinyan Jiang, Co-Editors  Spring 2002  Volume 01, Number 2

WORDS FROM EDITORS

Vrinda Dalmiya and Xinyan Jiang
To a large extent this issue of our Newsletter is about breaking stereotypes and boundaries. We would like to underscore that Asians have worked on much more than Asian or comparative philosophy—on logic, ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, phenomenology, philosophy of language, post-colonial and feminist theory; and that Asian philosophy, in turn, can be deeply metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, phenomenological or post-colonial. Without pretensions of exhaustiveness, what we attempt to present here is a sample of this wide philosophical spectrum.

The issue consists of three parts. One part focuses on the contributions of some philosophers who happen to be “Asians” and “Asian Americans” while another introduces some of the recent books written by them. But the philosophers whose works are featured here have very little in common. They might not even want to self-identify as “Asians” at all. A self-reflective moment on the fragmented and ambiguous configurations of an Asian identity thus seems to be in order. We begin with David Kim’s ruminations on the invisibility of Asian Americans in philosophy which brings in yet another layer of signification to the concept as a marker for identity.

The Committee on the Status of Asian & Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies

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  Yoko Arisaka (2002)
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(Terms expire June 30 of the year in parentheses)

PART I: ON IDENTITY

Asian American Philosophers: Absence, Politics, and Identity
David Haekwon Kim

This essay considers some aspects of Asian American identity through a critical reflection of why there are virtually no Asian Americans in philosophy. So I address a matter of some importance to the APA, namely the historical absence of Asian American philosophers, and show how some of the factors involved are precisely the sort that configures contemporary Asian American identity.

Absence
I would wager that most philosophers of Asian descent in the APA are Asian international scholars visiting or residing in the U.S. Their growing presence in American universities is hardly surprising given the present vitality of trans-Pacific ties, and their participation is so much to the good on a number of different fronts, including ethnic, national, racial, and philosophical diversity. It is a mystery, however, that the APA has so few Asian American philosophers, those who self-identify as such in virtue of being “homegrown”, having roots in, say, Phillie, Chicago, L.A., Frisco, or NY, instead of, say, Tokyo, Beijing, Bombay, Manila, Saigon, or Seoul. Though I cannot yet be certain, my sense is that there are fewer than 20 such philosophers affiliated with the APA. If this estimate is roughly correct, then Asian Americans constitute a percentage of the membership barely more than zero. Some philosophy departments are larger! So in spite of the fact that Asian Americans comprise a small proportion of the overall population, there has got to be some explanation of their virtual non-existence in the profession. This absence is dramatically more conspicuous in light of two further points.

First, consider the subset of the overall populace that is most immediately relevant for the development of the philosophical profession, namely college students. In many state and elite universities, Asian Americans have a numerical presence that far exceeds their representation in the general populace. In some California state schools, they even approach or exceed 50% of the student body, which is why a school like UCI (i.e. U. of California, Irvine) has been dubbed the “University of Chinese Immigrants” and UCLA (i.e. U. of California, Los Angeles) the “University of Caucasians Lost among Asians."
Second, other theoretically abstract disciplines in the humanities have attained a critical mass of Asian American scholars sufficient for critical reflection on the collective experience of Asian Americans. In the field of Asian American Studies, which serves as a meeting ground for such scholars, some of the most outstanding theoretical work has been produced by literary critics. So Asian Americans do have a presence in culture-making/assessing, theoretically rich disciplines – just not in philosophy.

Consequently, a substantial recruitment base has been supplied by the large Asian American presence in universities, and neighboring disciplines have already been relatively successful in recruitment and retention. And so I ask again: Why are there almost no Asian Americans in philosophy? I think this question is not only fair; it is important since there are not only a handful more Asian Americans in our profession than there were some 150 years ago when Asian American careers were more or less confined to sugar cane farming and railroad construction.

**Politics**

I think the prevailing explanation of the absence combines some facts about demographics and some conjectures about culture: The few Asian Americans that might enter philosophy end up pursuing more lucrative jobs pushed on them by their immigrant parents (e.g. law and medicine) or jobs that do not require complete English fluency (e.g. business and engineering). Now, I don’t reject these considerations. Many students, I’m sure, have longed to pursue a major and even graduate work in philosophy but felt compelled in the end to choose a more “practical” career path. I question, however, the sufficiency of the explanation as it is applied to Asian American students as a collective. Specifically, it suffers from being wholly apolitical. Nothing in it recognizes the distinctive set of racialized conditions faced by Asians in the U.S. It relies on a conception of immigrant communities meant to apply equally well to, say, Irish or Italians of an earlier point in U.S. history. Certainly, Irish and Italian Americans of previous generations did experience a great deal of discrimination. Over the centuries, there are other significant realms of evaluation in which Asian Americans continue to undergo identity derogation.

**Identity**

These considerations suggest that in spite of the peculiar valuing of the “Asian intellect” or “Asian work ethic” in recent decades, there are other significant realms of evaluation in which Asian Americans continue to undergo identity derogation. For example, Asian American students and professors might be viewed as lacking the sort of nuanced social sensitivity crucial for rich and humane analyses of human nature and society; as lacking the social graces or generosity of spirit that facilitates easy rapport and intimate friendships; as lacking the intellectual push or vivacity to excel beyond an ordinary competence or mere smartness; as lacking the dialectical tenacity (e.g. “stickin’ to your guns”) to be an engaging interlocutor; as lacking the charisma to lead effectively in the classroom, and so on and so forth. Now, there is a perfectly generic sense in which persons of any group might be deemed lacking in collegiality, loyalty, intellectual character, teaching ability, leadership, and the like. My point, however, is that in virtue of orientalism, perceptions of Asian and Asian American students and philosophers may be more easily distorted in these ways and that such distortions will be normalized and, hence, less easily detected.

These structures of derogation – and again they are continuous with anti-Asian processes working at large – are compounded by an array of secondary phenomena. First, many white Americans lack conceptual articulacy about Asia, Asian Americans, and anti-Asian racism and racialization processes. Far better known, comparatively speaking, are the conditions faced by black Americans. So if such an individual also happens to be racist, then the problem of ignorance is ramified: he does not know that he does not know what Asian Americans are like.

Second, many Asian Americans, in contrast, do have an articulate grasp of much that I have described above. As a result, it is often not so much Confucianist reserve or shyness that explains a student’s being quiet, but her being wary of a
professor or a TA that evidences racism, insists upon a Eurocentric curriculum, or, what is not exactly the same, reveals a certain cluelessness about anti-Asian racism and Eurocentrism.12

It is worth noting here that these first two points reveal a racially bifurcated access to knowledge and meta-knowledge about Asian Americans. Phenomenologically, this epistemic difference may seem like a wall of white incomprehension, which, we must be careful to note, is not the same as confronting white animosity. The animosity, however, is always a live possibility when the wall is challenged, for one is not then being a “nice Asian.”

Third, there is a lack of Asian American mentors that might help guide Asian American students along the path of a philosophy career. And of course this is a self-replicating phenomenon since the absence of Asian American mentors may help to ensure the absence of Asian American graduate students and, hence, help maintain the absence of Asian American mentors.

Fourth, philosophical thought that reflects Asian and Asian American concerns is routinely ignored in the profession. Asian philosophy is relegated to a secondary status, and is typically taught in religion departments.13 And philosophy of the Asian American experience (we might call it “Asian American philosophy”) is virtually non-existent and will likely be marginalized in the way that African American philosophy currently is. Together, these form a facet of what some African American philosophers have been calling the “conceptual whiteness of philosophy.”14

In light of these secondary phenomena, Asian Americans interested in philosophy will potentially contend with, in addition to the agent racism described earlier, a wall of white incomprehension, a lack of Asian American mentors, and the derogation of philosophical thought that resonates with their identity. I think we can now see, if it wasn’t already obvious, that factors beyond the exigencies of immigration and language acquisition must be considered in explaining the absence of “homegrown” Asian philosophers. We must be attentive to political identity generated by orientalist identification practices and to the secondary phenomena described.

I conclude with one last consideration in this vein. Earlier, I noted that Asians and Asian Americans can be devalued in spite of the accolades given to the “Asian intellect” and “Asian work ethic”. This valuing of Asian American academic and economic success often issues from the idea that Asians are a “model minority”, better not only than other non-whites but, in some respects, whites as well. In Asian American Studies, this idea is called the “model minority myth” and has been rightly denounced on a number of grounds. Perhaps the most insidious feature of this myth is its political function: it placates Asian Americans, prevents their solidarity with other nonwhites, and normalizes an enduring racial hierarchy. This myth has been enormously influential. For Asian Americans generally, there is a real temptation to be placated, to finally join whites at their location in the racial hierarchy, even if racism may prevent its complete success. For Asian Americans (and Asians) who want to be a part of the profession, one way to deflect some racism and to no longer be bothered by the wall of incomprehension, the lack of mentors, and the derogated philosophies is simply to succumb. This temptation, then, is also a dynamic of Asian American identity.15

Endnotes
1. Of course, many are “1.5 generation” immigrants who began their education in the U.S. in high school or college.
2. The APA has always collapsed this distinction, lumping together Asians and Asian Americans in all of its demographic analyses. Through the advocacy of a Chinese American philosopher, Gary Mar (at SUNY, Stony Brook), the APA has recently expanded the scope of its Committee on Asians to include issues of Asian American concern – hence the new title “Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies”.
3. Thanks go to Michael Omi for passing these acronyms along during his presentation at the Asian American Philosophy and Critical Race Theory panel at the 76th Pacific Division Meeting of the APA (March 29, 2001).
6. Actually, the Asian American community seems to be bifurcated in terms of immigration. A large subset of the community consists of 3rd, 4th, and even 5th generation Asian Americans, but a larger subset is comprised by post-1965 immigrants.
7. For a short excellent history of Asian America, see Gary Okihiro, Margins and Mainstreams (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).
8. There are many other disparities. Although some German and Italian Americans were interrogated by law enforcement during WWII, only Japanese Americans (some 110,000) were herded into manmade concentration camps. Less well known is that the U.S. used its influence in Latin America to extradite many Japanese Latin Americans and place them as well in concentration camps. Canada also had its version of this federal policy. The incarceration of “nefarious japs”, then, was a phenomenon of the entire Americas.
9. In addition, unlike European immigrants, many Asian immigrants left countries that were explicitly or semi-colonized by the U.S. For example, a large proportion of post-1965 immigration issued from the Philippines, Korea, and Vietnam. The U.S. stands unique among imperial Western powers in having exclusively Pacific and Latin American colonies or semi-colonies. This is a feudist fact that has not been fully acknowledged even in critical race theory.
10. Clearly, after September 11, South Asian Americans have in addition been targeted by anti-Arabic and anti-Muslim prejudice.
11. These statistics are taken from, American Attitudes Toward Chinese Americans and Asian Americans: A Committee of 100 Survey. Their website is www.committee100.org.
12. On the importance and complexity of trust in race relations, I have learned a great deal from Laurence Thomas’ “Moral
Hao Wang and Mathematical Logic

Charles Parsons

Hao Wang is known for his contributions to mathematical logic, computer science, and philosophy. He was a native of China and came from there to the United States in 1946. Except for a five-year interval in England, he remained in the US for the remainder of his life. After the opening up of relations between the US and the People's Republic of China, however, he renewed his own relations with China and visited there already in 1972, and a number of times thereafter. Although he became a US citizen in 1967, Wang would have resisted characterization as an Asian-American. I believe he thought of himself as simply Chinese, a member of the Chinese diaspora that has existed for centuries.

Wang was born in Jinan, Shandong, China, May 20, 1921. He obtained a B. Sc. in mathematics and an M. A. in philosophy in wartime China.1 In 1946 he came to Harvard to study logic and philosophy. He received his Ph.D. in 1948 and was a J unior Fellow of the Society of Fellows at Harvard until 1951. From then until 1961 he taught philosophy at Harvard and then Oxford. He returned to Harvard in 1961 as Gordon McKay Professor of Mathematical Logic and Applied Mathematics. But in 1966 he went to the Rockefeller University as a visiting professor; the next year he became professor, establishing a research group in logic. He made Rockefeller an active center, especially of research in set theory. After the group was broken up by the Rockefeller administration in 1976, only Wang remained, even beyond his retirement in 1991. He died in New York May 13, 1995.

Wang was a philosopher from early on and published his first philosophical essay before he left China. However, the primary field of his early work was logic, and his publications through the early 1960s are largely in mathematical logic. He published a large number of papers, most of which up to 1960 are included in A Survey of Mathematical Logic (1962). One significant contribution arose from W. V. Quine's attempt in his book Mathematical Logic2 to add classes to the sets of his well-known system New Foundations (NF). The axiom Quine proposed was shown inconsistent by J. Barkley Rosser in 1942. Wang analyzed the situation thoroughly and devised the axiom that best expressed the intended idea, which was then incorporated into the revised edition of the book.3 Wang gave a model-theoretic proof that if NF is consistent then his revision is also consistent.

Perhaps encouraged by the year (1950-51) that he spent in Zürich under the auspices of Paul Bernays, Wang worked throughout the 1950s on questions of the relative strength of axioms of mathematics, particularly set theories. He was a pioneer in the post-war research reviving Hermann Weyl's idea that mathematics might be developed in a way that avoids impredicative set existence assumptions. He also contributed to the effort of logicians of the time to analyze predicative definability.

Wang gained practical experience with computers early on, and some of the papers he published around 1960 are significant work on the border between logic and computer science, long before "logic in computer science" became a field with hundreds of publications every year. The best known of these papers reports programs that proved all the theorems of propositional and predicate logic in Principia Mathematica in a few minutes. By using the kind of logical analysis pioneered by Herbrand and Gentzen, he was able to improve substantially on the previous work of Newell, Shaw, and Simon. Possibly his most significant result in mathematical logic was the proof, obtained with A. S. Kahr and E. F. Moore in 1961, that the general decision problem for first-order logic can be reduced to that for the class of quantificational formulas of the form "for all x, some y, and all z, M(x, y, z)" where M contains no quantifiers, so that satisfiability of formulas in that class is undecidable.

Wang's prolific writing in logic included expository and historical work, which is to be found in A Survey and in some of his philosophical writings, especially From Mathematics to Philosophy (hereafter FMP). But he wrote only one expository book on logic, Popular Lectures on Mathematical Logic, based on lectures given in China.

Wang's early philosophical writings are short critical pieces, varied in content.4 Longer pieces in the 1950s stay close to logic and the foundations of mathematics but express a point of view owed much to the European work before the second world war. Probably his first really distinctive extended philosophical essay is "Process and existence in mathematics" (1961). This essay clearly reflects reading of Wittgenstein's Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics, although Wittgenstein's name is not mentioned. The notion of perspicuous proof, the question whether a mathematical statement changes its meaning when a proof of it is found, the question whether contradictions in a formalization are a serious matter for mathematical practice and applications, and a Wittgensteinian line of criticism of logicist reductions of statements about numbers are all to be found in Wang's essay. But it could only have been written by a logician familiar with computers. Computers and Wittgenstein enable Wang to present issues about logic in a more concrete way than is typical in logical literature then or later.

This essay also exhibits a style characteristic of Wang's philosophical writing, which is to present a certain amount of the relevant logic and mathematics, to look at the issues from
different angles and to discuss different views of the matter, very often without pressing very hard an argument for a particular view, even keeping a certain distance from the points of view presented. He was clearly skeptical of systematic theory in philosophy, such as was aspired to by major philosophers of the past and by his teacher W. V. Quine and his friend Michael Dummett. He also resisted the idea, prevalent in earlier post-war analytic philosophy, of “solving philosophical problems” by local analyses and arguments. But he did think that “philosophy should try to achieve some reasonable overview” (FMP, p. x). One could say he aspired to be synoptic but not to be systematic.

Wang’s most important statement in the philosophy of logic and mathematics is FMP, which was probably begun not long after his move to Rockefeller. It was also during that period that Wang’s extended series of exchanges with Kurt Gödel began, and these are reflected importantly in the book. But much of the book does not reflect Gödel’s influence at all. Wang describes his point of view as “substantial factualism,” the thesis that philosophy should respect existing knowledge. Although mathematical and scientific knowledge have special importance, they are not uniquely privileged as in some naturalistic views, and the autonomy of mathematics is maintained. Wang’s method is also much more descriptive than that envisaged, for example, in Quine’s program of naturalistic epistemology. In the context of FMP, this led Wang to include quite a bit of exposition of the relevant mathematical logic, as well as some of its history.

The book covers a number of basic topics in and related to the foundations of mathematics: the concept of computability, logical truth, the concept of set, the mathematical importance of computers, the mechanistic theory of mind. Probably the most notable chapter is that on the concept of set, where Wang explores more thoroughly than others had before in print the conceptual foundations of the accepted axioms of set theory. The chapter on minds and machines expresses a skeptical view of the claims both of mechanists and anti-mechanists and reports some views of Gödel on the subject. Wang explored these themes more fully in a late essay, “On physicalism and algorithmism: Can machines think?” (1993). Probably his main contribution was to make clear how many difficult questions surround the “machine” side of the proposed equation of mind and machine.

Taken as a whole, FMP offers a case, based on the general idea of factualism, for rejecting the pictures of mathematics offered by the logical positivists, by Quine, and by many lesser philosophers. It does not proceed by arguing directly with their views, but rather by laying out some of the data that in Wang’s view they have failed to consider adequately.

Wang conducted an extended series of conversations with Gödel during the time that he was finishing FMP. Gödel’s influence is in evidence in some important places, particularly in the chapter on the concept of set and the chapter on minds and machines. But Wang also presents some previously undocumented views of Gödel. The introduction quotes most of two letters of Gödel written in 1967 and 1968. Views of Gödel are presented there, in the discussion of computability, and in parts of the chapter on the concept of set. The chapter on minds and machines contains a section, “Gödel on minds and machines.” In each case the presentation of Gödel’s views was approved by him (see p. x). Not only were some of these passages revised by Wang in response to Gödel’s comments, but in some cases the final drafts were sent to the publisher by Gödel; in particular that was true of the above-mentioned section. This unusual arrangement reflected an unusual relationship, the closest intellectual relationship into which Gödel entered in his later years.

Wang’s relation to Gödel influenced all his subsequent philosophical work, which is reflected in three further books. The first, Beyond Analytic Philosophy, is a structured around a meditation on the philosophical development from Bertrand Russell through Rudolf Carnap to Quine. Wang thought symptomatic of a general philosophical climate that the interests manifested in Russell’s body of writing were so much broader than those of Carnap and Quine and nearly all later analytic philosophers. He thus sees the later development as a history of “contraction.” On the other hand he maintains (as have many others) that Russell did not succeed in his later career in working out a philosophical project of the depth and impact of his early work centered on logic. The book is a rich discussion of aspects of the development of twentieth-century philosophy. The treatment of Quine could be objected to as too unsympathetic and as not engaging Quine’s arguments. But the introduction articulates and criticizes in an interesting way, influenced by Gödel, assumptions common to Carnap’s and Quine’s treatment of analyticity. As in other writings, the last part of the book meditates on the nature of philosophy.

Wang viewed Beyond Analytic Philosophy as the first of a trilogy, of which the second was to be called Reflections on Kurt Gödel, and the third was to deal with Gödel and Wittgenstein as exemplifying a “quest for purity” in philosophy. Wang would in these three books have discussed extensively all the figures of twentieth-century philosophy who engaged him most deeply. The second book appeared in 1987. It was the first real attempt to see Gödel whole, as a logician, mathematician, philosopher, and to some extent anyway as a man, reflecting his conversations with Gödel as well as access to some then unpublished documents. It has probably been the most widely read of Wang’s books.

The remainder of Wang’s life was largely taken up by another project concerning Gödel, a presentation and discussion of Gödel’s philosophical views using his record of their conversations. Wang reconstructed from his notes a number of remarks from the conversations, which give information about Gödel’s philosophy and view of the world that are not otherwise documented. This alone makes the resulting book, A Logical Journey. From Gödel to Philosophy, published in 1996 after Wang’s death, an important work. But the accompanying commentary is not only of great value as interpretation but expresses the response of a philosophical mind that was more broadly trained and informed than Gödel’s own and, although very respectful of Gödel and his rationalistic position, had really a very different conception of philosophy, as I have said less systematic and more descriptive.

It is to be regretted that Wang did not live to write the third work in his trilogy. In his later thinking, he was fascinated by Gödel’s rationalism but always fell short of embracing it, and he continued to think about Wittgenstein’s very opposed philosophy, skeptical of any such systematic construction as Gödel aspired to.
Weiming Tu: Confucian Humanism and Dialogue of Civilization

Mary Evelyn Tucker

Tu Weiming is a Confucian scholar and philosopher whose ideas are of special significance for understanding the role of traditions in modernity, especially in relation to new global challenges. His intellectual journey has taken him from the place of his birth in 1940 in Kunming in southwestern China to Harvard University where he currently directs the Harvard-Yenching Institute. He completed his undergraduate education at Tunghai University in Taiwan in 1961 and then went to Harvard where he earned his master’s and doctoral degrees.

After finishing his doctorate in 1968, Tu taught Chinese intellectual history at Princeton from 1968 to 1971. He then spent ten years at Berkeley where he influenced numerous graduate and undergraduate students in the study of Confucianism and its role in Chinese history. In 1981 Tu joined the Harvard faculty as Professor of Chinese History and Philosophy and was later awarded the additional title of professor of Confucian Studies. At Harvard he has chaired the Committee on the Study of Religion and the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. In 1996 he was appointed director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute and has expanded the number of scholars who are invited to the institute and increased the number of seminars and colloquia offered. In addition to its traditional support for the Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies and the Harvard-Yenching Library, the institute also supports some Chinese language scholarly publications.

Tu has received many honors for his accomplishments including election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1988 and the International Yi T'oebye Studies Award in Seoul in 2001. In 2000 he received the Thomas Berry Award as well as an honorary doctorate from Lehigh University. He is a Fellow of the World Economic Forum regularly held in Davos, Switzerland and chair of the Academia Sinica’s advisory committee on the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy in Taiwan. In addition to Princeton, Berkeley, and Harvard, Tu has taught at Beijing University, Taiwan University, and the Ecole Pratique de Haute Etudes in Paris.

From 1990-1991 Tu was director of the Institute of Culture and Communication at the East-West Center in Hawaii. There he developed two projects, one on “Cultural China” and the other on “A Dialogue of Civilizations”. While the former focused on the varied cultural components of Chinese identity in a global context, the latter concentrated on the important contributions of indigenous traditions to what Karl Jaspers has called axial age civilizations. This illustrates something of the breadth of Tu’s intellectual interests that have been evident in his writing and speeches for several decades now.

Key Areas of Focus: Confucian Humanism and Dialogue of Civilizations

In identifying some of the major philosophical topics that Tu has been concerned to address we might site two key areas: first, the role of Confucian humanism historically and at present; second, globalization and the dialogue of civilizations. In all of this Tu speaks as both a scholar of Confucianism as well as a public intellectual interested in the implications of

After his first return to China in 1972, Wang began to publish again in Chinese. Evidently what he published were largely short essays, and much of what did not duplicate his writings in English consisted of essays on Chinese intellectual figures, in most cases his own teachers and friends (cf. note 1). In many of Wang’s philosophical writings, one can sense his Chinese cultural background, but even his explicit statements about Chinese thought are best commented on by someone familiar with the Chinese language and intellectual tradition. It is to be hoped that some scholar with the relevant training will take up this task.

Cited Writings of Hao Wang®


To and From Philosophy — Discussions with Gödel and Wittgenstein. Synthese 88 (1991), 229-277


Endnotes

1. Wang writes a little about his studies in China in “From Kunming to New York,” a preface to a volume of essays by a student friend who had remained in China, He Zhaowu. In matters concerning Wang’s Chinese writings, I am greatly indebted to Montgomery Link.

2. New York: W. W. Norton, 1940.


4. Most are reprinted as an appendix to FMP.


7. The paper “To and from philosophy — Discussions with Gődel and Wittgenstein” (1991) may have come from this project.

Confucianism and other religious traditions for the contemporary world. He brings a unique blend of historical and comparative understanding to his work along with the profound sensibility of an engaged scholar who is living with an attunement to the deep challenges facing humans and the planet. Tu is a philosopher-statesman and a concerned intellectual as well as a persuasive public speaker that makes him much in demand as a lecturer in many parts of the world. Most recently he has been appointed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan as a member of the Group of Eminent Persons for the Dialogue among Civilizations.

When Tu speaks of the role of Confucianism in Chinese history he is interested in its impact intellectually, religiously, politically, culturally, and socially. He sees the rich texture of this tradition as far from monolithic in its outreach and capable of embracing contemporary concerns such as ecology and feminism. While he is willing to grant that Confucianism, like all ideologies, has had negative consequences at different periods in Chinese history, he has been determined to investigate the complex legacy of the tradition in shaping a rich and enduring civilization. In this respect there are several areas of inquiry that Tu has explored, namely Confucian humanism as present in key texts, traditions, and thinkers. Second, he has been instrumental in articulating the broadened understanding of the religious dimensions of Confucianism. Third, he has investigated the potential contribution of Confucian thought to contemporary problems such as human rights and the ecological crisis.

With regard to globalization and the dialogue of civilizations Tu has made it abundantly clear that it is critical to explore various ways that religious traditions can contribute to modernity effectively. In other words, modernization processes will be gravely impoverished without the renewed presence of religious traditions responding to modern challenges. He has repeatedly suggested that we in the modern west are both the beneficiaries and victims of the Enlightenment mentality. He argues that we have surely benefited from the rational, individualistic, and democratic legacy of the Enlightenment. However, now various limits of that legacy are evident in the loss of community and in environmental destruction. Thus he suggests that the Enlightenment legacy needs to be enriched, transformed, and restructured with exploration of the spiritual inheritance of the religions of Asia, the west, and indigenous traditions.

**Confucian Humanism: Historical and Contemporary Relevance**

Tu has suggested that the Confucian tradition has had three major phases: its early classical period from the sixth century BCE, through the Han period of the second century C.E., its Neo-Confucian revival from the 10th to the 16th centuries including its further spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, and its third epoch in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries known as New Confucianism. It is Tu’s particular concern to speak to the modern transformation of the tradition in its third epoch, both in its East Asian forms and in its western interpretations. Tu held up the promise of such a creative transformation of the tradition against the skepticism of those such as Joseph Levenson who saw this as an impossible task after the deleterious effects of the May Fourth revolution and the relentless debunking of the tradition as conservative, reactionary, and irrelevant in the face of modernity by so many Chinese intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike. Tu has maintained, with a creative yet well-founded examination of the historical record, that the moral metaphysics and spiritual inspiration of the tradition hold the possibility of such a revival, just as Confucianism has demonstrated its adaptive resilience in the past against formidable odds.

Toward this end Tu undertook an intensive investigation of the Confucian tradition in his undergraduate and graduate studies where key texts and thinkers were carefully read, sometimes under the tutelage of New Confucian scholars who had left the mainland after Mao’s rise to power in 1949. Tu began his publication on Confucian subjects with a study of the great Confucian scholar and activist, Wang Yangming (1472-1529). Wang revitalized Neo-Confucian thought with his dynamic understanding of the unity of knowledge and action and the profound identification of mind and principle. For Wang this was evident in the idea from the Great Learning of “manifesting illustrious virtue”, especially through the practice of humaneness. The fullest expression of this was the empathetic identification of Heaven, Earth, and all things. Tu’s book Neo-Confucian Thought in Action: Wang Yangming’s Youth (1976) makes it abundantly clear that Tu’s appreciation for the engaged intellectual was due in part to the remarkable career and far reaching ideas of Wang.

Tu’s other major contribution to our understanding of the Confucian tradition in its historical dimensions comes through his appreciation of texts such as the Chun-yung, (Doctrine of the Mean). Tu’s essay on this text, titled Centrality and Commonality (1979), draws on the integrating ideas of a leading New Confucian, Mou Tsung-san, in a creative synthesis of commentary and original reflection which is characteristic of Tu’s later thought. This work, along with his collected essays in Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation (1985), exemplify Tu’s unique contribution to a new recognition in the west of the religious dimensions of Confucianism. This is also evident in the two volume work on Confucian Spirituality (edited with Tucker) to be published in 2002.

The religious dimensions of the Confucian tradition for Tu might be described as a means of self-cultivation where human beings discover their unity with all things amidst daily affairs. For the Confucian the ordinary is the locus of the extraordinary; the secular is the sacred; the transcendent is in the immanent. For Tu this is not a tradition that seeks liberation from the world but rather one that affirms the Way of becoming more fully human within the world. The means of self-transformation is through cultivation of oneself in relation to others and to the natural world. Such cultivation for Tu aims to promote flourishing social relations, effective educational systems, sustainable agricultural patterns, and humane political governance within the context of the dynamic, life-giving processes of the universe.

In addition to contributing to the further understanding of the historical complexity and relevance of Confucian texts and thinkers, Tu has been instrumental in the revival of Confucianism in East Asian societies. More than eighty collections of his essays, lectures, and interviews have been published in Chinese and five volumes of his collected works are currently being published in Chinese. Tu has been a major influence on the revised study and uses of Confucianism both in the People’s Republic of China as well as in Singapore. While he remains deeply skeptical about the narrow
appropriation of Confucianism for social control or political manipulation, he supports the further study and revival of the tradition as a counterpoint to a rapacious modernization process which destroys both human and natural communities.

In this spirit, he has been effective in demonstrating the germaneness of Confucian ideas to contemporary topics such as human rights and ecology. He has edited a volume with Wm. Theodore de Bary on Confucianism and Human Rights (1997) and he has contributed significantly to the conference and volume on Confucianism and Ecology (ed. Tucker and Berthrong, 1998). For example, in his seminal article on “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature” Tu identifies organic holism and dynamic vitalism as key elements in the comprehensive anthropocosmic worldview of Chinese thought which embraces Heaven, Earth and humans. He has suggested this may be a source for rethinking worldviews that distance humans from the natural world though dualism or other worldly salvation. In light of these concerns, Tu has been a principal supporter of the Forum on Religion and Ecology that has examined the major world religions and indigenous traditions to identify their potential contributions to shaping a global environmental ethics.

Dialogue Among Civilizations:
In much of his work Tu has been interested in countering the notion that the west as a leader in the spread of modernization has nothing to learn from other civilizations. Instead, he suggests that rather than a clash of civilizations or a misplaced triumphalism of one civilization over another there is a need for mutual learning between and among civilizations. The deleterious consequences of globalization has resulted in dis spirited and denatured cultures in the west which seem to focus exclusively on individual human concerns at the expense of care for nature and the development of a more inclusive sense of human community. To restore a broader sense of community — both natural and human — Tu suggests a vigorous reexamination of the intellectual and spiritual resources of the traditions of western religions, Asian religions, and indigenous traditions. This implies a process of retrieval, reevaluation, and reconstruction of traditions in modernity in the face of the rapid destruction of the environment and the growing inequities between developing and developed nations.

In the emerging dialogue among civilizations Tu hopes to assert the importance of localization in relation to globalization processes. In other words globalization should not result in homogenization or destruction of cultures. Rather, Tu is particularly concerned to identify the significance of primordial ties of ethnicity, language, gender, land, class, age, and religion. He advocates the emergence of a new humanistic vision that refuses to homogenize cultural diversity. For example, in his seminal article on “The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature” Tu identifies organic holism and dynamic vitalism as key elements in the comprehensive anthropocosmic worldview of Chinese thought which embraces Heaven, Earth and humans. He has suggested this may be a source for rethinking worldviews that distance humans from the natural world though dualism or other worldly salvation. In light of these concerns, Tu has been a principal supporter of the Forum on Religion and Ecology that has examined the major world religions and indigenous traditions to identify their potential contributions to shaping a global environmental ethics.

It is my great pleasure to introduce my friend and colleague David B. Wong.

Wong, who is currently a Professor in the Philosophy Department at Duke University, received his doctorate from the Philosophy Department of Princeton University in 1977. He has established himself as a leading figure in several demanding fields at once: contemporary ethics, the history of Chinese philosophy, and comparative philosophy. I shall introduce some of the features of his scholarship discussing four impressive works.

In “Flourishing and Finding One’s Identity in Community,” Wong argues that, regardless of whether one’s ethical theory is liberal or communitarian, one should value “effective agency.” Effective agency alone is not enough; one also needs a meaningful and purposeful life. This requires a comprehensive anthropocosmic worldview of Chinese thought which embraces Heaven, Earth and humans. He has suggested this may be a source for rethinking worldviews that distance humans from the natural world though dualism or other worldly salvation. In light of these concerns, Tu has been a principal supporter of the Forum on Religion and Ecology that has examined the major world religions and indigenous traditions to identify their potential contributions to shaping a global environmental ethics.
groups, cooperatives, etc., that are intermediate in size between the family and the state). More fundamentally, there is a tension between the commitment they demand to purely impartial principles and the commitment to particular individuals and groups created by the intermediate organizations that nurture effective identity.

“Universalism versus Love with Distinctions” shows that Wong’s interest in Chinese philosophy informs, and is informed by, his interests in Western ethics. In this essay, he explores the ancient debate between the Mohists, who advocated a sort of agent-neutral consequentialism, and the Confucians, who had a kind of virtue ethics that endorsed certain agent-relative prohibitions and obligations, especially ones that show preference for one’s own family members. Wong shows great historical insight in identifying several interrelated lines of argument in favor of these sorts of preferences in early Confucian texts. First, it is in the family that we originally learn to love others, and get from others the love and esteem that provides us with a strong character. Mohists responded to this by arguing that, while the family is the context within which one is first enabled to love others, good consequences would be maximized if this love were redirected so that it applies to all people equally. The Confucian response is that what the Mohists propose is conceptually possible, but practically impossible for the vast majority of humankind. This relates to the second Confucian line of argument in favor of agent-relative family-preference: Because of their causal role in creating who we are, our identity is closely tied up with certain other people, especially our parents. Insofar as we approve of who we have become, recognition of the role of such people in making us what we are both tends to cause, and warrants, extremely strong feelings of gratitude and affection for them. As Wong notes, the Confucian philosopher Mengzi uses a “thought experiment” to argue that such reactions are part of human nature. Such appeals to human nature have not been in favor in much of modern philosophy. However, Wong argues that these appeals are an aspect of a commendable aspect of Confucian philosophy: its “constant attention to the question of how ethical principles are to become a reality within actual human beings, on how they are to become embodied in reliable motivations that human beings can have that can be nurtured within practically possible institutions.”

In Moral Relativity, Wong demonstrates his deep understanding of a wide variety of topics in the philosophy of language, Anglo-American ethics, and comparative thought. He argues against “absolutism” (by which he means the belief that there is one, true morality) and in favor of a version of relativism (the denial of absolutism). Wong observes that advocates of a single, true morality (such as Gewirth, McDowell, and Moore) owe us an explanation for persistent disagreement among human beings regarding moral issues. They may respond that disagreement is due to ignorance or errors in reasoning on the part of some parties to the debate, but this response has force only if the absolutists can supply some plausible, detailed account of the relevant ignorance or errors that does not beg the question of who is right in moral disagreements. Wong argues that no one has succeeded in giving such an account, and there is no reason to believe that anyone will be able to do so in the future. Wong’s alternative account is that morality is rooted “in rules and standards intended to fulfill the human needs for the resolution of internal and interpersonal conflict.” Furthermore, since there are “conflicting human needs and interests,” there are unresolvable indeterminacies in the systems or morality that satisfy these needs. In other words, there is no one, true morality; instead, there are multiple moral systems that do just as well what moral systems are supposed to do.

For example, Aristotelians commonly identify theoretical contemplation as an important component (and perhaps the most important component) of the good life for a human being. In contrast, early Confucians see no important role in the good life for theoretical contemplation for its own sake. Instead, Confucians emphasize participation in familial life. Wong then asks, “Suppose the Confucians were wrong. How did they miss the value of theorizing? Here the usual explanations of moral misperception through self-interest or self-deception do not even have prima facie application.” In the absence of a plausible account of why either Aristotelians or Confucians are in error on this point, it is preferable to hold that we have here a case of two equally warranted conceptions of the good life for humans.

Finally, Wong advances a challenging argument that one can, in some cases, use moral relativism as part of an argument in favor of tolerance. For example, if we add to relativism the premise that “it is wrong to impose one’s views on another person unless one can justify them to him or her,” then it follows that we must tolerate at least some sorts of behavior on the part of others. Of course, this additional premise is itself parochial: not all adequate moral systems will accept it. But it is a premise that many people will accept, and for them it can be part of an argument for tolerance.

I do have a quibble with Wong. His conclusions seem correct to me, but I wonder if “relativism” is really the best label for the position that he is defending. Wong has always struck me as being firmly in the “pluralist” tradition, of which Isaiah Berlin was one of the leading expositors and defenders. And, as Berlin himself stressed, pluralism is not relativism.

Wong has his own quibbles with me, though. In his “Xunzi on Moral Motivation,” Wong notes that Mengzi had argued that humans innately have incipient motivations toward virtuous behavior. The later Confucian Xunzi denied that humans have such motivations. However, Xunzi and Mengzi agree that humans can and should transform themselves into ethical agents who delight in virtue. Mengzi suggests that achieving this transformation is a process of cultivating our incipient virtuous inclinations until they grow into mature virtues. Mengzi’s picture raises a number of intriguing questions, some of which Wong explores in his essays, “Is There a Distinction between Reason and Emotion in Mencius?” and the more recent, “Reasons and Analogical Reasoning in the Mengzi.” However, as earlier interpreters had pointed out, Xunzi’s sour view of human nature in its untutored state seems to leave him with a particularly severe problem of explaining how it is possible for humans to come to be virtuous. I had suggested that part of the explanation has to do with a distinction Xunzi makes between two kinds of psychological states, “desire” and “approval,” where the latter attitude can motivate humans to perform actions that they recognize will not satisfy any desire they currently have. Wong agrees that Xunzi wishes to mark some sort of distinction between approval and desire, but he argues that an interpretation like mine forces us to (implausibly) attribute to Xunzi either a Kantian or a Platonistic view of moral
motivation. In contrast, Wong suggests that Xunzi only wishes to distinguish between acting to satisfy one’s immediate desires, and acting to achieve “what it will take to best satisfy over the long term the total set of the agent’s desires.”

Despite the impressive diversity of Wong’s work, I detect an underlying theme. He seems to always be trying to effect a reconciliation between ideas and people that are typically seen as being in inevitable conflict. He is attracted to aspects of communitarian approaches to society, but he is also concerned that communities be able to accommodate, and even delight in, cultural and ethical diversity. Whereas many philosophers are attracted to either Confucianism or “Taoism,” Wong has great respect for and offers nuanced interpretations of both. Chinese philosophy often attracts those who reject the methodologies of much of twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy, but Wong is part of a new generation of scholars who sympathetically apply “analytic” techniques to the study of the history of Chinese philosophy, and who see Chinese philosophy as a source of insights that have the potential to inform contemporary ethical discussion.

These traits reflect not only an active and powerful intellect, but also Wong’s generosity as a person.

Endnotes
2 For some of the relevant texts, see Philip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2001), especially Analects 13:18 and the Mohist essay “Impartial Caring.”
5 Wong, Moral Relativity, p. 156.
7 For representative essays, see Isaiah Berlin, The Proper Study of Mankind (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

J. N. Mohnty on Husserl

Joseph Margolis

Professor J. N. Mohnty (1928-    ) counts among the most important contemporary specialists on Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and phenomenology. If one construes the question of characterizing Husserl’s work in terms of a close account of his treatment of meaning vis-à-vis Gottlob Frege’s (1848-1925) distinction between a naturalized (or psychologized) and an ideal (or rational) grasp of meaning (free of psychologizing influence), then the best-known views on Husserl (which have become increasingly attenuated) are best distinguished in terms of the Norwegian philosopher Dagfinn Føllesdal’s Master’s thesis, Husserl and Frege (1958) and Mohnty’s own monograph, Husserl and Frege (1982). For Føllesdal holds that Husserl changed his view on the nature of logic only after Frege’s very critical review of Husserl’s first book, Philosophie der Arithmetik (1891), which appeared in 1894; whereas Mohnty advances evidence that Husserl’s Prolegomena to a Pure Logic, the first volume of his Logical Investigations, which appeared in 1900 but which Husserl claims (in the second edition of the Prolegomena) was developed from lectures given in 1896 — which themselves incorporate pertinent themes of a review of E. Schröder’s account of logic (by Husserl) dating from 1891. The upshot of Mohnty’s account is that Husserl came to the distinction independently of Frege, though he remained attentive to Frege’s criticism.

The matter is not a question of mere influence but bears on the possibility (the certainty, in Mohnty’s opinion) that the Husserlian distinction between a naturalistic and (pure) phenomenological account of meanings is very different from the relatively fragmentary, linguistically centered account that Frege provides. In particular, Husserl’s distinction leads directly to the analysis of “pure” or “transcendental” consciousness and, hence, to the analysis of Husserl’s complex views about the noema, that is, the generalized meaning (Sinn) — in the Investigations, Husserl uses both “Sinn” and “Bedeutung” — of any conscious act. The technical term “noema” appears for the first time in Husserl’s Ideen (1913). But, apart from textual complications, Husserl believed, as Frege apparently did not, that psychologism could be finally refuted. The difference between Husserl and Frege, in this regard, rests on the analysis of Evidenz, which Frege (and Føllesdal following Frege) treats as ineluctably hostage to psychologism. Mohnty’s pivotal contribution, in Husserl and Frege, is to make the case for Husserl’s originality and the philosophical force of that originality.

Nevertheless, in later years, Mohnty revisits the Husserlian conception and, in effect, develops a more daring account of how to recover Husserl’s intended disjunction (even with respect to the Arithmetik): an account that concedes the continuity, in conscious experience, between the naturalistic and the phenomenological, and permits the phenomenological (in its “pure” form) to be distinguished or abstracted within a common stream of consciousness, without doubting or separating faculties within experience itself. In this sense, the psychologistic and the phenomenological need not be two separate faculties but, rather, a systematic distinction between the contingent and the essential or self-evident aspects of consciousness, an idea that avoids the more extreme forms of an explicitly Platonizing reason.
Mohanty believes that this line of thinking accounts for Husserl’s tolerance of potentially relativistic analyses of the content of consciousness, provided only that such a naturalistic tolerance leads to the eventual recovery of the ideal structure of meaning phenomenologically abstracted from such materials. For related reasons, he shows how the Fregean preference for construing meanings in semantic terms — hence, linguistically: Føllesdal’s preference and the preference of those who follow Føllesdal — fails to capture Husserl’s own emphasis on a certain strenuous cognitive effort that claims its own epistemological power and leads to the recovery (otherwise never discerned) of the invariant structure of meaning present in all intentional acts.

This is a distinction of the first importance, regardless of whether one finally agrees with Husserl or not. The fact that Føllesdal misses its full importance confirms the clarity of Mohanty’s grasp of Husserl’s intention as well as his appreciation of a possible way of correcting Frege and reversing the order of philosophical discipline within the terms of what might be called an analytic phenomenology. Certainly, its appeal rests with its making concessions to naturalistic accounts and yet, at the same time, fashioning a very reasonable reading of Husserl’s reversal of the naturalistic trend that triumphed in English-language philosophy at least.

In Mohanty’s work, the distinction amounts to a scruple that permits the most extreme conception of phenomenology that Husserl advanced to have a fair run for its money. There is evidence, of course, that Mohanty is himself attracted to Husserl’s view. But he also manifests a strong attraction to Hegel’s sort of phenomenology, which is very different from Husserl’s, may even be said to be naturalistic, and, notably, avoids any transcendental assurance regarding the detection of the “essences” of meanings in any sense comparable to the discipline of the epoch_. Perhaps it would be reasonable to say that Mohanty’s best work is occupied with the implicit dialectical contest between a Husserlian and a Hegelian account of consciousness, a contest inclined to favor the first but respectful of the work of the second.

In fact, Mohanty seems to view Husserl as largely right in his conception but oddly abstract in his grasp of the way in which reality is experienced concretely. So, for instance, he finds Husserl deficient in a way that may derive from Husserl’s featuring perception rather than “resistance to volition,” which signals Mohanty’s own attraction to Scheler and Hegel, as in his Phenomenology Between Essentialism and Transcendental Philosophy (1997). Here, Mohanty explores the conceptual connection between phenomenology and metaphysics and the importance of drawing a closer linkage (than Husserl favored) between the lifeworld and pure phenomenology. Mohanty has increasingly explored the continuum between nature and phenomenology without displacing the primacy of essences. This may be Mohanty’s most distinctive line of phenomenological inquiry in his mature years: it marks his as as loyal as possible to Husserl’s distinctive convictions but also as as adventurous as he can be about the possibility of strengthening the Husserlian vision of phenomenology itself.

This is worth emphasizing, because much of the energy of the phenomenological movement has tended to favor the deviant views of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. For, instance, Mohanty insists (in the Phenomenology) that “transcendental subjectivity and empirical subjectivity do not form two distinct domains, but are one and the same life of consciousness considered from two different perspectives” (p. 55). Along the same lines, he distinguishes very pointedly between Kant’s and Husserl’s conceptions of the transcendental: for Husserl, the transcendental is confined to meaning and does not extend (as in Kant) to truth; the transcendental and the essential are neither equivalent nor coextensive; and the transcendental is both constitutive and (in its own sense) experiential. You see from this how Mohanty addresses the implications of reinterpreting psychologism in his attempt to demonstrate the preferability of Husserl over Frege. In fact, at one point, Mohanty seems willing to consider that transcendentalism is itself “truly” a Hegelian-like interpretation of the historical “life of the spirit,” read in the constituting sense. Mohanty tends to be self-effacing in inquirers of these sorts; but it seems fair to say that he is extending and strengthening Husserl’s general strategy more than he is shoring up Husserl’s own philosophy.

In this same adventurous spirit, Mohanty views Heidegger as Husserl’s “other,” just as he regards Hegel as Kant’s “other.” Hence, though he deplores Heidegger’s taste for the irrational, he sees how Heidegger supplements and enriches Husserl (or suggests how one could enrich Husserl). He is more positive about Hegel, of course. And, in fact, in some autobiographical passages (which he was kind enough to let me see and which I believe are scheduled to be published soon), he views Hegel’s critique of Kant “from within,” so that he takes Hegel to have “abolished” all of Kant’s limitations on “human faculties of knowing”—in effect “abolishing the line of demarcation between man and God,” which he explicitly reads as “Vedantic.”

There, in a single stroke, you see the nerve of Mohanty’s originality. He draws on his knowledge of the Sanscrit texts to enrich his account of European philosophy and he draws on the Europeans to enrich his account of Indian philosophy. In short, he has come to realize that he has been historicizing Kant; and that, in doing that, he views Husserl’s phenomenology as a way of escaping that form of closure (in Hegel) that Hegel himself labels “Absolutism.” Mohanty has been tempted by all of this to think of his own project as one of writing “a new phenomenology.” And, indeed, the project has already begun. He views it, apparently, as originating in the question of Platonic essences; so that the dispute for and against Platonism proves to be akin to the dispute between Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. In a word, Mohanty’s project is to secure a sense of the reality of essences without fixity or closure, achieved under the conditions of history, in a sense that is manifest in practice as well as in theory. Mohanty looks forward to another decade of productive work, just as we may look forward to his phenomenology.

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J. N. Mohanty completed his doctorate at Göttingen, and has taught and lectured widely in Europe, India, and the United States. He has settled in the United States, where he is currently Professor of Philosophy at Temple University. He has held the George L. Cross Distinguished Research Professorship in Philosophy at the University of Oklahoma and the Woodruff Professorship in Philosophy and Asian Studies at Emory University. His many publications include: Edmund Husserl’s Theory of Meaning (1964); Phenomenology and Ontology (1970); The Concept of Intentionality (1972); Husserl and Frege (1982); The Possibility of Transcendental Philosophy (1985); Transcendental Phenomenology: An
Asian Asian American

Analytical Account (1989); Phenomenology Between Essentialism and Transcendental Philosophy (1997); The Self and Its Other (2000); Explorations in Philosophy, vol. 1: Indian Philosophy (2001).

BIMAL KRISHNA MATILAL: Comparison, Confrontation and Conversation of Cultures

Jonardon Ganeri

The history of Indian philosophical studies has been a history of comparisons – comparisons between Indian philosophy on the one hand, and whichever philosophical system was in vogue on the other. British idealism, logical positivism, neo-Kantian philosophy, the ordinary language school, and many other theories have all been used as counterpoints for a comparison with Indian theory. Early comparativists, however, were unclear first of all about the purpose of making the comparison, and in consequence rarely got further than merely juxtaposing doctrines, making priority claims in the history of ideas, or, at best, arguing that a doctrine acquires prima facie support if it can be shown to have arisen independently in different places. They could supply no criterion for determining when a point of comparison is significant and when merely superficial. Indeed, the very existence of such a criterion is cast in doubt by J. N. Mohanty’s observation that, in practice, ‘just when an exciting point of agreement is identified and pursued, surprising differences erupt; and just when you have the feeling that no two ideas could be further apart, identities catch you off guard’ (Mohanty, 1993, p.216). A further objection to the early approach is that the Indian theories were mostly treated as the objects of the comparison, to be placed in correspondence with some sub-set of Western theory. Early comparativists, however, were unclear first of all about the purpose of making the comparison, and in consequence rarely got further than merely juxtaposing doctrines, making priority claims in the history of ideas, or, at best, arguing that a doctrine acquires prima facie support if it can be shown to have arisen independently in different places. They could supply no criterion for determining when a point of comparison is significant and when merely superficial. Indeed, the very existence of such a criterion is cast in doubt by J. N. Mohanty’s observation that, in practice, ‘just when an exciting point of agreement is identified and pursued, surprising differences erupt; and just when you have the feeling that no two ideas could be further apart, identities catch you off guard’ (Mohanty, 1993, p.216). A further objection to the early approach is that the Indian theories were mostly treated as the objects of the comparison, to be placed in correspondence with some sub-set of Western theory, an approach which necessarily denied them the possibility of original content.

This was the background against which Bimal Krishna Matilal (1935–1991), an analytical philosopher working in the classical Indian traditions, wrote. He described his aims in the following terms: ‘the purpose of the Indian philosopher today, who chooses to work on the classical systems, is to interpret, and thereby offer a medium where philosophers..., both Indian and Western, may converse.’ Behind this modest statement lay a bold intellectual programme, a reinterpretation of the relationship between contemporary and classical philosophy, and of the nature of conflict and communication across cultures. One of the many ways to read his work today is as a powerful antidote to the apocalyptic vision of cultural confrontation set out in Samuel Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilisations” (Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993) that has done so much to shape contemporary American thinking in this area, and it is this aspect of his thought that I will explore here.

B. K. Matilal became Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford and Fellow of All Souls College in 1976, before which he held teaching positions at the University of Toronto. He was born in Jynagar, West Bengal, leaving for Calcutta at the age of fourteen, where he studied first at the Islamia College and then at the Sanskrit Department of the University of Calcutta. In 1957 he was appointed as lecturer in the Government Sanskrit College. He continued there to study Nāyāya with a number of eminent pandits, and under their guidance completed a traditional degree, that of Tarkatāthā, Master of Logic and Argument, in 1962. For some time prior to this, Matilal had been in correspondence with Daniel Ingalls, who suggested to him the possibility of moving to Harvard in order to acquaint himself with the work being done by W. V. O. Quine in philosophical and mathematical logic. Matilal followed this advice, completing his PhD at Harvard in 1965 having taken Quine’s classes and continued his studies in mathematical logic with D. Fallesdal. In his doctoral thesis, The Nāyāya Doctrine of Negation, published by Harvard University Press in 1968, he gives voice to his growing conviction that “India should not, indeed cannot, be left out of any general study of the history of logic and philosophy”. This was to be the first statement of a thesis to the defence of which he devoted his academic life, that our philosophical understanding is enriched if the ideas of the philosophers of classical India are brought to bear in the modern discussion.

Matilal approaches the Indian materials with a methodology that is explicitly, if moderately, comparative-philosophical. In Matilal’s work, however, the goal is not merely to compare. It is informed, first and foremost, by a deep humanism, a conviction that the classical thinkers should not be thought of as mysterious, exotic or tradition-bound creatures, but as rational agents trying to understand their cultures and societies with as little prejudice as possible: ‘we may discover in this way that in the past we were not all gods or spiritual dolls, but we were at least humans with all their glories and shortcomings, their ambitions and aspirations, their reasons and emotions’ (Philosophy, Culture and Religion, essay 24, volume 1 [PCR 24-1]). It is this humanism in Matilal’s approach which is brought out in his claim that the comparativist should create the means whereby philosophers of different ages and societies may converse. The point is to establish the prerequisites for a debate or an interaction, something which can sustain, in Amartya Sen’s apt phrase, an ‘intellectual connecting’ between philosophers and traditions (Sen, 1992, p.5). The basis for such an interaction is a shared commitment to a set of evaluative principles, norms on reasoned argument and the assessment of evidence, rather than to any particular shared body of doctrine. A little like the ‘supervisor’ in a traditional Indian debate, the comparativist’s role in Matilal’s conception is to set out and oversee those ground-rules adherence to which is a precondition for the conversation to take place. The same commitment to rational inquiry can be found elsewhere, for example, in Greek and Medieval philosophy, phenomenanism and elsewhere. Matilal’s field of expertise was analytical philosophy, however, and so he sought to open the conversation between the classical Indian philosophers and their contemporary analytical colleagues. He succeeds brilliantly in charting the philosophical terrain, identifying the salient groups of texts appropriate for the analytical enquiry (most notably, the pramāṇa-āstra), and pin-pointing the topics in which Indian theory can be expected to make a substantial contribution. A good example of the latter is the epistemology of testimony, where the extensive Indian discussions have a real prospect of informing contemporary debates. A volume of articles co-edited by Arindam Chakrabarti and B. K. Matilal (Knowing From Words, Kluwer: Dordrecht, 1994) brings together the
leading Indian and Western philosophers in the area, and is an impressive illustration of the sort of philosophical ‘interconnecting’ Matilal sought for and believed to be possible.

Matilal regards the very idea that there are independently bounded and closed philosophical cultures as a ‘dogma of orientalism’, albeit a self-sustaining one which has served the historical interests of Indian and Western philosophers alike. Mysticism and spirituality, the properties projected onto the East, do not fit the Western self-image as rational and scientific: ‘it is as if our Western man is embarrassed to acknowledge anything that is even remotely irrational or mystical as part of his indigenous heritage’ (20–2). So mystical systems such as Neoplatonism have been regarded as marginal in western thought. In no less measure, Indian authors like Radhakrishnan have wished to down-play the rationalist streams in the Indian traditions in their desire to represent Indian culture as distinctively spiritual and intuitive, a desire at one with the nationalist search for an autonomous Indian identity (26–1). Anthropologists and ‘colonial liberals’ have also found the relativist dogma convenient, for it absolved them of the need to make value judgements on the practices of the society being governed or observed. The platitude, however, is a myth: ‘the fact of the matter is that materialism and spiritualism, rationality and irrationalism-cum-intuitionism, are monopolies of neither India nor the West’ (2–2). Matilal’s argument against the dogma (and indeed against other expressions of cultural relativism) is that it is impossible to individuate cultures in any such way as would give them sharp boundaries; cultures are always mixing and merging with each other, identities are being enriched or revised by adoption and absorption (18–2, 19–2). Indeed, it is for Matilal the very mutability of cultures which shows real confrontation between them to be possible. If relativism were true, the only confrontation that could occur would be ‘notional,’ and would have no impact on the values of either culture. Cultures do not, however, have unchanging, immutable essences; even what seem to be the most characteristic and embedded values of a culture are subject to gradual trade-offs, rejections and modifications in the course of time.

Matilal sees the primary source of moral conflict as lying in real confrontations between different value systems. This leads him into a more general discussion of the competing claims of different value systems, religions and cultures. He is critical of relativism, the doctrine that distinct value systems do not in fact genuinely conflict. It is a doctrine Matilal particularly associates with the ‘colonial liberal’, who refuses to condone or condemn the practices and values of another culture, on the grounds that they are incommensurable with western cultural values. In a sustained attack on relativist claims about religions (15–2, 16–2), Matilal argues instead that minimal ‘common elements’ in all religions can be isolated at a suitably general level of description. He tentatively suggests, among others, respect for life or commitment to non-violence, and a prohibition on lying, as two candidates; another (27–2) is the quest for immortality. This does not imply that different religions are simply talking about the same thing in different ways; rather ‘they talk about different things while standing on a common ground’ (15–2). Matilal often refers to Rabindranath Tagore’s idea that there is a ‘surplus in man,’ a capacity be more than machines, to think about and question our own values, and so to reach a kind of self-understanding of our place in nature. The different world religions all, perhaps, address this surplus, and in doing so become ‘alternative hypotheses to render the universe comprehensible and our life in it meaningful’ (16–2). In his work, Matilal sets out to show that cultures and religions do interact, that there is a common basis for conversation, meaningful connections, genuine conflicts and moral dilemmas. His philosophical understanding of the relations between cultures offers us today an intellectually rigorous and vitally necessary alternative to the apocalyptic vision of the ‘Clash of Civilizations.’

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Others


Anil Gupta on Truth

André Chapuis

To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true. [Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1011b, 23]

It is surprising and fascinating that such a simple concept as truth—the essence of which Aristotle appears to have summarized in one sentence—would give philosophers so much to disagree about for so long. In a necessarily short contribution to an APA Newsletter it is impossible to do justice to the rich history of the concept even over just the past 30 years. In those years, alternatives to the long prevalent Tarski approach were discovered and explored producing much new work, too much to be usefully covered here. Because of their “logical origin,” these accounts tend to be technical and not easily accessible to a wider audience. As a result, many contemporary theories of truth are—unfortunately—enjoyed by only a small segment of the profession.

In what follows, I hope to broaden the segment by providing an outline of one contemporary account—easily the most intriguing one—Anil Gupta’s revision theory of truth. My outline must leave out much detail, in particular the formal
details, but fortunately there is an entire book for those who wish to learn more. Gupta’s 1993 book The Revision Theory of Truth, jointly written with Nuel Belnap, remains the most complete account of the revision theory to date. In 1995, one reviewer for the Journal of Symbolic Logic expected that “this book will appropriately become the standard text on modern formal approaches to truth.” He was right. Of course, this does not mean that the revision theory of truth has become the standard theory of truth. That debate is still ongoing. My aim here is not to engage in the controversy between the different approaches. Instead, I will present the problem the modern theories of truth address and the new way of thinking about the issues the revision approach has opened up.

**The Problem of Truth and Paradox**

The problem, as formulated by Alfred Tarski, is to give a materially adequate and formally correct definition of truth. “Materially adequate” means that we don’t invent a new notion but find a definition that captures the notion we ordinarily use, i.e., the one embodied in the above quote from Aristotle. For example, we should say that the sentence ‘snow is white’ is true, if snow is indeed white, and it is false otherwise. This is expressed by the so-called “T-biconditional” for the sentence ‘snow is white’:

\[ \text{The sentence ‘snow is white’ is true if, and only if, snow is white.} \]

Tarski proposed that a theory of truth should imply the T-biconditionals for all assertions. Prima facie this seems a reasonable requirement, it would simply capture what Aristotle had said about truth. However, as Tarski remarks immediately, applying this schema without restriction leads to contradictions. For the Liar sentence, the sentence that claims of itself that it is not true, the T-biconditional is:

\[ \text{The sentence ‘the Liar sentence is not true’ is true, if and only if, the Liar sentence is not true.} \]

This biconditional is contradictory, it says that the Liar sentence is true just in case it is not true. Thus, if a language is rich enough to express, for example, self-reference, then adding a truth predicate for the language to that language together with the T-biconditionals results in a contradiction.

To avoid the contradiction we have different choices, including restricting the expressive richness of the language, restricting the T-biconditionals, or abandoning classical logic. Until thirty years ago, many have taken Tarski to show that one of those choices was forced by the contradictions, in particular the restriction Tarski imposed on the expressiveness of the language by requiring that the truth predicate be part of a “higher metalanguage,” and not of the language for which it is a truth predicate.” But there are different choices. The so-called “fixed-point theories” of Robert L. Martin and Peter Woodruff along with Kripke’s were the first to illustrate this. Although the revision theory grew out of the study of these approaches, it makes significantly different choices.

**The Revision Theory of Truth**

The simple observation Aristotle made about truth in the quote above and Tarski’s embodiment of that observation in the T-biconditionals is the least controversial intuition we have about truth. Gupta’s theory preserves this fundamental intuition. Tarski mentions that each T-biconditional could be viewed as a partial definition of the concept, and that “[t]he general definition would have to be, in a certain sense, a logical conjunction of all these partial definitions.” But the T-biconditionals for the Liar sentence and similarly problematic sentences make it impossible to accept all the T-biconditionals and the traditional view of definitions at the same time. Tarski chose to preserve our traditional view of definitions as biconditionals. Gupta chooses to accept all T-biconditionals. But doing so requires a different approach to definitions.

Traditionally, definitions are not allowed to use the concept to be defined, the definiendum or left-hand side, among the terms of the right-hand side or definiens. The following definition Gupta sometimes uses as an example is traditionally rejected as circular because the definiens contains the definiendum \( G_x \):

\[ G_x = \text{def} x \text{ is Plato or } (x \text{ is Socrates and } x \text{ is not-G}) \]

Gupta observes that even though there are problems with this definition, it is unproblematic in some respects. Note that the right-hand side is certainly not satisfied by anyone who like George Bush is neither Plato nor Socrates. Bush is ruled to be not-G by this definition. The verdict is similarly unproblematic for Plato. Substituting Plato for \( x \) renders the definiens true. So Plato is ruled to be G.

The problematic case is of course Socrates. Whether Socrates makes the definiens true or not depends on whether he is G or not. If we assume that only Plato is G, then Socrates satisfies the definiens. The clause “Socrates is Socrates and Socrates is not-G” is now true, and so the definition rules Socrates to be G. But if we assume that both Plato and Socrates are G, then the same clause becomes false for Socrates, and the definition rules him to be not-G. In other words, the definition switches the verdict regarding Socrates constantly.

It is a remarkable fact about the definition that although it does not behave in traditional ways for all objects, it does so for almost all. It classifies almost everything as clearly G or clearly not-G, and it thus serves a useful purpose. Only on one object, Socrates, does the definition not do so. If we simply reject such definitions, we don’t take advantage of the useful part, we throw the baby out with the bath water. Of course, there is a good reason we cannot simply accept them. Contradictions would follow immediately such as the claim that Socrates is both G and not-G.

Gupta has shown how to use such definitions without producing contradictions. Instead of evaluating a definition as a biconditional, he suggests an evaluation in a sequence of stages. Each stage may revise the previous verdict—thus the name revision theory—or it may confirm the verdict. If the verdicts for an object conflict at different stages, we may not be able to categorically judge that object as being G or not-G. But we don’t incur contradictions.

Having a way to work with these definitions allows to implement Tarski’s suggestion that the conjunction of all T-biconditionals defines truth. Take ‘\( A_i \)’ to be the name of a sentence \( A_i \), so that the T-biconditionals have the form

\[ \text{true}(A_i) \text{ if and only if } A_i \]
\[ \text{true}(A_i') \text{ if and only if } A_i' \]
\[
\ldots
\]

We can read these T-biconditionals as a definition of the concept “true”: 
true(x) = _def_ (x = ‘A’; and A) or
(x = ‘A’; and A) or
...

However, we cannot evaluate this definition as if it were
the contraction Tarski noted. If one reads it as a definition, it
 poses the problem that to assess "true(x)" we are referred to the
sentences A, but these may themselves contain the predicate “true.” It seems then that
we would already need to know what we are trying to
find. Gupta observes that although we don’t know yet which
sentences are true and false, we can make an assumption—
an arbitrary assumption—to get the evaluation started. With
a candidate for the extension of the concept we can apply
the definition in the usual way and determine an extension.
An ordinary, non-circular definition lets us determine
the extension absolutely. In contrast, a circular definition
determines an extension relative to the assumption made.
We get a candidate that is better or as good as the one we
assumed. Repeating the procedure we attempt to find better
and better candidates for the extension. This generates a
sequence of extensions, a so-called revision sequence. To
make sure every candidate is tested, every possible extension
is used to start a revision sequence.

The arbitrariness of the initial assumptions is soon
overcome in this process. The verdicts will not switch for
what may intuitively be called the unproblematic objects.
For example, all sentences that don’t involve the truth
predicate, such as ‘snow is white’ will settle in the revision
process, i.e., in all revision sequences, on the expected values.
Similarly for sentences that iterate truth attributions to such
sentences, i.e., ‘it is true that it is true…that snow is white,’
and for all compound sentences that can be formed from
these. Sentences that are intuitively pathological, such as the
Liar sentence, will get a definite verdict in the revision
process. They produce characteristic evaluation patterns that
closely mimic our reasoning. The Liar sentence, for example,
produces an oscillating pattern in every sequence, moving in
and out of the extension of the truth predicate.

What is gained by the revision approach? We gain a way
to accept all T-biconditionals, read not as material
equivalences but as partial definitions, and we can do so
without imposing restrictions on expressiveness and without
abandoning classical logic. Thus the revision approach can
implement Tarski’s suggestion to view the T-biconditionals
as partial definitions of truth. The resulting definition agrees
completely with our ordinary intuition as expressed by
Aristotle, it is materially adequate.

Definitions are traditionally required to be non-creative,
we should not be able to prove essentially new conclusions.
And the definiendum is required to be eliminable. Non-
creativity is met by the revision approach. But it is impossible
to have both circular definitions and eliminability of the
definiendum. However, for non-circular definitions
eliminability is also met by the revision approach. Thus, for
the ordinary definitions our ordinary ways of working with
them are unchanged. The revision theory does not restrict
our old ways, it extends our arsenal of conceptual tools to
deal with circumstances in which our old tools have failed.

The way Gupta explains the concept of truth is an
impressive and useful application of his general theory of
definitions. Clearly, the phenomenon of circularity is not
restricted to truth. There are other concepts that exhibit
strikingly similar problems. Rational choice with its Liar-like
paradoxes is just one example. The thought that there may
be a similar mechanism at work, that a circular concept lies at
the heart of these problems, does not seem absurd.

Or, more precisely, it does not seem absurd anymore,
now that Gupta has shown a way to make sense of such
concepts.

**Endnotes**

2. On this point and for a concise introduction to various modern
   theories of truth see Anil Gupta’s article “Truth,” in Lou Goble (ed.),
   and Phenomenological Research 4, p. 344.

**Jaegwon Kim: Conscience of Physicalism**

Chang-Seong Hong

Jaegwon Kim has recently presented a paper at Duke
University. I was one of the fortunate who could attend his
colloquium on reduction and reductive explanation. I found
it interesting that Kim was introduced as the ‘Conscience of
Physicalism’. This phrase aptly suggested that there are more
philosophers than we think who have accepted Kim’s robust
physicalism. His reductive physicalism may not be
heartwarming to many philosophers, as truth is often not,
and it has been almost politically incorrect to support reduction
for a few decades. Kim points out, however, that
nonreductive physicalism is a metaphysically unstable position
maintain once we take physicalism seriously. Reduction
needs to be considered in order to solve recalcitrant problems
such as the mind-body dependence and mental
epiphenomenalism. I will briefly introduce Kim’s
philosophical view and its influence in contemporary
philosophy, especially in metaphysics and physicalism of mind.

Kim debuted in philosophical society in the 1960’s and
1970’s with his articles on event theory. He proposed to analyze
the concept of event as an exemplification (or instantiation)
of a property in an object (or objects) at a time. His analysis
confirms the view that scientists typically explain an event by
describing an object having a property at a time. Further, he
clarified confusions involved in the mind-body type identity
theory with his criterion of event identity: Event e1 and event
e2 are the same event if and only if they are the exemplification
of the same property in the same object at the same time.
Kim’s event theory has been recognized as one of the two
most influential views of event, along with Donald Davidson’s
event as an unstructured particular. While Davidson had a
semantical approach to events, Kim’s event accounts better
clarify and illuminate metaphysical problems. Over the past
two decades we have noticed that more philosophers
accepted Kim’s event theory to present their views of
reduction, supervenience, and mental causation.

Kim’s supervenience thesis made his next philosophical
contribution more prominent. Davidson introduced
supervenience to the mind-body problem, but it was Kim
who defined its concept clearly and made it a key for much discussion in the 1970’s and 1980’s. From the early 1970’s many physicalists began to look for a way to characterize the mind-body relation that complies with the physicalist commitment to the primacy of the physical but does not risk reduction. Then came along the supervenience thesis. It claims: (1) mind depends on the body, (2) there is no mental difference without physical difference, but (3) this dependence does not entail nomological reducibility. Many physicalists accepted supervenience because they thought it promised dependence without reduction.

Those terms that Kim coined for supervenience, such as “supervenient property” and “base property”, became standard in philosophy. Further, his formulations of three different types of supervenience – weak supervenience, global supervenience, and strong supervenience – aroused much debate on the nature of each type and also on their mutual relationships. Kim chose to accept strong supervenience that specifies strong connectibility between mental properties and their base physical properties. He also speculated that strong supervenience implies reducibility of mental properties to their base properties.

The supervenience thesis attracted physicalists with its promise to provide the mind-body dependence without reduction. But Kim argued that nonreductive physicalism, including nonreductivist interpretation of supervenience, is a fundamentally unstable metaphysical stance. Cartesian substance dualism failed to explain the causal interactions of mind and body. It is thus rare to come across a serious form of substance dualism these days. With substance dualism set aside, however, a subtler form of dualism, nonreductive physicalism, entered the fray with reductive physicalism. According to nonreductive physicalists, (1) some things have both physical and mental properties, (2) mental properties somehow depend on physical properties for their instantiation, but (3) mental properties are autonomous because they are not identical with, or reducible to, physical properties. Nonreductive physicalists argue that mental properties ontologically depend on physical properties in that mental properties cannot be instantiated independently of the instantiation of their base physical properties. If a solid dependence relationship is to be established, however, mental properties may need to be tied quite intimately to physical properties, so much so as to suggest their reducibility to physical properties. So, there is in nonreductive physicalism pressure to move toward reductionism. On the other hand, if autonomy is to be secured for the mental, the dependence relationship should not be too strong and intimate. Mental properties will otherwise be constrained by physical properties in a way that threatens their autonomy. If mental properties are autonomous and unconstrained by physical properties, however, mental properties may float freely vis-à-vis their base physical properties. Then nonreductive physicalism begins to look more like an explicit form of dualism. In nonreductive physicalism, therefore, there is also pressure that pushes it toward dualism. So nonreductive physicalism is pushed in two opposite directions, toward reductionism and dualism; it is a metaphysically unstable position.

Kim has also pointed out the limit of the supervenience thesis as a mind-body theory. A supervenience claim consists of the claims of mental-physical property dependence and covariance. But the supervenience thesis itself does not specify the nature of the mind-body dependence relation. What it specifies is only a pattern of covariance between the two kinds of properties. Since the thesis as it stands does not specify the nature of the mind-body dependence, it does not as yet yield a full-blown account of the mind-body relation. Classic mind-body theories such as emergentism, logical behaviorism, and type identity theory, however implausible they may be, at least attempt to explain how mind is dependent upon the body — whether the dependence relation is causal, logical, or mereological. However, a supervenience claim is not about a specific type of dependence. It is but a mere statement, rather than an account, of dependence and covariance of two kinds of properties. This is also clear when we notice that various mind-body theories, including these three classic theories, are compatible with the supervenience thesis. To conclude, although supervenience of the mental may serve as a criterion of minimal physicalism, a thesis of supervenient dependence is rather a vacuous claim for a mind-body theory.

The problem of mental causation has dominated much debate in philosophy of mind since mid 1980’s. ‘Mental causation’ means ‘any causal relation in which a mental event/property is a cause or an effect of another event/property’. There is no question that Kim has led and guided most discussions of this issue. Philosophers of mind needed to discuss Kim’s view in order to present at all their own views of mental causation.

Kim’s simple but devastating argument meant to demonstrate nonreductive physicalism to be a version of mental epiphenomenalism. To appreciate the strength of his argument, consider first the following principle of the physical causal closure: If a physical event has a cause, then it has a physical cause. This principle implies that we do not necessarily require events of another domain in tracing out a causal chain for a given physical event. We believe, however, that mental states have an effect upon, and are affected by, physical states. For instance, my intention to raise my left arm causes it to rise. Since the physical domain is causally closed, however, the rising of my left arm can also be viewed from a purely physical perspective: a certain neural signal from my brain is transmitted down to my left arm and causes the appropriate muscles there to contract. The neural signal seems to be a sufficient cause of my left arm rising. Then, how does my intention play a role in the causation of my arm’s rising? In other words, how is it possible for my mental state to do any causal work when some neural state in my brain already has a sufficient cause of this event? To see the nature of this problem more clearly, consider Kim’s principle of causal exclusion that has been widely accepted: For any single event, there can be no more than a single sufficient cause unless it is a genuine cause of causal overdetermination. Let us now see the dilemma that nonreductive physicalists must face. Physicalists are committed to the physical causal closure. Nonreductive physicalists deny that mental properties are identical with, or reducible to, physical properties. Those nonreductive physicalists who believe in mental causation must accept the consequence that, when my left arm rises, both my intention to raise it and the neural state of my brain are each a sufficient cause of the same effect. This is their dilemma: (1) If this causal relation is understood as a genuine case of causal overdetermination,
Kim proposes a solution to the problem of mental causation with his reductionism and new identity theory. Hilary Putnam’s multiple realizability thesis virtually vanquished the classical type identity theory. Any mental property is realized in a large variety of physical properties in various physical/biological structures. It follows that a mental property cannot be identified with any single physical property. Accepting this thesis of functionalism, Kim presents a view that having a mental property on a given occasion is nothing over and above having one of its physical realizers on the same occasion. Instances of a mental property are identical with instances of its physical realizers. Since a mental property instance on an occasion is identical with the instance of its base physical realizer on the same occasion, the causal powers of the former are identical with those of the latter. Functional mental properties do not lose out to epiphenomenalism. For Kim, only the functional reduction and identity can save mental properties from the threat of causal overdetermination.

Kim’s recent research focuses on the problems of phenomenal consciousness. Our conscious life is constantly inundated by a panorama of phenomenal mental properties — qualia. It is hard to deny the existence of these phenomenal properties. But there are also good reasons to believe that unlike intentional mental properties, qualia may not be functionally reduced to their base physical properties. Without functional reduction and identity, however, there is no way that mental properties can have causal powers. Kim concludes that we cannot avoid the epiphenomenalism of phenomenal mental properties.

The problem of mental causation is partly unsolvable because of the epiphenomenalism of phenomenal consciousness. Due to the epiphenomenalism of phenomenal mental properties, however, we cannot solve the mystery of phenomenal consciousness. It turns out that the problem of mental causation and the problem of phenomenal consciousness cannot be divorced. They are the two interlocking Weltknoten (world-knots), problems that have defied the best of our intellectual efforts. If physicalism is to survive as a worldview, claims Kim, it must try to meet this most difficult challenge.

A couple of years ago, Kim told me that Buddhist philosophies had a long and rich tradition in the studies of consciousness, subjectivity, and especially the self, and that he was trying to find for his research purpose appropriate Buddhist scriptures and reference materials. It was encouraging to notice that one of the world’s most influential philosophers had found in the midst of his most recent research a close link between an Asian tradition and Western analytic philosophy.

Can Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak Speak to Philosophers?

Linda Martin Alcoff

“The revolution is like housework; it has to be done everyday.” —Spivak

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a philosopher. No matter how irritating reading her can be for philosophers—she doesn’t organize her essays in a familiar fashion, and she shares Derrida’s annoying habit of overusing quotation marks and refusing to define her idiosyncratic use of terms —still, Spivak has original interpretations and analyses of western philosophy. Besides this, she continues to advance powerful arguments in social theory, which, as someone who wishes to share little with Derrida, I define as the philosophy of society.

Spivak is recognized as one of the most important post-colonial theorists who write in original English. She is in fact one of the founders of post-colonialism, the project of inquiry into colonialism’s effects on thought, on the world, and on contemporary life and culture. Perhaps it is her gendered tendency to stay with the particular and avoid the universal that keeps Spivak from being seen as one of the “great” theorists, such as Foucault, Derrida, Said, and others, who have changed our vocabulary and analytical perception with strikingly new concepts and categories: deconstruction, power/knowledge, orientalism. On the other hand, Spivak has introduced important and influential new concepts, such as “strategic essentialism” and “catachresis,” so perhaps the lack is not in Spivak’s writing at all but only in its reception. She initially came onto the scene in 1974 as the English interpreter of Derrida’s first masterwork, Of Grammatology, and was thus perhaps pegged as his mere disciple, but she somehow persuaded the publisher to print her dense eighty-seven page introduction, which was much less exposition of Derrida than it was her own sweeping assessment of contemporary European philosophy since Hegel, including as well psychoanalysis and structuralism, this in what is called a “Translator’s Preface”!

Since that astonishing debut, what Spivak has contributed is a truly unique variant of theoretical criticism and social analysis that is equally informed by feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism (or the critique of Europe from within), and post-colonialism (or the critique of Europe from without). She has artfully used deconstruction against the arrogance of western theories, arguing against the claim that they have a global reach, and making this argument on methodological rather than overt political grounds. (And this application was certainly not one she learned from Derrida, who barely acknowledges Germany much less the rest of the world.) Her version of how to be a deconstructive revolutionary might...
be encapsulated in the epigraph above, which is a witty way of saying that no theory or strategy is stable in its effects or beyond the reach of cooptation (which again goes beyond Derrida, who tends more toward skepticism than pragmatism). But her work from the last two decades has ranged beyond the confines of deconstruction to develop accounts of representation, agency, meaning, the philosophy of history, power, reason, and knowledge. Along the way she has made incisive critiques of western feminism, third world nationalism, cultural studies, and environmentalism, not toward repudiations but toward reforms.

It is extremely difficult to summarize any of her arguments; she still writes in the deconstructionist style of a moving target, though this is less true of her two recent books, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason and Outside in the Teaching Machine. This style has led to frequent misreadings of Spivak’s position that she has had to correct in subsequent essays. For example, in what is perhaps her most influential essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak’s answer was read as a negative although it was actually only a negative on whether the subaltern can be heard, not whether she can speak.

The question of the subaltern’s ability to speak has been front and center of the agenda of subaltern studies, which attempts to represent the agency and subjectivity of that sector of colonized societies usually invisible to history, except as nameless victims. Can intellectuals—western trained, sometimes located in the west—discern the true and authentic desires and views of the subaltern? Can they reach below the peasantry’s internalized colonial ideology and their strategic maneuvers necessary for survival to find their independent thought and ultimate goals? Spivak’s contribution to this debate has been to criticize for philosophical reasons the “nostalgia for lost origins” but also to argue that, politically, debate has been to criticize for philosophical reasons the desires and views of the subaltern? Can they reach below the sometimes located in the west—discern the true and authentic desires and views of the subaltern?

In “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and elsewhere Spivak takes issue with the position of Foucault and Deleuze, that intellectuals should retreat from their usual presumption to speak for the oppressed, on the grounds that this will maintain and reinforce the normative relations of unequal power within the pragmatics of discursive arrangements. In order to support self-determination for the oppressed, Foucault and Deleuze argued that intellectuals should restrict their actions to developing spaces in which more people can speak for themselves. Spivak is as interested as the next revolutionary intellectual in supporting self-determination, but she argues that we cannot romanticize the subaltern in assuming that their speaking will necessarily be a self-determining act. Foucault and Deleuze seem to imagine the subaltern as having an uncomplicated subjectivity, easily available despite ideology, and they attribute a problematic and fragmented subjectivity only to the dominant, or at least dominant Westerner. Moreover, Spivak points out that the power of the intellectual is only concealed by such a retreat from speaking for the subaltern, since, if the intellectuals are “letting” the subaltern speak for themselves by providing the discursive spaces in which to speak, the authorizing voice is still theirs. Finally, she accuses Deleuze and Foucault more generally of a “refusal of the economic” in their work, helping to render the international division of labor invisible by neglecting to theorize it in their accounts of how meaning and knowledge are connected to power, as well as by neglecting to connect their very ability to authorize or retreat to their own place in “economic history.”

The result of this neglect, she says, is a micrological politics that, because it is not complemented by a macrology, conceals imperialism and produces a problematic imagery of utopianism as a private sphere for subjects transcendent of ideology.

Spivak argues we need an account of ethical relations with the subaltern that maintains a concept of the self as problematic, without transparent experience, constituted in fact through recognition and defined in relation to difference and negation, taking these points respectively from Marx, Hegel, and Ranajit Guha. What does such a view of the self mean for the concept and goal of self-determination? To explore this question, Spivak looks at a particular, famous case of sati (widow immolation, supposedly self-inflicted) which was interpreted differently by Indian nationalists and British colonialists. The colonialists presumed to re-present the meaning of her act as concealing a true desire to live rather than die, an interpretation which they then used to justify their own cultural and political interventions, much as the U.S. government uses this same sort of excuse to justify unilateral military actions in numerous other countries. Indian nationalists contested the British colonialist reading arguing that this act of sati really meant exactly what it appeared to mean: the woman wanted to die. The nationalists presented their interpretation as resulting from, not speaking for her, but listening to her own stated desires. Their interpretation was used to bolster the claim that patriarchal traditions enjoyed authentic consent and therefore the British had no moral excuse for usurping local governments. This mode of “listening to” accords with Deleuze and Foucault’s approach by essentializing whatever a subaltern says as her authentic expression, as well as concealing their own inevitable power in the interpretive act.

Rejecting both “speaking for” and mere “listening to,” Spivak argues instead we attempt a mode of “speaking to” which will involve reading the woman’s action as a text, without assuming a transparency either in the meaning of it or in our own process of reading. We need to recognize the presence of ideology and problematic subjectivity in both directions. In the dialogic, mutually critical encounter, Spivak suggests, there may exist the possibility for a version of self-determination, certainly greater than exists either in the “speaking for” or “listening to” variants. In this way, she displaces the question of whether the subaltern can speak in favor of the question of whether she can be heard, that is, engaged in as a dialogic participant.

Such an account might seem to disallow subaltern studies altogether, given that the very object of subaltern studies cannot and should not be represented. However, Spivak argues pragmatically that the act of representation is that which one cannot not pursue, which is to say that in the current context it is an act one must attempt even though it cannot be successful in traditionally understood terms. “That’s the thing that deconstruction gives us; an awareness that what we are obliged to do, and must do scrupulously, in the long run is not OK.” One must simply acknowledge this inevitable failure, and thus acknowledge, and take responsibility for, the constructions that even subaltern studies must impose on the subaltern. This is simply to engage in “the difficult task of
counterhegemonic ideological production,” a task that Foucault and Deleuze attempted to sidestep by an act of “ventriloquism.”

There are many who are content with such paradoxes, and in this respect deconstruction is not dissimilar from various trends in Anglo-American philosophy, such as the view that knowledge is strictly speaking unattainable (since we cannot know when we have reached the truth) and yet that we must pursue it nonetheless. I am less inclined toward such approaches, because (a) they seem to give up too soon, declaring failure and accepting paradox, and (b) they are generally based on unworkable and incoherent conceptions of the goal that is then declared unattainable. Nonetheless, Spivak’s use of deconstruction to critique the many fallacies of representation makes a persuasive, and politically crucial, negative case, even if she is less persuasive in the conclusion she draws from the critique. I would argue that, although we will inevitably fail in pure representation, we can still develop and defend criteria of adequacy for the interpretive process, while fully acknowledging the unavoidable political context in which meanings are made intelligible.

Spivak also uses deconstruction to show that “the ways in which history has been narrativized always secures a certain kind of subject position which is predicated on marginalizing certain areas.” In a discourse that presents itself as universal and all inclusive, such marginalization has especially bad effects, rendering the woman, the subaltern, or the racialized other not only marginal for the moment—for the purposes, one might say, of this particular narrative— but permanently and irretrievably marginal, such as in a “great man” theory of history. This is as true of philosophy as it is of history. In the first chapter of her most recent work, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, Spivak makes this case in her long opening chapter entitled simply “Philosophy,” which offers a reading of Kant, Hegel, and Marx as the central figures continuing to operate in present day social and philosophical critique.

Spivak argues against turning our back on “this trio”: given that “so much of one’s critique is clearly if sometimes unwittingly copied from them,” to reject them would be a simple “denial of history.” Yet she urges that it is still possible, and certainly important, to note the ways in which western philosophy, even theirs, has maintained its universal narrative through foreclosing the possibility that the marginal subject could have “access to the position of narrator.” In this way, philosophy, which she perceptively remarks has “remained untouched by the comparative impulse,” has developed a representation of self and world that explained and excused “the domination, exploitation, and epistemic violation entailed by the establishment of colony and empire.” This is never merely a question of intent, but of textual effects. In close readings of Kant, for example, Spivak notes that only “Man” is the end in itself to which the whole of nature can be justifiably subordinated. But this argument could not work for what Spivak calls the “raw” men, or racialized others. Kant seriously entertains the question of why these men even exist, a teleological question he renders unlawful to ask about “cooked”, or European, men. Women, she points out, are argued out of the text by Kant, but racial others do not even rate a philosophical argument, and are instead dismissed in a “casual rhetorical gesture.”

Spivak’s readings of philosophy should not be similarly dismissed. Her deconstructive variant of the post-colonial critique reveals elements too long left unanalyzed in the canon. Yet she does not hold it accountable for a task none can accomplish: a pure representation of the human condition, or an inclusive historical narrative. Her writing issues a new challenge, however, to drive the colonial legacies out of philosophy, by conscientiously reading them within it.

Endnotes
1. She is also one of the most trenchant critics of some of the problematic tendencies and unforeseen effects of post-colonial theory, and has even said (in hindsight) that she dislikes the term.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.

A Phenomenological Dialogue between East and West — Kah Kyung Cho’s Major Works and His Contribution to Philosophy

Charles Guignon

Nam-In Lee

Born and educated in Seoul, Kah Kyung Cho received his Ph.D. from Heidelberg (1957), taught at Seoul National University (1957-69) before joining Buffalo as successor to Marvin Farber (1970). He has been SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor since 1994.


Philosophy of Existence, while not available in Western language translations, left its enduring mark on Korea’s aspiring philosophical generations as a must-read classic for its in-depth treatment of the existentialist movement. It traces the central concept of “existence” from Kierkegaard to Schelling and his relation with Hegel. Schelling is recognized here not only for anticipating Kierkegaard’s strong reaction against “absolute idealism,” but also for influencing Heidegger and Marcel by providing a post-idealistic paradigm of man in terms of his facticity, finitude and transcendence. In addition, this
early work of Cho clearly outlines the future relevance of phenomenology independently of its close connection with existentialism.

But it is Bewußtsein und Natursein: Phänomenologischer West-Ost-Diwan, which has attracted the attention of leading European scholars. Its main philosophical aim is to uncover the true relation between consciousness and nature, and thereby to open a new horizon of thinking that reaches beyond the limitations of phenomenology, of both Husserlian and Heideggerian versions. According to Karsten Harries (Research in Phenomenology, April 1990), the subtitle, “Phänomenologische East-West-Divian,” harks back to Goethe’s attempt to open a non-Eurocentric perspective in poetry. Cho undertakes “a similar task, not in poetry, but in phenomenology, and not against the Persian, but against the Taoist backdrop.” Nevertheless, the reference to Goethe’s anthology may be appropriate also in another regard, since there is in this native Korean author’s German a subtle echo of the prosodic style of the German poet (Helmuth Vetter, Philosophischer Literaturanzeiger, Vol. 40, 1987).

Landgrebe, in his Preface to Cho’s volume, sees the specifically phenomenological character of this study in its commitment to several major themes of Husserlian phenomenology. Among them are the rehabilitation of the rights of sensibility and intuition, the a prioristic import of the kinesthetic, pre-predicative and life-worldly experience, the anonymously functioning subjectivity and the pre-logical structure of language. While Cho approves of Husserl’s ever more radical thrust into the deepest “foundings” layers of consciousness, he notes the lack in Husserl of a genuine openness to the blind side of receptive experience as complementary to the self-transparency of the performing Ego.

Husserl’s thesis of the functional primacy of consciousness a priori correlates “being” as such (ordo essendi) with the totality of real and possible objects “being known” (ordo cognoscendi). Figuratively speaking, nature is treated like a corralled and chained animal at the mercy of its keeper. Nature reduced to “intentional object,” an object to be tallied by means of parsimoniously doled out gaze, a subject that finds us before we can look at it, and often “takes us by surprise.” Not that all of Husserl’s followers lost sight of this living universe and went along with his transcendental constitutive phenomenology. Cho points out that Hedwig Conrad-Martius developed a “Real Ontology” in which even plants are creatures with souls, and Eugen Fink’s cosmological contemplation attempted to restore a playful and self-substisting universe (Phenomenology of Nature, “Introduction”).

However, Cho’s immediate point of departure for an East-West dialogue is Heidegger’s own platform, namely, the Thought of Being. At the time when Heidegger was groping for a new language to cope with the problem of the so-called “turning” (Kehre), his thinking gravitated towards an “encounter” with the presumably like-minded experience of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. Since Cho is the first Asian philosopher who initiated (1967) a critical review of Heidegger’s involvement with Taoist thought, a somewhat detailed report on this subject may be in order.

Cho endorses Heidegger’s explication of the Thought of Being by means of the negative imagery ("nothingness," “non-action,” “emptiness,” “withdrawal,” “letting-be,” etc.) so successfully employed by the old Taoist masters. To be sure, Heidegger drew similar images from his own traditions as well. Yet he could not resist adopting verbatim some of the more paradoxical Taoist epigrams. “Use of the Nothingness,” (emptiness in an earthen jug) and “strength of the weak” (water drilling a hole in stone) are well known examples. The “Letter on Humanism,” makes an oblique reference to the principle of “non-action” (wu-wei). Somewhat underhandedly, Heidegger amplifies here the esoteric idea of “overcoming by enduring” (Verwindung). Whether it is seen as “humanism” or “technology,” a crisis of world-historical magnitude, which Heidegger believes is rooted in the “metaphysics of subjectivity,” cannot be brought under control by yet another will “to surpass.” In fact, both the will to control and the event against which this will is directed belong to the same metaphysical dimension of subjectivity. Hence Heidegger’s recipe for coming to terms with this crisis bears an unmistakable Taoist signature: Apply no direct opposition. Endure, even work along with it, and let it gradually wane from within.

For Western scholars, calibrating the measure of Heidegger’s involvement with Taoist thought is a difficult task. Much has been known about his conversation with Japanese scholars. But it is far less obvious what he actually owes to the Chinese, in spite of his admission that he “learned more” from them. It is here that Cho, in the eyes of Otto Pöggeler, “made not only the necessary corrections with regard to Heidegger’s rather hasty appropriation of Lao Tzu, but he consistently upheld Heidegger’s own issue (Sache) in a new situation.” (K. Cho, “Der Abstieg über den Humanismus. West-Ostliche Wege im Denken Heideggers,” in Europa und die Philosophie, Martin Heidegger Gesellschaft Schriftenreihe Bd. 2, Frankfurt 1993. See also O. Pöggeler’s comment on Cho’s work in “Noch einmal: Heidegger und Laotse,” in Phänomenologie der Natur, Freiburg 1999, p. 114.)

With reference to judging Heidegger’s Asian connection, Cho undercuts any speculations that might point to a single origin of the saga of Being spanning East and West. Heidegger was tempted to such speculation, if only fugitively, in the light of Hölderlin’s intimation of the Occident’s “mysterious relationship (Bezüge)” to the Orient. At best, one may read into the concepts of Tao and Being certain historical parallels. Forgetfulness of Being is to Heidegger what loss of heavenly Way (Tao) is to Lao Tzu. In both cases, the vacuum created by loss has to be filled by something man-made. As Lao Tzu lamented the artificiality of rituals and morals parading as the human Way during his time, Heidegger now grieves over the planetary ascendancy of a technological culture in which Being is forsaken and “entities” prevail.

No doubt there are other themes that connect the two thinkers across the spatio-temporal distance. “Return to origin” is the common refrain of the elegics on two great civilizations gone astray. Lao Tzu’s warning to return to rustic simplicity is matched by Heidegger’s plea to descend to the depth of poverty and namelessness of a new beginning. And finally, when the former spelled out tzu-jan or “naturalness” as the uncanny way Tao operates, and the latter unveiled physis as the Greek orthography of the German word for “Being,” it seemed obvious that the recovery of some
primordial relationship of man to nature was the terminus ad quem of their respective philosophical journeys.

But this was as far as Cho would go. He did not overlook the tenacity with which Heidegger, in his newfound piety of thinking, holds on to the ancient privileged status of man in the universe. For Heidegger finds it simply incomprehensible that man could have an “abyssally deep affinity” with animals when, in his “transcendence,” (which is his essence) man stands closest to a being who is farthest away from him – God. At this point, Cho’s argument is conclusive: Heidegger develops an ultimately anthropocentric worldview in which humans retain the status of the “chosen ones.” Man is summoned back from the depth of self-degradation (crisis of humanism) to assume a “hagiographic” mission, to chronicle the truth of Being. Can the distance from Lao Tzu’s world get any greater than this?

Lao Tzu’s historic significance lies in the fact that he emerged as the great iconoclast of the anthropomorphic worldview of ancient China. Ridiculing the popular Confucian belief that “heaven is benevolent towards man,” he declared that humans are nothing but “sacrificial straw dogs” for heaven and earth. Hence to say that Tao reveals its truth only to man through its language, to which man hearkens, would be an affront to the larger order of the universe, which sustains itself perfectly without speech.

However, if one looks away from this fundamental difference stemming from theological traditions of the West, the scope of Heidegger’s thought has enough breadth to accommodate significant philosophical insights of the East. For, in Heidegger’s later philosophy, man was brought down from the airy height of “Nothingness” over which he once had to stand guard, to the position of a strikingly “ecophile” caretaker of the “Earth.” Being and Time described man’s world almost exclusively from a mechanistic, tool-oriented cultural perspective. But already a year later, in 1929/30, “naturalness of nature” has emerged as a central topic in his lecture, Basic Concepts of Metaphysics.

Thus, when transcendence as a cue for man’s uniqueness seemed to signal a setback to continuing an East-West dialogue, another niche is left open, as it were, in which to weave some more threads on the same loom. If the faculty of speech elevates man in any way at all, it is clear now that man is only elevated towards the truth of Being, and certainly not above the ranks of animals. For to guard over the truth of Being implies to guard over the “being” of animality as well, by carefully sorting out its “ready to hand” or “present at hand” modalities from its own (natural) being. Heidegger couldn’t be more explicit in defending the rights of animal nature in general: “Neither the inanimate, nor the animate nature is the lowest plank upon which humanity is elevated, so that it could play havoc with nature.” (Basic Concepts of Metaphysics, 403) But how far is Heidegger cutting into the contemporary ecological issues with his question of the “naturalness of nature”?

Cho’s study, “Ecological Suggestibility in Heidegger’s Later Philosophy,” first presented to the General Society of Philosophy in Germany (1983), had repercussions by denying that Heidegger at any time intended to make a contribution to solving ecological problems. (One of the consequences was that a group of German artists organized a symposium in Saarbücken in 1989, with Cho and G. Böhme as speakers. The title of the conference, “Natur, Kunst und Technik,” was directly taken from Cho’s book.) For 1929/30 was nearly half a century before the groundswell in public awareness of ecological crisis sent the Green Party into the German parliament. At that early date, Heidegger employed the word “Ökologie” in his Metaphysics lecture and defended the integrity and dignity of animal life. It was, as Cho has demonstrated, a corollary of Heidegger’s ontological question and had nothing to do with Heidegger insinuating himself to any popular trend of time.

The same logic was followed in Cho’s analysis of Heidegger’s concept of technology. The critique of technology was not meant to reject it or belittle its importance, as if one could bring about such a result through one’s own will. Similarly, the naturalness of nature cannot be measured by the yardstick of what we habitually call “natural.” The side of nature that has become most familiar to us through physics may well conceal the most essential side of it. Technology only knows to carve nature for itself. Cho’s ecology-article received high praise from Gadamer, Landgrebe, Pöggeler, Riedel, J. sseling, Vetter and many others for having shown, in the final analysis, that Heidegger drove home that same, simple message of his, namely, Thought of Being. Protection of natural environment was never intended. The time was too early for that. But over seventy years ago, with his own idiomatic reading of eco-logy as “housing of Logos” (Hut des Seins), the simple Black Forest peasantry thinker may have dropped a seed on a fertile soil. The term “Guardianship of Being” has only now become a slightly more concretely suggestive title. Meanwhile, rightly or wrongly, the ramifications of Heidegger’s simple, obsessive Thought of Being has spread to Far East. Seven or eight different translations of Being and Time now exist in Japan, China and Korea are also catching up.

In his attempt to bring Asian thought to the attention of Western readers, Cho adopted a markedly different approach from that of Japanese philosophers, as Landgrebe pointed out. While most Japanese are used to relying on their own Zen Buddhist tradition as the basis for assimilating Western philosophy, Cho appealed to more original Chinese sources of Taoism and Neo-Confucianism in order to implement a much wider ranging conversation between the two traditions. The most important tool for this cross cultural research, for Cho, is Husserl’s phenomenology. It is significant not only for its methodical thrust into the depth dimension of conscious and subconscious experience. Phenomenology provides, as Cho often emphasizes, the purest „optical instrument” with built-in possibilities for self-correction. If philosophy is in its essence the pursuit of self-knowledge, then the objectives for Asian philosophers are clearly mapped from the beginning. They are called upon to turn to their own traditions and engage their Western colleagues in conversations based on what they can positively contribute to sharing a higher and better level of knowledge.

That Cho has had Asia always deep in his heart has not escaped the attention of fellow Asian philosophers. Nitta Yoshihiro, one of Japan’s leading phenomenologists, had this to say about him: …by identifying himself with the natural philosophy of the East as typified by Lao Tzu, Cho brings to light the extremely Western aspects of Heidegger’s thought, thus making possible a meeting of East and West at a level much deeper than that offered by any previous study” (Letter to Peter Hare, 7/26/93). Cho’s recent essays are aimed at
brining traditional Eastern thought to an ethnmethodologically viable dialogue with the phenomenologcal thought of the West. The classical thought of China, he argues untringly, is the fountainhead of Eastern culture. It should never be left to dry up. A concerted effort is needed, transcending national boundaries, to revive, revitalize and refine it, if Asia is to have its own respectable place in a global civilization.

Thinking in Surfs—A Brief Introduction of Kenneth Inada

Xianglong Zhang

Born and raised in Hawaii, Kenneth K. Inada is one of the few Asian Americans to come out of World War II US military experience in Europe and to work distinctively in the area of East-West comparative philosophy. The experience precipitated him to engage in philosophical and religious pursuit. After obtaining the BA at University of Hawaii (1949) and MA at the University of Chicago (1951) in philosophy, he, encouraged by the famous Zen scholar Dr. D. T. Suzuki, went to the University of Tokyo where he received Ph.D. in the study of Asian Buddhism in 1960. After ten years of teaching in the Philosophy Department at the University of Hawaii, he moved to the Department of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1969, where he remained for the next 28 years before retiring in 1997 at the rank of Distinguished Service Professor.

With his learning, insights and language abilities (Japanese, Chinese, Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan and German), Inada made considerable impact on various domains such as teaching, writing, editing, directing conferences and establishing institutes. He held esteemed academic positions and won quite a few fellowships and awards. The following will concentrate on his contributions to introducing Buddhism into the English world and developing his own philosophical thought in the field of comparative philosophy.


In what he wrote and taught in the last several decades, Inada has shown that his philosophical insights (the President of SUNY at Buffalo called him “an extraordinarily wise man”) primarily come from Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and his own life experiences, especially that of being wounded in World War II. “I realized how flimsy life really is,” Inada said to a reporter in recalling this experience, “Although my rifle somehow saved me, I believe it could have gone the other way around.” We find that the pivot of Inada’s thinking is, as it were, a “Buddho-Taoist metaphysics of experience.” In this scheme, the reality of our experience and the world is not being, like what traditional western metaphysics asserts, but becoming that takes being and nonbeing as its two rubrics.
Nonbeing (suniyata, wu) is not merely the opposition of being, but what penetrates, absorbs and opens the realm of being, and hence refers to the deeper and resilient dimension of our becoming experiences. The ordinary, conventional and symmetric nature of experience is limited only to the realm of being and thus is superficial and truncated. Only when the experience includes nonbeing or the asymmetric dimension, does it turn out to be holistic, rich, dynamic and aesthetic, “similar to the nature and content of a surf in both seen and unseen aspects. …The asymmetric then serves as the so-called pure potential in momentariness, i.e., the moment in its full realization, steps back potently, so to speak, before stepping forward.” The “momentariness” indicates an open, moving ontology from which a novel and lively understanding of epistemology, ethics, aesthetics and political theory has been brought out in Inada’s papers, especially those written in the last two decades.

Ethics for Inada is intimately related to ontology. In ethics, the most crucial element is not the foundation for moral laws but the relations among persons. There are two kinds of personal relations designated by him as the “hard” one and the “soft” one. In the hard relationship, human persons are understood and treated only as beings that are objectifiable and manipulable, regardless of their potentials for becoming. This means that the function of nonbeing is overlooked totally. In the soft relationship, by contrast, nonbeing or emptiness (sunyata) plays the primary role to open our experience to the ongoing momentary situation by nullifying independence of any being as such, whether taken as a form or an element, and hence makes it possible for the function of mutuality and holism. In consequence, the soft relationship is supple and malleable, and is able to accommodate and incorporate the whole of any hard relationship; but the reverse is not the case, i.e., the hard relationship does not absorb or accommodate the soft one.

In human experience, the soft relationship manifests in terms of the intangible traits or virtues that we live by, such as patience, humility, tolerance, humanness, concern, pity, sympathy, altruism, faith, responsibility, love and compassion. Without them, human relations would be sapped of the so-called human element and reduced to perfunctory activities which would be more in character with hard relationship. Stemming from the Greek tradition, western ethics has always centered the knowledge of things in terms of certain intellectual functions based on logos (word, logic) and nous (intelligence). Therefore, it has failed to comprehend the soft relation even after Nietzsche’s revolutionary change of moving away from so-called “dry” metaphysics.

In the “hard” approach which characterizes most western schools, therefore, “human rights” are primarily taken as certain “rights” with legal traits. The soft one, however, seeks to understand the nature of becoming a human “being” before turning its attention to so-called “rights” of individuals. In a fundamental way, then, human rights cannot be truly asserted and legalized because they must be nourished in a wider, deeper, nonviolent, all-sentient-creatures-loving circumstance, “where feelings that are extremely soft and tender, but nevertheless presented and translated into human traits or virtues that we uphold, make up the very fiber of human relations. …The unique coexistent nature of rights and feelings constitutes the saving truth of humanistic existence.”

For Inada, beauty occurs at the momentary interplaying edge of being and nonbeing, symmetric and asymmetric, that prevails and maintains the balance of existence. “Once a master and a disciple were walking through a dense forest and suddenly, they heard the clear chopping strokes of the woodcutter’s axe. The disciple was elated and remarked, ‘What beautiful sounds in the quiet of the forest!’ To which the master immediately responded, ‘You have got it all upside down. ‘The sound only makes obvious the deep silence of the forest!’” In such a non-dichotomous situation, every form does not assert its own existence but reveals something non-present, greater and essentially richer. In this view, oriental painting is not “monochrome” but “nonchromatic” or “achromatic”. It is colorful in a kinetic and asymmetric sense. For the same reason, “one-corner-painting” shows something deeper by the empty space. “It utilizes in a harmonious way what is called in painting empty space but which in reality depicts the continuum of being-in-nonbeing. The seemingly empty nature of space is the ‘hidden’ potentiality waiting for the appearance or creation of any and all beings.”

It seems that Inada has been using the terminology of western metaphysics to express a holistic and dynamic experience that is both oriental and revealed by modern physics. It is the spirit of this experience that makes his retired life fruitful, being extremely active in the quietude of “doing nothing” (wu wei).

Reviewed by Keya Maitra

Winner of the 1997 American Political Science Association’s Victoria Shuck Prize for Best Book on Women and Politics, Uma Narayan’s Discollating Cultures has come to occupy a central position in the transnational, postcolonial and multicultural feminist literature. While this centrality has been widely acknowledged by all previous reviewers (Friedman, Grewal and Schirilla), what remains under-appreciated is this book’s contribution to a movement that has gained momentum during the last quarter of the twentieth century in the scholarship about India.

Countering the popular tendency among scholars to capture the essence of India through binary oppositions that characterize the ‘East’ as mystical and spiritual and the ‘West’ as rational and argumentative, Matilal, Nussbaum and Sen, among others have argued that these simplistic descriptions belie the complex and heterogeneous nature of Indian philosophical landscape. Narayan’s contribution to this movement is her interesting diagnosis of the conception of these totalizing and simplifying descriptions in colonialism. Further, her analysis exposes many faces of the ‘colonialist
stance’ by helping us detect traces of colonialist representation not only in the traditional Western encounter with the Other, but also in some non-traditional locations, namely, Western feminist encounter with the Other.

Narayan’s opening essay contests the charge of ‘Westernization’ that is often raised to delegitimize the Third-World feminists’ contestations of her own cultural norms and practices. Narayan argues that this charge misses the point since Third-World feminism is a response to problems that women face locally. Indian feminism, thus, is a response to issues specifically confronting many Indian women. Now, one might worry that though the pains and the oppressions giving rise to Indian feminist consciousness are local, the consciousness itself, in being theorized in ‘Western’ vocabulary, remains ‘Western’. Narayan responds by showing how the term ‘Westernization’ is applied ‘selectively and arbitrarily’ in this charge. She notes that this charge is often voiced by people whose ‘own political perspectives are indebted to political theories such as Marxism and liberalism that have Western origins’ (6). Narayan also argues that the dichotomy between ‘Western culture and the indigenous [Indian] national culture’ (5) is not a given but rather a construct of complex political forces of colonialism and nationalist movements.

In her second essay Narayan uses the example of Mary Daly’s discussion of the practice of sati in her famous 1978 book to discuss problems with Western feminist understanding and critiques of Third-World traditions. Narayan’s main problem with Daly’s presentation is that it erases both temporal and contextual histories of sati. By framing sati along with contemporary problems like dowry-murders Daly fails to acknowledge the temporal fact that sati is nearly extinct. Daly erases contextual history in failing to ‘make clear that sati was not practiced by all Hindu communities, and was never practiced by various non-Hindu communities in the Indian population’ (49). Further, by ‘erasing the voices and political agency of Third-World critics and critiques’ (57) in her portrayal of the history of contestation around sati, Daly commits yet another erasure of contextual history.

Daly’s atemporal and ahistorical account replicates a ‘colonialist stance’ because it reproduces the Western tendency to portray Third-World contexts as ‘places without history’ where ‘time stands still’. This in turn encourages the idea that ‘Ancient Indian Patriarchal Traditions’ are solely responsible for the problems facing Indian women of all ages and places (49).

Narayan faults Daly’s contestation of the practice of sati for its failure to challenge sati’s perceived standing as an ‘indigenous tradition.’ Narayan recommends a ‘double-strategy’ that not only challenges practices like sati for being oppressive to women, but also challenges their status as ‘indigenous traditions’ (78). Failures in advancing the second type of challenge are ‘dangerous’ for Third-World feminist politics because it leaves an important assumption in the Third-world religious fundamentalism unchallenged. If it is conceded that sati is a long-standing Indian tradition, then any contestation of that tradition can easily be construed as a ‘refusal’ to be an ‘authentic Indian woman’.

Narayan’s third essay explains the problematic effects of Western feminists’ simplifying and totalizing colonialist representations of Third-World practices. These simplifying representations fail to take note of how national contexts ‘bring’ particular issues onto feminist agendas, mold the information that is available on the issue, and shape as well as distort the ways in which they are understood when the issue ‘crosses [national] borders’ (84). These simplifying representations also encourage border crossing of only those aspects of an Third-world issue that seem exotic and alien to the Western audience leaving behind important and relevant contextual information. Then when the phenomenon becomes difficult for the Western audience to comprehend, what often comes in to fill this explanatory void is reference to terms like ‘Indian Culture’ (104). As a result Western feminists and Western media seem particularly prone to explaining cases of dowry-murders in India in terms of a ‘death by culture’ explanation, while no such ‘cultural explanation’ is invoked in explaining forms of violence that affect mainstream Western women.

Narayan’s fourth essay on different ‘roles’ — of ‘Emissaries,’ ‘Mirrors’ and ‘Authentic Insiders’ — that Third-world individuals, especially feminists, are often assigned to play in Western academic contexts show how a colonialist perspective can still shape, though in an indirect fashion, the contemporary Western interest in the Third-World. What governs the contemporary Western encounters with Third-World contexts are the dual imperatives of the ‘anthropological perspective’ (125). These imperatives draw their blood from good-intentioned Western determination not to repeat the blunders of colonialism. Thus while this perspective asks Westerners to be interested in the Third-World cultures, it enjoins them against making any moral criticism of these cultures. This limits the contribution that a Third-world feminist can make to these academic spaces. For example, while an ‘Emissary’ is allowed only to focus on the achievements of her native culture, a ‘Mirror’ is positioned purely for West’s critical self-discovery.

These roles become problematic when they are taken up as identities rather than as assignments. Narayan urges Third-World feminists to occupy these roles ‘strategically’ thus remaining conscious of their agency and responsibility in drawing critical attention to problems in their native contexts. The ultimate aim is a dialogue based on true mutual respect where Westerners become active participants in Third-World’s critical self-discovery. However there is a tension between Narayan’s vision of a truly multicultural academic space and her own theorizing about informational ‘border crossing’. As pointed out by Friedman (1999, 671), if Third-World feminist issues are embedded and shaped by their national contexts in such a way that their nature almost invariably get distorted and misrepresented in their travel into the First-world, then how should a Western feminist critically participate in the Third-world feminist discourse? This tension is highlighted by the awkward juxtaposition between Narayan’s considerable ‘pessimism’ (105) about easy solutions to informational ‘border crossing’ problems and her confidence in the possibility of a ‘shared and collaborative’ (80) endeavor between the Western and Third-World feminists in understanding the colonial history.

Narayan’s final essay depicts food as another venue of colonial and postcolonial encounters that is worth exploring in understanding the construction of cultural and national identities of the colonized and the colonizer. Narayan points

Reviewed by Matthew D. MacKenzie

Bina Gupta’s Disinterested Witness: A Fragment of Advaita Vedánta Phenomenology makes a major contribution to comparative philosophy. The central focus of the study is the concept of witness-consciousness (sákskhi), and it is the first comprehensive study of this important Advaita concept to appear in English. This fact alone makes Gupta’s book rewarding reading for anyone interested in Indian or comparative philosophy. However, The Disinterested Witness is not merely exegetical, it also makes important contributions to contemporary phenomenology, epistemology, and metaphysics. Thus, beyond showing the pivotal role of the concept of sákskhi in Advaita philosophy, Gupta also critically appropriates the concept for contemporary use. On Gupta’s view, “witness consciousness may indeed be a necessary component of any sound epistemological theory, regardless of whether one is talking about Western or Indian philosophical thinking” (p. 13). Gupta skillfully moves between clear exegesis of the primary Sanskrit texts, key figures in the Western and Indian traditions, and original argumentation. In so doing, Gupta’s work is an example of comparative philosophy at its best.

The Sanskrit term ‘sákskhi’ means direct or immediate perception, or the agent of such perceptions. It can also denote a witness, both in the legal and in the more general, epistemological sense. Sákskhi, as witness-consciousness, is the ultimate witness of all experience, and that which makes experience possible. Yet, while the concept of sákskhi is fundamental to Advaita philosophy, one finds various characterizations of the notion. Gupta takes the following six to be fundamental in the Advaita literature.

1. The sákskhi is indubitable, unerring, eternal. It is always directly manifested and its manifestation is not due to any extrinsic reason.
2. The sákskhi is the neutral (pure) consciousness as qualified by a modification of the inner sense.
3. The sákskhi is that which is never concealed.
4. The sákskhi manifests ignorance.
5. That which directly manifests is the sákskhi.
6. The sákskhi is that which illuminates everything (pp. 3-4).

Moreover, it is important to note that sákskhi denotes a disinterested witness. The sákskhi witnesses all experience, but is not perturbed by it. Hence, it must be strictly distinguished from the narrower empirical ego. The jiva (empirical individual) is the ‘knower, doer, and enjoyer’, bound up in relations with the empirical world. In contrast, witness-consciousness is “completely independent, existing in its own right, and not in relationship to anything else; it is seamless, eternal existence, the ground of our understanding of ‘I,’ and the ultimate reality that the ‘I’ names” (p. 17).

Now, while the term ‘sákskhi’ rarely appears in the Upanishads, and never as a technical philosophical term, Gupta points out (Ch. 2) that the notion is anticipated these texts. For example, in the Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad, the
átman is said to be, “the unseen seer, the unheard hearer, the unthought thinker, the unknown knower... He is your self, the inner controller, the immortal” (p. 21). In this passage, the self is taken to be the immortal subject of experience, which is never known as an object of experience. According to Gupta, it is from these characterizations of the átman that the later, more technical notion of sákshin is developed by samkara.

Having traced the origins of the notion of witness-consciousness to the Upanishads, Gupta goes on, in Chapter 3, to critically analyze samkara’s account of sákshin. This chapter is perhaps the most helpful for those particularly interested in Indian philosophy. Gupta is very careful to show the rigor and originality of samkara’s account of sákshin, while also pointing out important tensions in his writing on the subject. For samkara, “sákshin” is a kind of enduring, passive, and unchanging awareness, which observes and reveals mental cognitions and physical objects as well as witnesses all changes and activities that take place due to the intellect, the ‘I-notion’” (p. 48). However, in his various writings, samkara at times uses sákshin interchangeably with átman, brahman, and Ishvara (God). One of the strengths of Gupta’s work is that she is able to disentangle these various uses, giving us a clearer picture of the pivotal role of sákshin in samkara’s thought.

In the next two chapters, Gupta elucidates the crucial role witness-consciousness plays in Advaita epistemology and metaphysics. On the Advaita view, the notion of witness-consciousness is required in order to make sense of experience. Gupta argues, in a rather condensed fashion, that “all of us accept mental states such as knowledge, desire, aversion, effort. These cannot be apprehended by any ‘all of us accept mental states such as knowledge, desire, aversion, effort. These cannot be apprehended by any


Reviewed by Stephen Phillips

In the introduction to these exemplary essays in comparative philosophy, Arindam Chakrabarti, echoing Peter Strawson, calls the epistemology of the classical Nyãya school descriptive, descriptive of “knowledge in a social world” long before Alvin Goldman. Locke and the entire Cartesian tradition are epistemological revisionists. Whereas Nyãya recognizes learning from others, i.e., testimony, as a respectable and indeed irreducible “knowledge source” (pramána), the ideal epistemologist according to classical foundationalism is suspicious of testimony unless she has prior evidence of the reliability of the testifier. But clearly we do not require such prior evidence, and Nyãya appears to have it right about learning from others at least in normal cases. Thus contemporary epistemologists will be happy to find out that there is an externalist tradition in India as rich as Descartes’s and Russell’s. This review focuses on Chakrabarti’s exposition of the Nyãya epistemology of testimony in a long paper, “Telling as Letting Know,” along with its introduction and its lucid overview.

First let me formulate Nyãya epistemology in general using the old-fashioned prop of Platonic “justified true belief.” Chakrabarti seems reluctant to state the following characterization, though it is pretty easily recognizable in his papers. Apparently, as he says citing J. N. Mohanty (p. 13), he is afraid that the closest Sanskrit equivalent of “knowledge” as used in English is not quite the same concept: Sanskrit pramána- is “veridical cognition” and may be used for a lucky guess. However, classical epistemologists focus on pramána-ja-pramá, “veridical cognition generated by a knowledge source,” which seems to me to be only marginally different from English “knowledge”—no more different than, to make an analogy, two theorists’ intuitions about “hard cases.” Nyãya holds that belief-forming cognitions are normally veridical and that beliefs formed (“Fa”) are normally true in the sense of indicating, paradigmatically, an object (a) as a way (F) it is in fact. This cognitive hitting of the facts is accounted for by Nyãya through identifying causal processes—natural processes—that connect the environment with cognizers, i.e., processes that connect an object’s being F with a subject’s a-as-F belief. Nyãya epistemologists are externalists. A person S knows a proposition p just in case the belief p has been generated in the right way by the truth that p. S need not know nor be able to articulate the truth-generating means responsible for her belief p while indeed knowing p: her knowledge is accounted for simply by the occurrence of a truth-generating process (perception, inference, testimony). According to Nyãya, knowledge requires no “conscious justification” but only the proper tie between cognition and fact, which amounts to a belief-forming cognition’s being knowledge-source-generated. Thus
if, as Plato seems to have proposed, justification is required for knowledge, this justification would be the fact that a cognition is knowledge-source-generated whether anyone knows that fact, according to Nyāya.

Now all this is in no way to belittle or to confuse knowledge with a second-order activity which we might also call justification—or, better, certification—where our being able to cite the sources of our beliefs and other evidence is crucial. (“Other evidence” might be success or failure of action guided by the belief that p and other inferential arguments.) Certification is a different matter from brute knowing where we stand with babies and animals in unwittingly being forced to grasp. Regarding certification, Nyāya philosophers sound a lot like Western internalists, specifically, linear coherentists. Nyāya’s epistemological externalism is confined to a bottom level of implicit justification; it does not extend to canons of debate and inquiry. But this bottom-level of implicit causal connection makes Nyāya distinctive and, as Chakrabarti shows, capable of untangling knots generated by (Cartesian) extreme internalism.

A person is found to acquire descriptive knowledge in three distinct ways: by perception, by inference, and by testimony. As indicated, each of these involves a causal (and not only an intentional) link with a fact known. Testimony is the process whereby we acquire knowledge by being told. The catchy characterization, “knowledge from trustfully understood words,” is, Chakrabarti explains, not so much a matter of trustful as of distrust-understood words, “explanationally irrelevant”). Similarly, the “intention” (tātpārya) of the speaker is irrelevant (except in cases where the hearer becomes aware of an ambiguity such that it would be normal to ask the speaker what was meant), says Gangeśa. However, I’d say that though a little distant in the causal chain the qualities of the speaker of (a) knowing the truth and (b) wanting faithfully to communicate are entirely relevant. Testimony, like perception, links the fact that p with the belief that p. I suspect that Gangeśa in this plank of his theory has acquiesced in Māṁsa veneration for the “authorless” tradition of ethical authority known as the Veda. But I shall have to leave this bit of historicism for development on another occasion.

To sum up, Nyāya’s is a view that every contemporary epistemologist should learn, and this book is an excellent way to get started. And what a pleasure it is for a student of Indian philosophy to encounter contemporary epistemologists who are not Nyāya specialists (Michael Dummett, John McDowell, C. A. J. Coady, et al.) confronting the Indian theory along with the expert specialists! There is here, all told, a little friction and heat but also a whole lot of illumination.


Reviewed by Chenyang Li

Kwong-loi Shun’s Mencius and Early Chinese Thought is the most significant work in Mencius studies in recent years. His extensive scholarly research, in-depth analyses of original texts, and insightful discussions make this work first rate. This is one book that every serious student of Mencius must read.

This impressive book is divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter addresses the subject and methodological issues. The second chapter investigates the historical and cultural background. It studies pre-Confucian thought and its connections to early Confucian thought. Shun’s study of t’ien (tian, Heaven) and ming (Decree, Destiny) is illuminating. Chapters three, four, five and six deal with the moral ideal, core philosophical concepts, and disputed issues in Mencius. These include Benevolence or Humaneness (jen/ren), Propriety (yi) and Heart/Mind (hsin/xin), Self-cultivation, and Nature or Characteristic Tendencies (hsing/xing), respectively. Each of these chapters is a thorough and engaging study of the respective concept(s) and therefore makes a contribution not only to Mencius studies but also to the study of early Confucianism in general.
While examining various commentaries and translations of the book of Mencius, Shun often defends a particular interpretation on the basis of a comparative assessment of these interpretations. For example, the author examines three major interpretations of Mencius’s concept of yi. After rejecting two of them, he defends the interpretation that Mencius’s notion of the internality of yi is the claim that one’s recognition of what is yi derives from certain features of the heart/mind. Shun’s comparative approach is productive. Through a comparative study of ren and yi, Shun infers that ren in the Mencius emphasizes an affective concern for others, both not wanting to harm others (7B:31, 7A:33) and not being able to bear the suffering of others (7B:31). On the other hand, yi emphasizes a strictness with oneself, a commitment to abide by certain ethical standards that involves both not acquiring things by improper means and not accepting others’ improper treatment of oneself. A common interpretation of Mencius has been that he thinks that ren (humaneness) and li (profit) are opposed to each other. Based on textual evidence, Shun argues persuasively that Mencius is not saying that there is something problematic with li per se; Mencius’s point is that li can be attained only by practicing ren and yi (168). I also find Shun’s examination of the debate between Mencius and Kao Tzu (Gao Zi) on hsing xing (Nature, Characteristic Tendencies) particularly engaging.

The last chapter of the book, chapter six, focuses on a most important and also most debated concept in Mencius, his theory of ren xing. “Ren xing” has been often rendered in English as “human nature.” Students of Mencius often struggle with the question of what Mencius means by saying that ren xing is good. Shun renders “xing” primarily as “characteristic tendencies,” which is probably more appropriate than “nature.” He concludes that “what Mencius’s explanation of his view [on ren xing] amounts to is the claim that human beings already have emotional dispositions structured in a way that is directed toward goodness” (218). On Shun’s interpretation, Mencius’s idea of xing shan (“human nature is good” or “human characteristic tendencies are good”) consisted of two elements, that human beings have a natural (or emotional) tendency to be good and that they have the capacity to be good. Both elements are supported by textual evidence. For example, the first element may be found in Mencius’s discussion of the scenario when a person sees that a baby is going to fall into a well (2A:6) and his discussion of the Ox Mountain (6A:8), and the second element may be found in such passages as 1A:7 and 2A:6.

Shun’s interpretation, however, makes Mencius’s theory of ren xing shan one of moral psychology, not of moral metaphysics. A moral psychology tells us what good we human beings, given our psychological makeup, tend to do. A moral metaphysics dictates what we ought to do. Mencius’s theory, as interpreted by Shun, tells how human beings have inclinations to act morally, and how these inclinations are strong enough to serve as a starting point or foundation for human beings to form a pattern of moral behavior. It does not, however, tell us why human beings ought to follow our natural inclinations, which I think is a more important issue for moral philosophy.

Of course, it may be true that Mencius does not have a moral metaphysics. If that is true, then Shun’s study has presented the whole picture of Mencius’s theory; it would follow that Mencius does not answer the “ought” question, a vital question for moral philosophy. Another possibility is that Mencius indeed has a moral metaphysics, which is not covered in Shun’s book. If so, one needs to say what it is.

It seems to me that Mencius’s moral metaphysics, if there is one, should include at least two elements. First, human beings are capable of acting morally. This is Kant’s claim that ought implies can. Any moral requirement must be grounded on the premise that the agent has the capacity of acting morally. As made abundantly clear by Shun, Mencius repeatedly makes this point. Second and more importantly, human beings ought to act morally. The first element does not imply the second. The claim that human beings have emotional dispositions to act morally can only imply that it is natural for us to act morally; it does not imply that we ought to act morally.

The second element is the core of a moral metaphysics. It is the point that we human beings have an obligation to be moral and not being so involves some wrongness on our part. It is not the same as claiming that human beings have a psychological or emotional tendency to act morally. If for the second element we substitute Mencius’s claim about human inclinations to act morally, as Shun appears to have done, we end up with a moral psychology, not a moral metaphysics. In my opinion, a moral philosophy without a moral metaphysics is intrinsically inadequate.

At one place it appears that Shun attempts to develop an “ought” out of natural dispositions. Shun borrows A. C. Graham’s analogy to illustrate the idea of our natural tendency to act morally: human beings have a biological constitution such that they ke yi (can, are able to) live to seventy years old under normal circumstances; if one dies at twenty, this is not the fault of one’s biological constitution but due to one’s growth having been injured in some way (220). This analogy, however, does a better job of showing that, if a person becomes immoral, it is not due to one’s natural tendency, than showing that one ought to be moral. Whether human beings have a natural tendency to become evil is as debatable today as it was in Mencius’s time, of course. Even if we put this issue aside, the analogy does not seem to make a case strong enough for the kind of “oughtness” that a moral philosophy requires.

As Shun correctly points out, Mencius is aware that human beings have various predispositions of the heart/mind (xin), including eating and having sex as well as respecting parents, but Mencius emphasizes the ethical predispositions in characterizing ren xing. Shun presents three proposals as to why Mencius does so: first, because these ethical dispositions distinguish human beings from other animals; second, because their development is fully within human control; and third, because their development has priority over other pursuits such as life and the satisfaction of sensory desires. Tang Chun-i, whom Shun quotes, notes that the first two proposals fail to show why human beings ought to pursue these ethical predispositions (199-200). The third proposal, put forth by Tang himself, may tell us why Mencius emphasizes the ethical predispositions. Namely, Mencius does so because he believes that, ethically speaking, they are more important than others, because the pursuit of other predispositions must be subordinated to ethical predispositions. But Tang’s proposal does not tell us why we must give priority to them; that is, why human beings ought to develop these predispositions.
The answer, if there is one, has to be in Mencius’s moral metaphysical thinking.

We cannot expect this book to answer all questions about Mencius, of course. Unanswered questions notwithstanding, this work is a landmark in Mencius studies. Shun ends his book without a general conclusion, as he indicates that this book is just the first of his three projected volumes on Confucian-Mencian ethical thought. While I very much look forward to reading the next two volumes, I also hope that Professor Shun will deal with the issue of Mencius’s moral metaphysical thinking, or the lack of it, more fully later on.


Reviewed by Greg Ray

The central aim of this book is to show how the evident usefulness of possible worlds semantics can best be explained without any commitment to possible worlds. An impressive amount of philosophical theorizing has been carried out with the help of possible worlds talk, and such talk has been useful in clarifying intuitions about modal claims and inferences, but all this seems to come at a significant ontological price. The frequent suggestion that possible worlds talk can be treated as a mere façon de parler has been little more than a promissory note.

Moreover, it has been argued that the mere application of quantified modal logic already commits one to possible worlds. As soon as one wants to use modal logic to make inferences about truth simpliciter (as opposed to truth in a model), then one is committed to possible worlds, because the only account we have which connects the relative and absolute notions of truth is possible world semantics. Possible worlds semantics can be thought of as a formal, model-theoretic semantics for a quantified modal language, together with a commitment to the existence of an intended model in which the indices of the model are possible worlds and the domain of each index includes the objects (possibilia) that exist in the world of that index. The model-theoretic semantics delivers pronouncements about truth in a model, and then, since one of the models is an intended model, we can make certain inferences about the truth or falsity simpliciter of various sentences. For example, from the fact that a sentence is true at the distinguished index of every modal model, we infer that the sentence is true simpliciter. If this is the only story we have, then applying modal logic commits us to worlds.

It is to these issues that Chihara’s account is addressed. He proposes to relate model-theoretic modal semantics to absolute truth in a way that does not require anything like possible worlds, thus undermining the argument sketched above, showing how possible worlds talk can legitimately be deployed as a mere façon de parler while at the same time allowing us to explain why it is a good and useful one.

Those familiar with Chihara’s work in philosophy of mathematics will see in this new work a continuity of initiative and ontological concern. In Constructibility and Mathematical Existence (1990), Chihara has a cognate concern: to explain how mathematics can be so useful in application without supposing that there are mathematical entities.

Chihara has a knack for making implausible or absurd views appear downright implausible or absurd. As in that earlier work, Chihara devotes a portion of the new book to a careful critique of competing views. Here as there, the views of the competition look strikingly bad by comparison. There are searching critiques of both modal realist (Lewis, Plantinga) and modal anti-realist (Forbes, Rosen) views, and these discussions will be quite useful in courses where those views are being studied. We do not have space here to discuss these critiques.

The second half of the book develops Chihara’s positive view. Chihara approaches it in stages: developing parallel accounts first for i) non-modal propositional languages, ii) modal propositional languages, iii) non-modal quantificational languages, and finally, iv) modal quantificational languages. This development culminates in the proof of a Fundamental Theorem and several Corollaries which are supposed to bear much of the burden of showing what Chihara proposed to show. To grasp the character of these results, three key notions must be understood: i) natural language proto-interpretation, ii) representing function, and iii) the relation of conforming between proto-interpretations and S5-models.

Natural Language proto-interpretations. The provision of a natural language proto-interpretation, I, to an uninterpreted modal language, M*, provides everything required to determine a fully-meaningful language, and each sentence of M* when understood according to I will have a determinate truth value. Literally, a proto-interpretation consists of an assignment of a domain-of-discourse-determining English language predicate, assignments of English predicates to the predicates of M*, and names or rigid English descriptions to the constants of M*. A proto-interpretation is also required to do what we expect with logical connectives and modal operators. Note that a proto-interpretation does not just assign extensions to predicates, but assigns a meaningful predicate which is, in turn, extension-determining. For this reason one can talk sensibly about what the extension of a certain predicate (understood according to I) would have been under counterfactual circumstances.

Representing Functions. Our S5-models will all be built from pure sets, and each can be thought of as an indexed collection of substructures each of which has the character of a non-modal model, i.e., each substructure has a specified domain, assigns predicates to extensions, constants to elements of the domain, etc. The notion of a representing function pertains to these substructures. Now, a proto-interpretation also determines (indirectly) an extension for each predicate and a referent for each constant, and a domain of quantification for the quantifiers of M*. A representing function for a given S5-substructure, S, (and relative to some I) is a function mapping the domain of S one-to-one onto the domain of quantification determined by I in such a way that the function carries the S5-extensions of the predicates to the extensions those predicates have according to I, etc.

Conforming. In order for a proto-interpretation, I, to conform to an S5-model, I, four conditions must be met. The first two are roughly as follows.
C1: For every index \( w \in W \) of \( I \), there could have been a representing function (relative to \( \Box \)) for the \( w \)-substructure of \( I \).

C2: The world could not have been such that there was no representing function for any of the substructures of \( I \).

In short, \( I \) represents (in the intuitive sense) every way the world could have been in so far as what was of concern were the domains of the quantifiers, the denotations of the individual constants, and the extensions of the predicates (as these terms are understood according to \( \Box \)), and there is no way the world could have been (in so far as that is what was of concern) but that \( I \) represents it.

We are now in a position to characterize the Principle Corollary of Chihara’s Fundamental Theorem:

For any S5-model \( I \), proto-interpretation \( \mathcal{S} \), \( w \in W \), and sentence \( \theta \), if \( \mathcal{S} \) conforms to \( I \), then \( \theta \) is true at \( w \) under \( I \) if \( \theta \) (understood according to \( \Box \)) truly describes what would have been the case had the world been such that there was a representing function for the \( w \)-substructure of \( I \).

Chihara’s Fundamental Theorem is a generalization of this Corollary to the case of open formulas, but a technical problem precludes straightforward generalization, and the resulting complexities cannot be briefed here. In any event, the Theorem is primarily a tool which enables Chihara to prove results which show that model-theoretic semantics can be used to draw genuine conclusions about truth and necessity. For example,

\[ [\text{Cor A}] \text{For any } l \text{ and any } \mathcal{S} \text{ which conforms to that } I, \text{ for any sentence } \phi, \text{ } \phi \text{ is true under } I \text{ iff it is necessary that } \phi \text{ (understood according to } \Box) \text{ is true.} \]

\[ [\text{Cor E}] \text{For every proto-interpretation } \mathcal{S} \text{ that conforms to some S5 model, and for any sentence } \phi, \text{ if } \phi \text{ is valid, then it is necessary that } \phi \text{ (understood according to } \Box) \text{ is true.} \]

So far, we seem only to have related the notion of truth in a model to another relative notion, namely, truth under a proto-interpretation, but in application to cases, these theorems can indeed be used to establish the relation between truth in a model and truth simpliciter. Suppose one has a fully meaningful language, \( L \). Suppose that (mere typographical differences aside) this language is syntactically just like the formal language \( M^* \). Suppose also that a proto-interpretation, \( \mathcal{S} \), can be given for this language which assigns the correct meanings for each of the terms of the language, and also so that \( \mathcal{S} \) conforms to some S5-model. We can now infer from the foregoing: 1) if \( \phi \) is true in an S5-model to which \( \mathcal{S} \) conforms, then \( \phi \) is true, simpliciter; 2) if \( \phi \) is formally valid, then \( \phi \) is true, simpliciter; etc.

Chihara offers us a very promising account of modal semantics, and his nuanced treatment of formal semantics generally will have much wider application. While Chihara makes a great deal of the theorems he obtains, these establish only that the formal semantics connects to truth and necessity. What we most wanted to grasp was how the formal models were accomplishing the job, and that, to this reviewer, is the more important aspect of Chihara’s detailed development—the careful articulation of how the trick is turned by a subtle interplay between S5-substructures and ways in which the world could have provided representing functions for them.


Reviewed by Jay Goulding

This review addresses Professor Cheng Chung-ying’s (成中英) collection of essays (written between 1965 and 1985) entitled New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy (1991). Cheng’s book is much more than a history of Confucian thought or a summary of ideas from neo-Confucians. Rather, it attempts to find common ground between Eastern and Western philosophy. It also explains the impact of Daoism and Buddhism on Confucianism.

Given the differences of Eastern and Western life-worlds, Cheng develops a common language between the two. Hermeneutic phenomenology provides that common ground, especially through the works of Martin Heidegger with some assistance from Hans Georg Gadamer and Edmund Husserl. As such, this review centres on Cheng’s application of hermeneutic phenomenology to Chinese philosophy. Briefly stated, hermeneutics is a discipline of interpretation that serves to lay bare the question of “truth” or aletheia (non-concealment); phenomenology is a method of suspending or bracketing pre-judgements and then assembling them, layer by layer, to create a rich and deep analysis. With intimate knowledge of both Eastern and Western traditions, Cheng establishes a bridge between the two. In his “Introduction: Chinese Philosophy and Confucian/Neo-Confucian Thinking: Origination, Orientation, and Originality,” he states that “…human experience has two levels, the individual and the community, each of which presents human experience and human thinking in a holistic unity of organic totality.”

Chinese philosophy relies on “harmonizing” human experience with thinking by means of a “non-reductive naturalism” as displayed in Yijing (易經 Book of Changes) and Daodejing (道德經 Book of the Way and the Power). Western philosophy attempts to “overcome” human experience by thinking through “reductive rationalism” as displayed in ancient Greek philosophy. In Chinese thought, this leads to the “rationalization of naturalization.” In Western thought, this leads to “naturalization of rationalization.” Consequently, Cheng argues that Eastern thought harmonizes the individual and the community by integrating the head and the heart, i.e., rationality and emotion; Western thought overcomes human experience through “reason.” In the Eastern case, Confucians discuss “unity and unification of man and heaven,” while Daoists...
discuss “unity and unification of man and heaven in te (virtue) or in Tao (way).”¹⁴ In the Western case, both science as rationalization and religion as transcendence aim to resolve human problems. Heidegger, however, feels that this process of overcoming tends “to obscure our experience of Being.”¹⁵

At this juncture, Heideggerian and Daoist thought are complementary. The Yi jing views the world as composed of a “dynamic unity and unification of the yin and the yang, where the yin represents the receptive and the potential and the yang represents the creative and the potential.”¹⁶ Cheng further suggests: “One can readily see that in time (the temporal) there is a creative realization of being, whereas in being there is great potentiality for individuating development and innovative ontogenesis. Hence we can conceive of time as a matter of the yang and being as a matter of the yin.”¹⁷ Thus, Heidegger’s “time” and “being” align with the “ontocosmology” of yin-yang dynamics in the Yi jing through “heavenization” (heaven creating humans) and “humanization” (humans creating heaven). Through a complex matrix of heavenly/earthly crossings, Chinese philosophy (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) leaps toward “totality,” “harmony,” “balance,” and “mutual transformation.” All of the essays in the book follow the idea of mutually conditioned, linked opposites of yin (陰) and yang (陽). Rather than dissolve binaries, Chinese philosophy preserves their uniqueness through transformation. For example, Cheng quotes the neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (朱熹) in regard to the linked pairings of li (理 principle/reason) and qi (氣 vapour/vital energy): “Under heaven there is no ch’i without li and no li without ch’i.”¹⁸ The “interpenetration” and “harmonization” of li and qi are inseparable; they form “the actuality of things in the world.”¹⁹ Unlike the Western tendency, from Plato to Kant, to bifurcate concepts such as mind and body, Chinese philosophy relies on the necessary linking of yin-yang opposites. For example, the Confucian pairings of xíng (性 subject-nature) and ming (命 object-nature) or nature versus destiny, provide a grid for Confucian morality as they interweave through human action.¹⁰

Many of the above concepts culminate in one essay: “Confucius, Heidegger, and the Philosophy of I Cheng: On Mutual Interpretations of Ontologies.” Written in 1985, this essay serves as a flagship for twenty years of Cheng’s thinking. Consequently, it is worth looking at in some depth. Cheng explores the Confucian pairing t’ien/xíng (天性) in relation to Heidegger’s Sein/Dasein. Cheng launches into a comparison of Confucius and Heidegger with an important expression from Zhong Yong (中庸 The Doctrine of the Mean): “What Heaven [t’ien] ordains [ming] is nature [hsing].”¹¹ Of the expression tian ming zhi wei xing (天命之謂性), Cheng eloquently states: “Hsing and t’ien, being ontogenetically identical, are at the same time phenomenologically different in the sense of being differentially enriched and displayed. There is identity in difference and difference in identity.”¹² Cheng compares the above with Heidegger’s expression of Sein (Being) and Dasein (there-being as being-in-the-world). For Cheng, Heidegger’s Sein is similar to Confucius’ t’ien, and Dasein is similar to xíng. Both Heidegger’s Being and Confucius’ Heaven are ontological conditions of the possibility of existence that show themselves through being-in-the-world as Dasein or human nature. Like the primordially dialogical interplay between Being and Dasein, the Chinese concept of Heaven is “enriched” and “reinterpreted” by Dao (道 the Way), taiji (大極 The Great Ultimate), li (principle) and qi (vital energy). Heidegger’s Dasein is similar to the Confucian ren (仁 benevolence). As Cheng portrays: “For both Confucius and Mencius the perfection of virtues is an existential state of perfection of Being or a state of Being where the perfection of Being is disclosed. Virtues are simply means to insist on a state of Being and to reach a perfect state of Being.”¹³ Tian generates both xíng and ming; xíng “fulfills” the human being through “identification” with tian while ming helps individuals “interact” with other things. As Cheng observes: “The former [xíng] represents a vertical dimension (or movement) of the Being of the individual, whereas the latter [ming] represents a horizontal dimension. The former transcends time; the latter is determined by time.”¹⁴

Aligning this configuration with Heidegger, Cheng sees Dasein as a virtuous person “thrown” into the world as a simple being of fortune. This person has a chance to become an “authentic being” by attending to an “ontological reality.” Being trapped in the this and that of daily concerns leads to what Heidegger calls “failing” and a long struggle to re-achieve authenticity. For Cheng, Heidegger’s way of thinking is parallel to Confucius’ idea of authentication (誠 cheng) from the Zhong Yong. An “authentic” person is able to fulfill his nature by fulfilling the nature of others, hence fulfilling the nature of things. Cheng purports that an “ontohermeneutical circle of understanding”¹⁵ can help blend both Heidegger’s Dasein and the Confucian philosophy of the sagely human being. These can be fashioned together through a “mutual penetration”¹⁶ that is the basis of a comparative philosophy.

An innovative aspect of Cheng’s comparison of Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology and Confucian philosophy comes in the discussion of “time” and its relationship to the Yi jing. For Heidegger, temporality gives rise to both fate (Schicksal) and destiny (Geschick) through Dasein or as Cheng explains: “Time therefore is temporality revealed in the structure of Dasein.”¹⁷ This argument is equally reflected in the Yi jing: “understanding change and temporality is the deepest concern of the authentic ideal man referred to as the Sage.”¹⁸ Heidegger’s primordial temporality is in accord with the Yi jing’s “right timing or timeliness.” Heidegger’s concern with “anxiety” and “care” can be mapped into the Yi jing’s concentration on practical divination, which situates the person on both ontic and ontological levels in seeking “the inner harmony of the self and the outer harmony of the world.”¹⁹ In both Heidegger and the Yi jing, “timeliness” overrides past-present-future. Hence time is “timeless.”²⁰

Cheng’s contact with phenomenology and Chinese philosophy stretches throughout the two decades of writing in this collection. In “Rectifying Names (Cheng-Ming) in Classical Confucianism” written in 1965, Cheng discusses the life-world of the Confucian system: “Indeed, phenomenologically speaking, an individual is capable of having many more intentional dispositions to be described in
terms of beliefs, knowledge, virtues and temperaments. 21
Hence, Confucius’ idea of names (such as “ruler” or
“minister”) and their rectification (zheng ming, 正名) are
layered into both “social and biological relationships” as well
as virtuous postures of “moral self-fulfillment.” 22

In summary, Cheng’s book intertwines Eastern and
Western thought on a primordial level. The deep
commitments of Confucian thought to a virtuous life find
parallels throughout Western thought from Plato to
Heidegger in respect to the quest for both “authenticity” and
“being.” As a landmark in the East-West dialogue of cross-
cultural communication, the book encourages philosophers
to think in a fresh fashion, especially through hermeneutic
phenomenology. In this regard, the book is an excellent
teaching text for comparative philosophical thought and an
eye-opener for scholars of both Eastern and Western
philosophy.

Endnotes
in New Dimensions of Confucian and Neo-Confucian Philosophy
Yuan, Chu Hsi and Wang yang-ming,” 424-450.
2. “Introduction: Chinese Philosophy and Confucian/ Neo-Confucian
Thinking: Origination, Orientation, and Originality,” 2.
3. Ibid., 5.
4. Ibid., 10.
5. Ibid., 6.
6. Ibid., 10.
7. Ibid., 10.
8. Ibid., 15; see also “Method, Knowledge and Truth in Chu Hsi,” 375-
395; cf. “Li-Ch’i and Li-Yu Relationships in Seventeenth-Century Neo-
Confucian Philosophy,” 504-536.
9. Ibid., 15.
10. See “Dialectic of Confucian Morality and Metaphysics of Man: A
Philosophical Analysis,” 280-293.
Interpretations of Ontologies,” 339.
12. Ibid., 339.
13. Ibid., 343.
15. Ibid., 349; see also “Toward Constructing a Dialectics of
Harmonization: Harmony and Conflict in Chinese Philosophy,” 185-
218.
Interpretations of Ontologies,” 369.
17. Ibid., 351.
18. Ibid., 352.
19. Ibid., 358.
20. Ibid., 362.
22. Ibid., 223-224.