

Chinese Philosophy in an Era of Globalization. Edited by Robin R. Wang. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004. Pp. vi + 240. \$59.50 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Since the beginning of economic reforms in 1978, the People's Republic of China has come to play a significant part in globalization. The country has also shared in a renaissance in the study of philosophy. This book attempts to present essays by some of the leading philosophers in modern China in both their own traditions as well as reflections on contemporary Western philosophy. All of them are committed to expanding the perspectives of philosophical inquiry globally.

The book is divided into two parts: Part One bears the title "Reflecting on Chinese Philosophical Tradition," and Part Two, "Bringing Chinese Philosophy into the Global Discourse." Those in the first part feature contemporary Chinese philosophers surveying the intellectual tradition down the ages in China and its contributions to philosophical conversation. Those in the second part allow the reader to eavesdrop on Chinese philosophers critically appropriating the work of major Western philosophers as a means to understand their own tradition from different global perspectives. There are in total twelve papers, resulting in six exchanges. Each essay serves to introduce a substantial area of Chinese philosophy (the opening essay consists of an exchange of ideas which is aimed at making the exchange fruitful). This exchange, originally done in Chinese, is followed with a critical response by a prominent Western philosopher whose work or field of inquiry is addressed in the lead essay. Each set can be considered as an invitation to further conversation, rather than a transcript of a conversation that has already been completed.

The first set, an exchange between Zhang Dainian and Kwong-loi Shun, is on the presence or absence of "axiology" or value-theory in representative works of pre-modern Chinese philosophy. Zhang starts a vigorous discussion of axiology running throughout that period. He then builds up a typology which locates ancient Chinese thinkers within the range of contemporary axiological discourse. Finally, he attempts an evaluation on their relative strength and weakness. Kwong-loi Shun, however, points out that such a project runs the risk of distorting a genuine understanding of their authors. Because of the absence of any clear equivalent to the modern meaning of value (*jiazhi*) in those ancient texts, Shun is sceptical of relating their richly evaluative discourses to value-theory.

The discourse between Zhang and Shun, in fact, demonstrates many of the challenges that must be dealt with if the old East-West "dialogue" about Chinese philosophy is to be transformed into an open and constructive conversation. Zhang wants to apply modern Western value-theory to classical Chinese philosophy. Shun suggests that such an approach tends to take for granted that contemporary Western philosophy has set the terms of the dialogue, so that Chinese scholars can reconstruct their tradition with the Western paradigm. This approach, however, runs the risk of distorting their interpretations because there is as yet no good cross-cultural dialogue or collaborative conversation. However, all dialogues must begin somewhere. Shun's attempt tends to intensify the reader's appreciation of the otherness of the ancient texts by challenging the modern conventions of analytic discourse in which Zhang has laid out his lucid account of Chinese "axiology."

The second conversation, between Zhao Dunhua and Stephen Davis, is about the historical origins of Chinese religion and theories of religion in general. As Davis notices,

Zhao's paper indirectly testifies that philosophy of religion is now liberated from Marxist dogma, particularly the evolutionary view of the origins of religion. Contrary to this "Progressive Theory," Zhao argues that the worship of the "Lord on High (*Shangdi*)" and "Heaven (*Tian*)" cannot be explained as evolving from "lower" forms of religious theories. Subsequent to the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the pattern of development is just the opposite: "polytheism" apparently emerges from "monotheism" as the "Lord on High" and "Heaven" become increasingly vague, impersonal, and removed from the existential concerns of ordinary Chinese people.

Zhao develops his discussion from Chinese history and further place it in the context of philosophical theories developed to explain the origins of religion in general. Davis does not dispute Zhao's interpretation of Chinese religion but points out that such an interpretation does not guarantee the hypothesis of an original, universal monotheist religion. Even though they have various opinions in many aspects, Zhao and Davis agree that the philosophy of religion cannot be identified with speculative explanations of the origins of religion.

The third set features a discussion on the theory of human nature found in the writings of a Neo-Confucian, Zhu Xi. Chen Lai reconstructs Zhu's reflections on the relationship between the heavenly principle (*li*) animating all things and the physical endowment (*qi*) specific to each individual. Zhu's reflections are, therefore, an advance beyond the teachings of his philosophical forebears, the Cheng brothers. Chen attempts to establish the basic coherence and adequacy of Zhu's position, especially the question of how to explain the evil that human beings give rise to. Chen's reconstruction is useful in the articulation of the cosmological presuppositions of Zhu's perspective on human nature, and how it might illuminate certain problems in moral psychology.

Bryan Van Norden gives a complement to Chen's reconstruction and helps the reader understand the importance of such reflections on Zhu. Van Norden notices the differences between the entire school of Neo-Confucianism (*dao xue*) and what is and is-not actually said in the classical texts. He initiates the reader into the reflection on moral self-cultivation in the Chinese tradition. The metaphysical disputes over the relationship between *li* and *qi* have profound significance for ethics: not only for understanding the kinds of moral demands made on human beings, but also for highlighting what must be cultivated in human nature, and with what kinds of resources, if one is concerned with becoming a moral person. Van Norden points out that the strategy in Zhu's programme of self-cultivation is in the "School of *Li*," rather than in the "School of Mind." The reader is, hence, involved in participating in the practice of self-cultivation that might be enhanced by a philosophical understanding of human nature.

The fourth set offers us a chance to observe an already sophisticated conversation between Wan Junren and Alasdair MacIntyre. The topic is reflections on the divergences and convergences between Confucian and Aristotelian theories of virtue, on which Wan tends towards emphasis more to the former and MacIntyre the latter. Wan's understanding of the otherness of the Confucian tradition is embedded to a great extent in the categories that MacIntyre developed in his *After Virtue*. His conversation partner now, MacIntyre, is less a Marxist and more a Thomist in the interpretation of Aristotle. MacIntyre explores the ways in which both perspectives on virtue make universal claims that are not only internally consistent, but are also rationally compelling for all serious students of moral philosophy.

Wan compares Confucian virtue theory with the Aristotelian by asserting that the former is constituted by a normative pattern of cosmically ordered social relationships carrying deontological obligations. Such virtue can never be reducible to an individual's personal pursuit of any teleological end, however objective or conceptualized, apart from the social practices in which they are embedded as part of a specific community's moral tradition. MacIntyre, first of all, refuses to accept Wan's characterization of Aristotelian moral theory, as if it were simply the point of departure for modern Western moral rationalism. He also challenges Wan's understanding of Confucian ethics, emphasizing the focus of ritual propriety (*li*) in self-cultivation, although he, too, agrees with Wan that this social practice requires a rather different account of the relationship between the achievement of exemplary moral character and the relationship of individual autonomy. To understand the differences between these two philosophers, it would require attention to what is not said, as well as to what they actually choose to address in each other's theories. Both of them are committed to the comparative study of moral philosophies and help readers notice the ways in which cultural differences can give rise to various ontological pre-suppositions and epistemological commitments.

The fifth set, featuring Kelly James Clark and Liu Zongkun, allows us to observe a conversation comparing Zhuangzi's and Alvin Plantinga's epistemology. In what way does *Dao* exist as a natural knowledge, and God exists as a possibility? Such a comparison may at first seem strange, yet both scholars argue that Zhuangzi and Plantinga share a common adversary in the classical foundationalism, identified with Rene Descartes and David Hume. On the one hand, Zhuangzi's criticisms of Confucian "rationalism" must be interpreted as tantamount to a form of "perspectivism" that allows what may be known naturally about the *Dao* to count as genuine "knowledge" capable of guiding a person's efforts at self-cultivation. On the other hand, Plantinga's philosophical dissent against classical foundationalism can be understood as a form of Christian apologetics, a philosophical defense of the beliefs of the reformed tradition in Protestantism, asserting that such beliefs are rational and can be regarded as true knowledge by those who adhere to them.

Both Clark and Liu are content simply to such a comparison whereas Plantinga tends to be more concerned with defending his own position. Plantinga is more sceptical in Zhuangzi than what Clark and Liu allow: he worries that Zhuangzi may in the end agree with classical foundationalism, which no one can claim to have any genuine knowledge of the nature of Ultimate Reality. However, in defending as genuine the knowledge of God that reformed Christians profess, Plantinga would seem to accept similar claims from Daoists and other non-Christians. It is likely that though comparative philosophy raises epistemological questions, for example, about the nature of *Dao* and God, they are unlikely to be resolved by appealing to any one epistemology or another.

The final set consists in an exchange between Zhang Xianglong and Merold Westphal on how understanding what Laozi and Zhuangzi meant by *Dao* can be further extended with an appreciation of Heidegger's theory of language (*Sprache*). These two scholars come to an agreement in many aspects. Zhang reconstructs the meanings of *Dao*, and how they are used in Lao-Zhuang thought to convey the nonrepresentational, nonconceptual nature of "Dao-language," that is, the "great speech" of the Dao beyond the "petty speech" of everyday, ordinary life, and all these are accepted by Westphal. They also propose the usage of

Heidegger's theory of language for the interpretation and understanding of *Dao*-language, and that his later work is useful in the reflection of philosophical Daoism.

What Zhang and Westphal disagree is merely a relatively unimportant question, namely, whether the later Heidegger's theory of language is already present in his earlier *Being and Time*. Westphal introduces another perspective, that of Augustine of Hippo, claiming that Augustine also held a nonrepresentational view of "God-language," similar to the view shared by the later Heidegger and Lao-Zhuang thought. The main difference is that Augustine's God is capable of "speech-acts," as pictured in the Bible. The *Dao*, in Westphal's view, may call us beyond the reach of language, but the *Dao* may not be understood as someone calling. Then, the reader is left with a future conversation in which Zhang might clarify the *Dao*'s impersonal nature, or might modify it in ways that make it more congruent with what Westphal (and Augustine) find so compelling about the personal nature of God.

The last three sets of exchange take us back to some basic questions animating the first part of this collection: What is it that humanity must value as constituting the core of a good life? How is our quest for wisdom about these things related to our religious awakening about *Shangdi*, *Tian*, *Dao*, and God? What in our nature should be cultivated, and how, so that we might find ourselves a closer integrity between our inner dispositions and what life itself requires of us? This volume has brought together leading scholars to further the conversation between the Western and Chinese philosophical traditions. Consistent with the Chinese traditional respect for philosophical reflection, contemporary Chinese philosophers rigorously study and make use of Western philosophy. By the same token, the history of Western philosophy yields impressive openness to learning and incorporating ideas from Eastern traditions. It is obvious that contemporary Western philosophers will also benefit from contemporary Chinese philosophy.

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