

Preface

This book is intended for thinkers who have, or ought to have, an interest in comparative philosophy embracing Chinese and Western traditions. My own formal education was strictly in Western philosophy, religion, and culture. Introduced to Chinese philosophy (and Indian philosophy) by Thomas Berry at Fordham University, I could not easily understand my enthusiasm for the Chinese traditions. Indian philosophy was interesting to me, as was a range of other “non-Western” traditions, but none held the degree of fascination China did. Comparative philosophy has helped me see how my particular enthusiasms within Chinese philosophy connect with my enthusiasms in Western thinking.

Unlike most Western thinkers, I have been unable to make any intellectually satisfactory or practically helpful distinction between philosophy and religion. To put the matter more precisely, I have been unable to distinguish between the living practice of philosophy and the practice of religion by intellectually curious people. So I think of myself as a philosopher, or theologian, or philosophical theologian, or philosopher of religion, or religious philosopher, who draws constructively from Chinese as well as Western sources, and from others.

Primarily what I do with these sources is to construct a philosophy with which to engage the issues of our time, including the perennial ones. This philosophy is a complex hypothesis, or a set of hypotheses, or a bunch of hypotheses, that are tested for coherence and consistency, applicability to our world, adequacy in representing the things of importance within it, and fruitfulness in advancing the global conversation about what to be and do. The cases to be made for the various points in my philosophy are of many different sorts, but rarely of the sort that says my hypothesis is strictly true and everyone else's is mistaken. Rather, I usually want to call attention to points that other philosophies neglect, and to criticize that neglect while making my own hypotheses vulnerable to correction. The chapters in this book collectively represent a partial reading of Chinese philosophy, often in explicit comparison with philosophies from other traditions, and as making a contribution to the larger world philosophic dialogue.

I write as a constructive and systematic philosopher (although my own system is not much expressed directly in this volume), not as a Sinologist. Most English-speakers writing about Chinese philosophy are Sinologists, and will immediately see the failures in these chapters to exhibit the discipline and perspective of Sinology. The virtues I hope they see instead are the particular insights that come from engaging the Chinese tradition as a living philosophy. The reception of my *Boston Confucianism: Portable Tradition in the Late-Modern World* encourages me to stake out a place as a Confucian philosopher and practitioner.¹ I hope readers will overlook the hubris involved in suggesting that one of the many interesting ways in which Confucianism is being developed in our time is the way my philosophy does so. Although I share the Confucian tradition's emphasis on ethics, self-cultivation, and social philosophy, I also have devoted much time to metaphysical issues. The metaphysical system I have been developing derives many of its terms and issues from Western philosophy. Nevertheless, it gives contemporary representation to fundamental Confucian metaphysical themes such as process, organic connection, the pervasiveness of value, a continuum of immanent and relatively transcendent principles, and the conviction that metaphysics is pragmatically necessary for living well. Systematic thinking is for the sake of deepening practice to make it more attentive to the truly important things in the world. All these themes are Platonic as well as Confucian, and all comport with certain traditions within Christian theology. So I admit to being a Platonist and Christian, as well as a Confucian. In modern terms, I am an heir and extender of pragmatism as well.

Some thinkers are deeply concerned with "membership," that is, with whether one is truly and wholehearted committed to one's tradition. In Chinese philosophy this concern manifests itself in disputes about the "true lineage" of Confucianism. For instance, Zhu Xi read Xunzi out of the lineage when he edited the classics, and, more recently, Mou Zhongsan suggested that Wang Yangming rather than Zhu Xi is the authentic transmitter of the Mencian tradition. Western philosophy has had a myriad of schools of Platonism, not only Ancient, Middle, and Neo. Christianity, of course, is rife with divisions. Many Christians believe that salvation depends on whether one belongs to their particular sect, and not to the others, surely not to a non-Christian group. For thinkers concerned with membership, it often seems impossible to be a Confucian, Platonist, and Christian at once.

I do not share this deep concern for membership. In each of the sources commended for contemporary life, we should emphasize some strains and not others. Given the contradictions, even violent contradictions, between kinds of Christianity, only some can be affirmed. I have a particular reading of Platonism quite different from the readings popularized by Aristotelians (who tend to treat him as a dualist who believed in independent existence for sep-

arate forms). In contrast to several of my close Confucian colleagues, for instance, Tu Weiming, Cheng Chungying, and Liu Shu-hsien, all of whom take their agenda from an extension of Neo-Confucianism, I take mine from ancient Confucianism, particularly from Xunzi's reading of Confucius. In this I join with Roger Ames and David Hall, although we differ on other issues. The point is, a constructive philosophy draws affirmatively from a highly select reading of its sources. The corollary is that a large part of the defense of a philosophy comes from dialogue about why these strains are the ones to affirm and others to suppress.

The chapters in this volume all originated as invited lectures or essays solicited for particular occasions or projects. Although they have been edited to cohere in this book, with cross-references and the elimination of some repetition, their different tones reflect the differences in their origins. Originally stand-alone presentations, they have accessibility rare in my usually oh-so-serious, turgid, monographic prose. The first two chapters express my most general assessment of what is valuable in Confucianism for the contemporary age and articulate the development of these themes as projects. Chapter 1 began as the Daxia Lecture for 2005, delivered at the East China Normal University in Shanghai, under the original title "The Expanding Family of Contemporary Confucian Thought." It was translated into Chinese and I understand has circulated widely over the internet in China. The chapter, as an introduction to this volume, claims that the Confucian tradition has worthy themes to develop in metaphysics, cosmology, the understanding of human nature and experience, and in social theory. But those themes need to be restated in ways that connect with the larger philosophical discussion for Confucianism to be a vital participant in the dialogue.

Chapter 2 originated as "The Contemporary Significance of Confucian Values," a lecture at a conference in Seoul, Korea, honoring Yulgok on the general theme "From Chaos to Order," in February 2005; it was published in English, Korean, and Chinese, in the *Journal of Yulgok Studies* 1:1 (Fall 2005). A briefer version of the lecture was delivered at the 2004 meeting of the American Philosophical Association. Its principal thesis is that Confucian values can be rearticulated to express a conception of the "good life" in a global, multicultural context in which basic values in life are disputed; the chief Confucian contribution is its theory of ritual for how one can negotiate fundamental differences about the good life.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of ritual and desire in Xunzi, the great ancient theoretician of Confucian ritual themes. It expands on the remarks about Xunzi's ritual theory in chapter 2 and argues that Charles Peirce's pragmatic semiotic theory is well suited to bring ritual theory into the present discussion. Then it analyzes the role of ritual in the formation of desire, according to Xunzi, and the role of desire in forming great civilizational values such as the

“good life.” The competition among desires, and the martial and psychic forces required for their integration in ritual, together constitute a conception of the inner self as filled with explosive contradictions, under pressure, that relates far more closely to post-Freudian and Nietzschean thinking than to the relatively simpler idealism of Mencius. An earlier version of this chapter is forthcoming in a volume of essays on Xunzi edited by T. C. Kline III.

Chapter 4 continues the exploration of the ancient Chinese tradition with a focus on Daoist ethics, and some comparisons with the Confucian. Whereas metaphysics has often been an assumed subtheme in Confucianism, in philosophical Daoism the vision of nature and its fundamental characters is an immediate and important source for ethics. The chapter explores Daoist metaphysics in the *Daodejing* and in Wangbi. A critical difference between Daoist and Confucian approaches to ethics derives from their different senses of timing. Whereas for the classical philosophical Daoists the continuities and spontaneous changes in nature set the time, for the Confucians time is kept by the scale of human projects, administering the yearly changes, raising a family, getting through the semester. The first three sections of this chapter began with a version published with the same title in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 29:1 (March 2002), pp. 5–20.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the reception and use of Chinese philosophy in the contemporary situation. Chapter 5 classifies and surveys influences of Chinese philosophy in the English-speaking world, from translations to working philosophers. Several of our contemporary thinkers, in English, about Chinese philosophy are discussed at length. The chapter began as an article called “Chinese Philosophy in English-Speaking Countries,” published in Chinese in a volume entitled *The Map of Contemporary British and American Philosophy*, edited by Kang Ouyang and Steve Fuller (Beijing: People’s Press, 2005); more material from that article is in chapter 12. Chapter 6, which in an early draft was published with the title “Methodology, Practices, and Discipline in Chinese and Western Philosophy” in *Two Roads to Wisdom?*, edited by Bo Mou (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 2001), discusses at length what the practice of philosophy means when based on Chinese models.

Chapter 7 expands the discussion of metaphysics broached in chapter 1 by arguing, first, that there is a legitimate need for metaphysics, Kantian refutations notwithstanding, and, second, that China as well as the West need to adapt their metaphysical ideas to the new world of science. Some of these ideas are spelled out, and directions for their development are indicated. This chapter began as a contribution for the special thirtieth anniversary edition of the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 30:3, 4 (September/December 2003), pp. 313–326.

Herbert Fingarette was one of the first Western trained philosophers to take Confucianism seriously, and his *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* made the classic argument that the twin themes of humaneness (*ren*) and ritual propri-

ety (*li*) get to the heart of Confucianism as a contemporary viable philosophy. His thesis is discussed at several places in this volume. Chapter 8 asks a Western question about humaneness and ritual propriety. How do they stand with respect to unconscious motivation and value? A Freudian reading and a Marxist reading are developed. The overall point of the argument is that those Confucian values (and much else in Chinese thought) need to lose the “first naiveté” of mere cultural transmission and be rethought through the masters of suspicion. This chapter continues the development of a modern Confucian theory of interiority. One early version of this chapter was presented as part of a Festschrift to Mikhail L. Titarenko in *China in the Dialogue of Civilizations: For the 70-Year Jubilee of Academician Mikhail L. Titarenko* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences/Institute of Far Eastern Studies/Pamyatniki Istoricheskoy Mysli, 2004), pp. 653–660. Another early version was published in *Confucianism in Dialogue Today: West, Christianity, and Judaism*, edited by Liu Shu-hsien, John H. Berthrong, and Leonard Swidler (Philadelphia, PA: Ecumenical Press, 2004), pp. 48–58.

Chapter 9 is the first of three that focus explicitly on comparative issues. It takes up the question of the relation between Confucianism and Christianity and originated as a keynote address for a conference honoring the late Julia Ching. Professor Ching was probably our greatest student of the ongoing historical connections between those two religious traditions and collaborated in several works with the Roman Catholic theologian Hans Kung, who also delivered a keynote address. The focus of the chapter is on how the two traditions contribute to one another now, a topic of obvious importance to people who admit to be practicing both. The argument is about practical politics, putting forward a Confucian/Christian alternative to the preemptive war practice of the American government and Al Qaeda. The original lecture was published in *Wisdom in China and the West: Chinese Philosophical Studies XXII*, edited by Vincent Shen and Willard Oxtoby, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series III, Asia, Volume 22, 2004, general editor George F. McLean.

Chapter 10 deals with the question of whether the ultimate is to be conceived in personal or impersonal terms, according to Chinese and Western traditions, and I argue that every tradition has a spectrum of issues that cause it to deal with both personal and impersonal representations. An early draft was presented at a session on Field-Being at the American Academy of Religion in 1999.

Chapter 11 is devoted to issues of comparison per se. It first discusses issues in comparative theology, where concerns for the ultimate are uppermost and the nagging meta-issue is whether a thinker needs to belong to several traditions in order to compare them; what is the relation of comparative theology to religious practice? Then it distinguishes two forms of comparative philosophy (and the forms apply as well to comparative theology), namely,

descriptive or objective comparison and normative comparison that attempts to say what is true and valuable in the traditions compared. Finally it defends a move beyond comparison, even normative comparison, to integrative philosophy. Integrative philosophy is constructive, and so this argument is crucial for my own project, and that of those contemporary thinkers whom I hope to inspire to take Chinese philosophy as a major resource. Part of this chapter appeared in the inaugural edition of *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 1:1 (Winter 2001), pp. 1–13; other parts were published in the American Philosophical Association special newsletter on comparative philosophy, edited by Chenyang Li, in 2001–2002.

Chapter 12 summarizes the main themes of the previous chapters, presenting them as tasks for future work developing the Confucian tradition in its relations with others.

Transliterating Chinese names and words into English is impossible to make consistent, especially when quoting someone else. Generally I have followed the pinyin system but sometimes have quoted the Wade-Giles. I tend to use the names of contemporary authors in the form in which they publish, although many of these authors have moved from Wade-Giles to pinyin, and there is little consistency. I tend to conflate the double given names of authors into one, even when I use the Wade-Giles transliteration system. We all need a sense of humor about this, and I need forgiveness from my friends who might not like the way I spell their names.

The debts of a thinker such as I who has gone far beyond the boundaries of the disciplines of formal education are enormous and innumerable. I thank all my teachers and my students, the close friends whose work is discussed here, and those authors whom I do not know but whose direct work in Sinology has made mine possible. I salute the younger generation of scholars who have been preparing for comparative work throughout their education, a near impossibility for a philosopher of my generation. Most of all I thank my colleague at Boston University, John H. Berthrong. We were colleagues in the administration of that university's School of Theology for fifteen years. But more, we have been and still are colleagues in the development of an intellectual life that learns from both China and the West. Together we have worked on the development of the South-of-the-Charles School of Boston Confucianism (Tu Weiming leads the North-of-the-Charles School, which emphasizes Mencius over against Xunzi). Many years ago, when he was the interfaith officer for the United Church of Canada, John taught me that it is possible to be a person of integrity and an institutional bureaucrat at once. This possibility, of course, is a necessity if one is to be a Confucian scholar-official, something to which we both aspire. I gratefully dedicate this book to him.