

Review: Chinese Cosmology and Recent Studies in Confucian Ethics: A Review Essay
Reviewed Work(s): Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yangming by Philip J. Ivanhoe; Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation by Philip J. Ivanhoe; The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy by David S. Nivison and Bryan W. Van Norden; Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang Lao by R. P. Peerenboom; A Chinese Mirror: Moral Reflections on Political Economy and Society by Henry Rosemont; Way, Learning, and Politics: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual by Tu Wei-Ming

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Book Discussion Section

Review Essay

Books Reviewed

Philip J. Ivanhoe. 1990. *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yang-ming*. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press.

Philip J. Ivanhoe. 1993. *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation*. New York: Peter Lang.

David S. Nivison. 1996. *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*. Edited with introduction by Bryan W. Van Norden. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Press.

R. P. Peerenboom. 1993. *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang Lao*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.

Henry Rosemont. 1991. *A Chinese Mirror: Moral Reflections on Political Economy and Society*. LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Press.

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CHINESE COSMOLOGY AND RECENT STUDIES IN CONFUCIAN ETHICS

A Review Essay

Jane Geaney

ABSTRACT

Scholars of early Chinese philosophy frequently point to the non-transcendent, organismic conception of the cosmos in early China as the source of China's unique perspective and distinctive values. One would expect recent works in Confucian ethics to capitalize on this idea. Reviewing recent works in Confucian ethics by P. J. Ivanhoe, David Nivison, R. P. Peerenboom, Henry Rosemont, and Tu Wei-Ming, the author analyzes these new studies in terms of the extent to which their representation of Confucian ethics reflects and is consistent with the view that in early China the cosmos was conceived to be organismic, nontranscendent, and nondualistic.

KEY WORDS: Chinese ethics, Confucius, cosmology, dualism, transcendence

SINCE THE 1980S, THERE HAS BEEN A RESURGENCE OF INTEREST in the Confucian tradition that has implications for the study of Confucian ethics. In section 1, I will briefly describe and compare the contents of new studies of Confucianism by Tu Wei-Ming, R. P. Peerenboom, Philip J. Ivanhoe, David S. Nivison, and Henry Rosemont—all of whom present some version of the early Confucian tradition from whence the ethical vision derives. In section 2, I will examine their texts in light of a particularly influential view of the nature of the early Chinese cosmology.

1. Brief Summaries

1.1 Tu Wei-Ming's *Way, Learning, and Politics*: Essays on the Confucian Intellectual

In his preface to the North American edition of *Way, Learning, and Politics*, Tu notes that this book depicts examples of the Confucian intellectual spirit. He sets himself the task of explicating the Confucian tradition in order to gauge its exemplary figures. In this way, Tu hopes

to enhance the modern Chinese notion of the intellectual, and perhaps the Western notion of the individual as well. In addition to presenting these exemplary figures, Tu responds to a series of challenges regarding the possibility of reviving Confucianism in the modern world.

The book consists of nine essays spanning Confucian history. The first four essays concern the classical period (500–221 B.C.E.). The next three pertain to the work of neo-Confucians from the eleventh to the seventeenth century of the common era. The last two reply to modern attacks that claim Confucianism represents the traditional Chinese feudal order.

Tu addresses the concern that Confucian ideas have lent support to oppression. For instance, he notes that during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), Confucianism may have been useful to the autocracy and patriarchy because of its emphasis on the authority of the ruler, father, and husband (Tu 1993, 27). Tu also notes accusations that Confucianism encourages familialism, authoritarianism, antiquarianism, passivity, submissiveness, and stagnation. However, he is optimistic enough about Confucianism to think that its stress on teaching and mutuality might compensate for its flaws: “the Confucian ideology, with its emphasis on exemplary teaching and mutual responsibility, also required that the ruler live up to the ideal of kingship, that the father live up to the idea of fatherhood. . .” (1993, 27). Thus, Tu seeks a balanced reappraisal of Confucianism that acknowledges its complicity in past injustices but nevertheless recognizes its importance in the preservation of Chinese cultural identity.

Tu also addresses the widely accepted view that Confucianism is a historical artifact with little relevance to the modern world. He argues that many of those who criticize Confucianism are, in fact, still obsessed with the Chinese tradition, because they still take for granted some of its central tenets regarding the wholeness of culture and its susceptibility to control. Tu is particularly concerned to respond to the claim that Confucianism lacks “original and creative perspectives” (1993, 145). Although he admits that Confucianism has not fared well in response to modern Western intellectual challenges, he sees the resurgence of interest in Confucianism in the 1980s as a sign of hope. He points out that Confucianism has confronted challenges before and emerged broadened by the experience. For Tu, the possibility of a modern “third epoch of Confucianism”—a creative transformation of the tradition—involves a kind of self-cultivation of Confucianism itself. The process requires recovering aspects of the Confucian tradition while at the same time tapping the resources of the West: that is, “embodying the other” in order to “revitalize the self” (1993, 178).

Tu seems willing to question his own biases in his presentation of the tradition. He also seems willing to incorporate even radical ruptures as

part of the tradition. Perhaps this flexibility is what allows him to remain optimistic about Confucianism's ability to transform the world.

1.2 R. P. Peerenboom's *Law and Morality in Ancient China: The Silk Manuscripts of Huang Lao*

Confucianism is not the main topic of Peerenboom's *Law and Morality in Ancient China*. The thesis of the book is that there was a notion of transcendence in the worldview of the Huang Lao Boshu (manuscripts from the second-century B.C.E. tomb at Mawangdui). That is, according to Peerenboom, the Boshu, unlike any other early Chinese text, presumed that the natural order constituted a transcendent foundation for human order. On such a view, human beings do not negotiate or achieve order—rather, order comes from preestablished principles. Peerenboom considers this “weak transcendence” because it did not involve “radical ontological disparity or separation” (Peerenboom 1993, 37). Hence, although he claims a unique position for the Boshu in terms of its historical context, in his view the Boshu remained within the frame of the general organismic cosmology of its period.

Peerenboom acknowledges that an interpretation of a text must account for its emergence from its cultural and historical context, and he accounts for the anomaly of the Boshu's view of transcendence predominantly by explaining it as a short-lived reaction against the worldview of other early Chinese texts. Thus, Peerenboom interprets early Confucianism as the opposite of the Boshu's foundational naturalism.

In establishing the worldview that the Boshu rejects, Peerenboom presents a brief characterization of early Confucianism. He devotes one chapter to Confucius and discusses Confucius's view of knowledge in another section.

1.3 Philip J. Ivanhoe's *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mencius and Wang Yang-ming*

In *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition*, Ivanhoe presents a straightforward, systematic comparison of Mencius (fourth through third century B.C.E.) and Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529 C.E.), showing how Confucianism reacted to Buddhist metaphysics. Ivanhoe compares the views of the two thinkers on the nature of morality, human nature, the origin of evil, self-cultivation, and sagehood, in each case devoting a chapter to each thinker, followed by a conclusion. He argues that Mencius located morality in human nature, whereas Wang located it in metaphysics. Where Mencius viewed human nature as having a certain proper course of development, Wang, influenced by Buddhism, replaced it with a fully formed perfect nature (which needed no proper course of development).

Mencius viewed evil as a disturbance in the natural course of development, while Wang viewed evil as something that pure knowing could eliminate through awareness. Whereas Mencius saw self-cultivation as nurturing sprouts of goodness, Wang saw it as realizing one's perfect nature. Finally, whereas Mencius's sage restored the past through his understanding of tradition, Wang's had no need for tradition since he could rely on his pure knowing.

1.4 Philip J. Ivanhoe's Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation

In *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation*, Ivanhoe analyzes Confucian moral self-cultivation from a philosophical perspective, tracing this "one thread" of Confucian teaching from the fifth century B.C.E. to the sixteenth century. His goal is to present some "distinctive and vibrant features" of each figure he discusses (Ivanhoe 1993, 95). Ivanhoe begins by explaining that the early Chinese focused on how to become good, rather than on what constitutes goodness. After introducing the importance of the moral cultivation of the ruler, he then describes the models of moral self-cultivation proposed by Mencius and Xunzi (third century B.C.E.). This is followed by chapters on Zhu Xi (1130–1200), Wang Yang-ming, and Dai Zhen (1724–1777), each of whom developed his model of self-cultivation in reaction to Buddhist metaphysics.

Ivanhoe says the book is intended for those interested in philosophy who may have little knowledge of Chinese, as well as Sinologists who do not study philosophy. The goals he hopes his study will achieve include explicating the Confucian ethical system, prompting contemporary moral philosophers to rethink the issues of moral self-cultivation, drawing attention to the fact that these issues are familiar outside the West, and suggesting that humanity needs something like Confucian moral self-cultivation (that is, that we need an ideal, a conception of how to achieve it, and an understanding of ourselves).

Although he does not mention it, both this work and *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition* would make good textbooks for courses in Confucianism or comparative ethics.

1.5 David S. Nivison's *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*

In this volume, Bryan Van Norden brings together a series of previously published essays by Nivison in order to make them more accessible. The collection of sixteen essays spans the period from the earliest Chinese civilization to the eighteenth century. The first two essays, "Virtue in Bone and Bronze" and "The Paradox of Virtue," contain particularly interesting observations about the history of the term *de*^a

(virtue).¹ Most of the essays focus on the way understanding of the role of virtue developed in the Confucian tradition.

Nivison brings questions from Anglo-American philosophy to bear on Chinese texts, examining them in terms of the themes of weakness of the will and moral motivation. Although at times his questions may seem extraneous to the material at hand, his sincere attempt to sort out moral questions makes the reading worthwhile. Nivison's engagement with the topics is infectious, and his illustrations are memorable—for example, moral weakness likened to a muscle cramp and the guiding of students likened to an ophthalmologist's guiding of an eye (Nivison 1996, 90, 229).

1.6 Henry Rosemont's *A Chinese Mirror: Moral Reflections on Political Economy and Society*

Rosemont's *A Chinese Mirror* is a short, highly readable collection of essays based on ideas that have appeared in other articles. According to Rosemont, these essays are not meant to be Sinology, science, or current affairs. Rather, they constitute an exercise in comparative philosophy, one that attempts to show that from a moral point of view, the contemporary state of affairs in China actually mirrors the problems the United States confronts, however different the two nations may be politically and economically.

Rosemont argues that American accounts of contemporary China are skewed by corporate and foreign policy interests. The book intends to balance these skewed accounts. Hence, Rosemont outlines what Americans are told to consider morally praiseworthy about post-Cultural Revolution China, and he attempts to replace these stereotypes with a more complex view of Chinese politics, society, and economics.

Rosemont suggests a connection between capitalism and a variety of ills that have recently emerged in China—inflation, corruption, bureaucratic meddling and incompetence, disparity in standards of living, rising crime, drugs, prostitution, pornography, homelessness, begging, and rural poverty. He also contends that the poverty in China was more evenly distributed in the 1980s, before the Chinese experiments with capitalism. According to Rosemont, the degradation of the majority by the privileged minority should be a reminder that those who oppose free-market capitalism in China are not motivated simply by a desire to preserve their power.

¹ Since typesetting for this journal does not permit the insertion of Chinese characters into the text of the essay, I have provided an appendix in which I have supplied the Chinese characters. Superscript lowercase letters refer the reader to the equivalent character(s) in the appendix.

As a result of Rosemont's view of the depreciation of the environment and the limited availability of capital, his prognosis for the future is bleak. Some of Rosemont's innovative recommendations for solving China's crisis include adopting a qualitative measure for standards of living; allowing the majority, who have to make the sacrifices that are required to improve the standard of living, to choose the form of sacrifice; and creating many "little Chinas" to replace the unmanageably large China of the present.

Rosemont's essays are interesting and would make a provocative addition to a course in comparative ethics or Chinese history.

2. The Cosmology of Early Confucians

Contemporary philosophers of early China frequently cite the "organismic," nontranscendent early Chinese cosmology as the locus of Chinese distinctiveness. Such a position secures special importance for early China, whose unique cosmology gradually altered in response to contact with Indo-European metaphysics (particularly evident in the Chinese reception and transformation of Buddhism, beginning slightly before the common era). To varying degrees, these six ethical studies also share this particular emphasis on the early Chinese view of the cosmos. Some of these studies overtly ground Confucian ethics in that organismic, nondualistic cosmos. Others, while affirming the importance of that nontranscendent cosmology, still employ terms that suggest transcendence and dualism (in some cases, perhaps, inadvertently). It is outside the scope of this review to determine whether these various approaches to transcendence and dualism are true to the early Chinese vision. However, given the contemporary tendency to explain the uniqueness of the Chinese tradition by reference to early Chinese cosmology, it seems worthwhile to place these new studies in ethics in relation to this growing scholarly consensus. When philosophers describe early Chinese cosmology as organismic, they have at least two things in mind: (1) that the cosmos is conceived organically and naturalistically, that is, that it is pictured without any transcendent dimension, and (2) that it is conceived as a complex whole, characterized by an interrelationship of mutually dependent patterns of change, that is, it is a picture that neither supposes nor struggles against the dualistic oppositions that characterize much of modern Western thought. Accordingly, to sort out the relationship of these six treatments of Confucian ethics to current scholarship on early Chinese cosmology, I will first examine what these authors have to say about the role of transcendence in Confucian ethics, and then I will turn to the even more subtle question of whether these studies of Confucianism offer dualistic accounts. What makes this second question particularly interesting is the fact that it is

not always possible to know whether the dualistic elements in the modern studies reflect an attempt to show that the Confucian texts themselves were dualistic or whether these elements simply reflect the difficulties modern Western thinkers have in accurately representing the content of nondualistic texts.

2.1 Transcendence in the early Confucian tradition

Peerenboom presents Confucian ethics strictly in terms of a nontranscendent, nondualistic cosmos. He generally follows the depiction of Confucius given by David Hall and Roger Ames in *Thinking through Confucius*. According to Hall and Ames, the cosmology with which Confucius would have been familiar involved no “transcendent.” In other words, it was free of that dualism whereby the cosmos is conceived to be divided into parts of inherently unequal status. Specifically, there was no unequal relation by which it would have been possible to account for one part of the cosmos (for instance, the human) by recourse to another (for instance, God), though the former could not completely account for the latter. Thus, according to the cosmology known to Confucius, there was no radical ontological separation between heaven and human. Instead heaven, earth, and humanity were thought to share a relation of mutual influence. This nondualistic cosmos was characterized by relations of “polarity,” by which Hall and Ames mean that each part was thought to be constituted by dependence on its opposite (Hall and Ames 1987, 17).

While Peerenboom accepts their position regarding transcendence, he both supplements their view and corrects it slightly. He explains the absence of transcendence in the *Analects* as a function of Confucius’s epistemology, which he characterizes as a pragmatic coherence view of knowledge, in contrast to foundationalist correspondence views of knowledge. He contends that seeing Confucius’s epistemology this way would benefit Hall and Ames’s arguments. However, it would also limit the extreme openness that Hall and Ames attribute to Confucius’s cosmos. The pragmatism that Peerenboom attributes to Confucius involves no such openness, because it involves no positive metaphysical assertions about the extent to which the cosmos is or is not determined.

In contrast to the works of Peerenboom and of Hall and Ames, Tu’s work on early Confucianism freely employs the term “transcendence” in relation to the early Confucian tradition. Tu’s attempt to engage in comparative theological discussion seems to account for his willingness to use terms like “transcendence.” In a thoughtful foreword to the book, Frederick Mote comments that Tu places unusual emphasis on the religious dimension of classical Confucianism. Hence, Tu’s presentation of the classical period involves terms like “holy” and “God,” which seem

inconsistent with what Mote calls the “organismic, self-generating cosmos” of early Chinese cosmological thought (Mote 1993, xvi). Some of the connotations of a dualism between heaven and human also find their way into Tu’s characterization of early Confucianism. For instance, Mote argues that Tu’s use of the term *tian ming*^b (heaven’s decree) implies a “guiding force from somewhere beyond the realm of the self-contained organismic process” and that Tu’s interpretation of the Mencius suggests the “handiwork of a God external to [the self-contained process]” (Mote 1993, xvii).

The ambiguity of Tu’s use of “transcendence” and other theological terms is evident in Tu’s discussion of basic early Confucian concepts. Tu maintains that in Confucianism, for the first time in Chinese history, the concept of *tian*^c (heaven/sky) constituted a “transcendent anchorage” for human life. If Tu had offered no further explanation, such phrasing would have undermined the mutuality between human and heaven that Tu also claims for the early tradition, but Tu does offer an explanation of “transcendent anchorage” that makes it clear that he uses “transcendent” in a very weak sense. He says that this term means things like the fact that humanity has value beyond life and death. Tu also notes that students of Confucius appreciated him precisely for not going beyond the ordinary: “[To his students] his great strength as an exemplary teacher lay in his everydayness. His conscious choice not to resort to the extraordinary, the powerful, the superhuman, or the transmundane to impress people was greatly respected as a sign of inner strength” (Tu 1993, 7). Moreover, Tu significantly reduces the weight of his theological claims by adding that, for Confucians, learning to be human amounted to learning to be divine (1993, 4).

Nonetheless, more ambiguity about transcendence surfaces in Tu’s discussion of how the Confucian intellectual’s moral center contributed to the institutionalization of Confucian cultural values. Tu comments that the “transcendental principle, be it the mandate of heaven or the dictates of one’s moral will” seems to be what has “allowed the Confucian to perceive politics in terms of the ultimate meaning of life. . .” (Tu 1993, 20, emphasis added). Here, Tu implies that the “transcendent” might refer to morality, or, as he suggests elsewhere, it might simply mean that the Confucian intellectual’s horizon exceeded the social system. However, in other parts of the essay, “transcendent” primarily refers to heaven itself, which suggests that heaven is not contained within the self-generating cosmos. Regarding certain Confucian intellectuals, Tu says, “[s]ince their moral ideals were thought to have been commissioned by the mandate of heaven, they appealed to both the transcendent and the people for support” (Tu 1993, 22). Thus, in some cases, Tu uses “transcendence” in a way that shows he is concerned to preserve what some consider to be the distinctiveness of the early Chinese cosmos

and the Confucian tradition it produced, but in other cases, he seems to use “transcendence” in a way that makes Confucianism resonate with Western theology.²

2.2 Mind/body dualism

Scholars who interpret the early Chinese cosmos to be organismic and nontranscendent usually also note its freedom from certain common Western forms of dualism. For instance, according to a strict interpretation of “organismic cosmology,” the early Chinese cosmos involved no dualism of mind/body, fact/value, knowledge/opinion, or reality/appearance. Hall and Ames specify that, in place of such dualisms, the cosmos of Confucius exhibited polar relations. A polarity, such as yin/yang^d (passive/active), has boundaries that are not entirely exclusive, and it does not privilege one side as ontologically superior to the other. Although, on the whole, the studies under review endorse this interpretation of relations in the early Chinese cosmos, suggestions of dualistic reasoning nonetheless (perhaps unintentionally) appear in the authors’ interpretive commentaries.

Rosemont’s argument for reconsidering the early Confucian view of the person builds on the absence of the mind/body and fact/value dualisms. Rosemont maintains that early Confucianism shows why it is infelicitous to talk in terms of an “autonomous rational” subject. The early Confucian view of the human subject presented what Hall and Ames might call a polar, rather than dualistic, relation of *xin*^e (heart-mind)³ and body, a relation in which reason is never quite disentangled from physicality. The thinking subject is a physical directed agent. Rosemont notes, “If we believe that human beings are, or can be, purposeful agents, we cannot simultaneously believe that they are altogether autonomous, disembodied, individual rational minds” (Rosemont 1991, 66). Rosemont argues that the notion of an embodied reasoner manages to avoid fact/value dualism because the body’s positioning in the physical environment guarantees that no facts are value free.

It is not clear whether Ivanhoe’s argument about the development of neo-Confucianism also presupposes that all early Confucians avoided mind/body dualism. Ivanhoe maintains that a mind/body dichotomy

² Like Tu, Rosemont uses terms like “transcendence” in describing the early Confucian tradition, but his claims in this regard are uncontroversial, since he employs the term only to indicate that the Confucian tradition invokes the human ability to go beyond particular points in space and time in order to experience a common humanity (Rosemont 1991, 77).

³ The term *xin*^e refers to the function of both cognition and emotion—hence, the translation “heart-mind.”

appeared in neo-Confucianism as a result of its contact with Buddhism. That is, neo-Confucians borrowed from Buddhism the distinction between a pure original nature and an impure physical body. In contrast, Ivanhoe argues that the Mencius does not present a strict separation between the physical body and the heart-mind.⁴ He notes, “Mencius drew no hard line between these two; to do so would have been anathema [sic] to his claim that moral goodness is the natural outgrowth of human nature” (Ivanhoe 1990, 34). But Ivanhoe seems to suggest that the Xunzi does draw such a line. Ivanhoe writes that in the Xunzi, “In the pre-social state of existence, we are led exclusively by our physical desires” (Ivanhoe 1993, 40). Ivanhoe’s claim, here, can imply two things—either that the Xunzi distinguishes “exclusively” between physical and nonphysical desires or that it distinguishes “exclusively” between physical desires and a higher aspect of a person that is neither physical nor desirous (presumably, the heart-mind).⁵ Both of these interpretations of Ivanhoe’s claim suggest that he reads the Xunzi’s juxtaposition of the heart-mind with the inborn desires in terms of a mind/body dualism. Both imply a hard line between the physical body and the heart-mind, the former insofar as it suggests that the heart-mind’s desires differ from the body’s desires in some exclusive way and the latter insofar as it suggests that the heart-mind excludes desires entirely. Hence, Ivanhoe’s stance on the presence of a mind/body dualism in early Confucian thought is complicated by his treatment of the Xunzi.

The notion of the heart-mind (that is, the notion of one function that performs both thinking and feeling) resists the clear distinction characteristic of mind/body dualism. In contrast to thoughts, feelings are more obviously linked to physical sensations (particularly in terms of how we experience them). Thus, the concept of a heart-mind implicates mental processes in other processes that are more overtly physical in nature. Along these lines, Tu affirms, in his essay “Subjectivity in Liu Tsung-chou’s Philosophical Anthropology,” that thinking is an action that involves the whole person (that is, it cannot be extracted from feeling and sensation):

⁴ In light of current debates about the possibility of multiple authorship of almost all of the classical Chinese philosophical texts, I follow the convention of attributing ideas to the texts rather than to individual authors.

⁵ In the Xunzi, the efforts of the heart-mind work to curb the inborn desires. The Xunzi claims that the ancient kings sought to curb the desires inborn in human beings (Xunzi 19/1–8). However, in making this claim, the Xunzi merely refers to these as inborn “desires,” without limiting them to the physical. The Xunzi does begin its list of desires with those of taste, smell, and sight, but its list also includes arguably more “mental” desires, such as the desire for a sense of trust and safety.

... thinking, in the Mencian sense, is a transformative act, involving the total person. This is part of the reason that Mencius characterizes the mind as the “great body” (ta t’i^f). . . . As Mencius points out, the will is the directionality of the mind; when the mind directs, a “bodily energy” follows. Actually, the conative and affective dimensions of the mind take precedence over its cognitive function. For the mind feels and wills more often and more immediately than it thinks, cogitates, and reflects [Tu 1993, 103].

Tu concludes that the heart-mind (and, presumably, its thinking) is “directly accessible though bodily sensations” (Tu 1993, 103).

Nivison and Ivanhoe make similar claims about the inextricable relations of heart to mind. For the Mencius, Nivison notes, the heart is “at the same time . . . the mind,” and thinking is “not purely a cognitive activity . . . but the heart’s reflective attending to and even savoring of its own inner dispositions” (Nivison 1996, 147, 114). Likewise, Ivanhoe notes that in early China there was no pure reasoning independent of attitude and goals; on the contrary, thinking (si^g) “does appear to include relating . . . goals and ideals to one’s attitudes and particular situation and hence includes a certain level of practical reasoning” (Ivanhoe 1993, 13). Thus, Nivison and Ivanhoe concur that the early Chinese regarded the affective and cognitive functions to be inextricably related.

In spite of this assertion that the heart is in some sense the mind, Nivison’s interpretation of the Mencius emphasizes a distinction between thinking and feeling that, perhaps inadvertently, sounds something like a mind/body (or mind/heart) dualism. This appears in his comment about Mencius 2A2 and the first half of book 6 of the Mencius. In 2A2, the Mencius discusses the relation between the heart-mind and the qi^h (energy-matter); and in the first half of book 6, the Mencius discusses the relation of the heart-mind to the senses. Nivison’s analysis of these passages casts the terms as a relation between mind (reason) and body (passions). He says, “It is chiefly here [2A2] and in the first half of book 6 that Mencius discusses the problem of the relation of mind and will to passions and appetites. . . .” (Nivison 1996, 121). This implies that the heart-mind’s relation to the senses and to qi^h amounts to the mind’s relation to passions. The equation of qi^h and the senses with “passion and appetites” suggests that the heart-mind itself does not experience passion or have appetites.⁶ Furthermore, in other contexts, Nivison’s attempt to explicate the Mencius involves terminology that clearly splits thought and emotion into two very different processes. He writes, for

⁶ This is certainly not to say that there is no difference between the heart-mind and the qi^h, or between the heart-mind and the (other?) senses. It is only to say that Nivison could have cast these differences in terms that do not contrast the mind to the body or imply that the mind lacks passion.

example, “We might say that the person has drawn the cognitive conclusion, but he or she hasn’t ‘drawn’ the ‘feeling conclusion’” (Nivison 1996, 143). Thus, while Nivison makes this distinction for the purpose of explicating the Mencius for modern Western readers, on the assumption that early Chinese texts understood the heart-mind to be one function, the thought-world of the Mencius would have had little reason to distinguish reason from passion in this way.

Nivison’s interpretation of Mencius’s opponents suggests another dualism involving thinking and feeling. Nivison does not expect Mencius’s opponents to have had an appreciation for the connection between the two operations. Nivison attributes to Gaozi the belief that reason and emotion are radically separate.⁷ Nivison takes Gaozi’s position to have been that reason comes from the outside, in words, whereas feeling comes from the inside, in the heart.⁸ “One can think of what are in effect Gaozi’s two ‘sources’—in his words what you ‘get it from’, i.e., ‘words’ and the ‘heart’—as respectively independent of myself and so ‘external’ to me, and in myself and so ‘internal’” (Nivison 1996, 104). Similarly, according to Nivison, Yi Zhi, a debate partner of Mencius, thought morality depended on two independent things—on “what I think I should do, and could state in words and reason about” and also on “my capacity to feel certain emotions” (Nivison 1996, 102).⁹ He therefore suggests that someone like Yi Zhi did not realize that cognitive judgments and feelings both derive from the heart-mind, but thought instead that “the heart (xin^e) supplies emotional capacity, while a quite separate and quite possibly misguided philosophical doctrine (yanⁱ) tells you how the capacity ought to be used” (Nivison 1996, 134). However, many scholars who deny that dualism can be found in early Confucianism make that claim with respect to early Chinese thinking in general, and would not endorse the view that the adversaries of the Confucians were dualists. If the opponents of Mencius, like Mencius himself, used the term “heart-mind” to refer to that function that both thinks and feels, they would have had no more reason than Mencius to view thinking as a cognitive activity entirely separable from feeling.

The distinction Nivison draws between reason and emotion produces a puzzle for him, insofar as early Chinese thinkers seem to have believed

⁷ Little is known about the philosopher Gaozi, the opponent addressed in 2A2 and 6A1–6 of the Mencius. Nivison and others speculate, on grounds that I do not find compelling, that he was Mohist in his philosophical orientation. (Mozi was a utilitarian philosopher of the fifth century B.C.E.)

⁸ In these arguments, Nivison interprets the character yan,ⁱ typically translated as “speech,” to mean “philosophical doctrine” and, by extension, “reason.” According to Nivison, “what I get from words” means “what I come to apprehend cognitively as my obligations” (Nivison 1996, 104).

⁹ Yi Zhi was a thinker described in Mencius 3A5 as a follower of Mozi.

we can change our feelings simply by thinking something is right. Nivison calls it odd that Yi Zhi had the notion (which he attributes to him) “that I have an emotional capacity—for love, e.g.—which I can then steer, focus, or spread out, this way or that, just by taking thought, in accordance with a doctrine that tells me I ought to” (Nivison 1996, 135).¹⁰ Likewise, he finds it bizarre that the Mozi seems to maintain that we can “adopt them [feelings], just as one might decide, on persuasion, to move one’s limbs or adopt a certain physical posture” (Nivison 1996, 83, emphasis added). This sense that reason’s persuasion can effectively change one’s emotions seems implausible to Nivison. But if all early Chinese texts shared the view that thinking and feeling were in some way inextricably combined in the very same function, the notion seems more plausible. In that case, changing the mind might just be changing the heart.

In emphasizing the relation of judgment to action, Nivison introduces another distinction that implies that the Mencius dualistically separates thinking and feeling. Nivison’s argument makes use of the figure of King Xuan of Qi, who agreed that he should do something but begged off on account of weakness.¹¹ Nivison does not believe the Mencius contrasts what people say with what people do (which is one way to interpret this kind of moral dilemma without suggesting a form of dualism).¹² Instead, Nivison thinks the Mencius presents the dilemma as a tension between thinking and feeling—between what thinking judges to be right and what feeling moves a person to do. Nivison says, “I can judge I ought to do something without ipso facto being moved to do it. . .” (Nivison 1996, 111, emphasis added). In another essay, he writes, “Mencius would hold, I think, that my judgment that I ought to do something is not, in itself, a feeling moved toward doing it. . .” (Nivison 1996, 148, emphasis added). If Nivison is right, however, that the Mencius views a dilemma like King Xuan’s as a clash not between speech and action but between judgment and feeling, then the Mencius would be displaying something like a reason and emotion dualism. Such a distinction seems to count as a dualism because disconnecting judgment and feeling presumes that reason is quite separate from emotion and has an entirely different status. Reason’s judgment is inherently right; the emotional impulse fails to live up to the necessarily valid judgment of reason.

¹⁰ Nivison sees this pattern in the positions of Confucius, Mozi, and Mencius as well (Nivison 1996, 84).

¹¹ Xuan, whom Mencius visited at some point during his reign, was a ruler of the state of Qi in the fourth century B.C.E.

¹² Because speaking is both a physical and mental act, the contrast between saying and doing does not lend itself easily to a mind/body split. It also does not imply an appearance/reality dichotomy, unless speech is devalued. The point is highly debatable, but I think speech and action had equivalent status in early Chinese thought.

2.3 Reality/appearance dualism

Drawing a contrast between an action and the motive (or feeling) “behind” it also seems to constitute a form of reality/appearance dualism in some of the texts under review. What is at stake in action/motive contrasts is the possibility of an action that is unaccompanied by appropriate feelings. Interpreted dualistically, the problem looks like this: motives and feelings seem genuine and represent the real person, while actions may be mere empty appearance. An approach that adheres to the claim that relationships in the early Chinese cosmos are “polar” rather than “dualistic” would choose a contrast to the “appearance” pole that is not inherently superior to appearance (that is, something other than “reality”).¹³ Thus, the contrast to *se^j* (face/appearance) might be something like behavior or feelings, which might be superior in a given circumstance, but are not inherently so because *se^j* can be more important than behavior (as in *Analects* 2.9, where maintaining proper appearance is more of a challenge than simply performing proper actions). The action/motive contrast arises in the studies under review when the authors tackle the problem of imitation. Imitation is an inevitable part of the process of ritual education; hence, Confucians need to address whether imitation of ritual behavior is a valuable stage in learning ritual or something that undermines its sincerity.

Peerenboom’s discussion of the problem of mimicking ethical behavior focuses on mimicry’s failure to respond to the total situation. Mimicry is inadequate, not because it lacks the proper feelings (although it may) but, rather, because it ignores the changing circumstances of each new situation. According to Peerenboom, Confucius held that ritual must continually adapt to a fluctuating environment; hence, no single interpretation of ritual would ever be consistently correct. The rites are situational. They have no set form. Thus, Peerenboom asserts that Confucius emphasized the authoritative person, who mastered interpreting ritual, rather than identifying one authoritative predetermined form of the ritual. From Peerenboom’s point of view, the problem with trying to imitate a ritual is that, in doing so, one treats as static something that Confucius himself considered to be inherently in flux.

In his essay on creative self-transformation, Tu discusses the problem of mimicking ethical behavior and focuses on the direction of the act. Although Tu does not deny that imitation is susceptible to the absence of proper feeling, he criticizes imitation on different grounds. Tu notes that

¹³ The claim, here, is not that the early Chinese cannot distinguish misleading appearances, but simply that they do not do so using terms that approximate anything so absolute as “reality,” in contrast to which “appearance” can only be in a relation of inherent inferiority and dependence.

children may initially view Confucian rituals as a game and suggests that “mere imitation” without the “spirit” of the ritual act will not suffice. In spite of the reference to “spirit,” however, Tu does not evaluate rituals in terms of the presence or absence of something “real” (that is, the appropriate spirit). Tu emphasizes the motivational direction of the act. “Confucius compelled his students to draw the conclusion that learning could not ultimately be a matter of imitation. Acts of virtue might be imitated, but the spirit that made such acts truly virtuous required a personal commitment beyond imitation. It had to be directed not only without but within” (Tu 1993, 42). According to Tu, mimicry is other-directed, whereas ethical action needs to be self-directed, as well as other-directed. “Spirit,” here, refers to the direction of motivation, indexed to a changing self and a changing situation. Tu writes, “But it is not enough to do the right thing at the right moment so that we can earn the approval of our elders . . . the more demanding task is to strengthen the centre in such a way that it can respond creatively to continuous change and generate virtuous transformation itself” (Tu 1993, 37). Tu stresses that the Confucian self is “at the center of a nexus of relationships, not an isolated monad” (Tu 1993, 38). Thus, the relation of self and other is “polar,” rather than “dualistic.” In contrast to the somewhat commendable act that is only motivated by desire for others’ approval, Tu praises the act that is fully directed (from a transforming self to an ever changing environment).

By contrast, Nivison implies that for early Confucians the motivation for an action was more significant than the action itself. Nivison makes a telling remark about how the position of the Mozi differs from that of its Confucian opponents. He says that, for the Mozi, “[w]hat people are is not important. All that matters is what they do” (Nivison 1996, 93). He thus suggests that the Confucian view, which he thinks the Mozi rejects, is that feelings indicate genuine identity, while actions are secondary and incidental. Nivison repeatedly describes Confucius as having been concerned that “genuine” or “real” grief be present during the “forms” of mourning (Nivison 1996, 81, 93, 105). The way this terminology contrasts something real with mere forms implies the presence of a reality/appearance dualism in early Chinese texts.

Nivison points to Mencius 1A7 for evidence of Mencius’s concern with fostering genuinely virtuous motivation. According to Nivison, in 1A7 Mencius was not just trying to get King Xuan to act; he was trying to get him to act with the right motivation. He proposes that Mencius might have been saying something like this: “What I’m trying to get the king to do is not just to issue some orders that will result in lightening the hardships of his people, but to do it with a particular motivation, namely, a lively and animated concern for their suffering” (Nivison 1996, 99). Perhaps because Mencius never explicitly challenged Xuan’s motive in 1A7,

Nivison cites a different passage for evidence that Mencius distinguished between doing something with genuine motivation and doing something because one feels one ought to. Nivison says that the Mencius makes an “invidious distinction” between these two forms of motivation. In 4B19, according to Nivison’s translation, the Mencius says that Shun “acted through benevolence and rightness. It was not that he put into action benevolence and rightness” [you ren yi xing, fei xing ren yi ye^k] (Nivison 1996, 99). This passage is not always translated in a way that produces such a contrast between genuine desire to do something and thinking that one ought to do something. For instance, D. C. Lau’s translation emphasizes “following” something, and contrasts “following” with “just practicing” it: “He followed the path of morality. He did not just put morality into practice” (Lau 1970, 131). James Legge’s translation also suggests something like moving in step on a path: “He walked along the path of benevolence and righteousness; he did not need to pursue benevolence and righteousness” (Legge 1895/1970, 325). As these alternative translations indicate, Nivison goes to some lengths to draw the contrast in the Mencius between (real) motive and (inauthentic) action.

Ivanhoe employs a similar contrast, although he avoids language like “genuine” and “real.” In response to those who think Confucianism consists of nothing but mechanistic prohibitions (Ivanhoe 1993, 16), Ivanhoe maintains “the rites were not intended merely to elicit particular kinds of behavior, the goal was to instill certain attitudes and dispositions in the practitioner” (Ivanhoe 1993, 15). This juxtaposition of behavior and attitudes resembles Nivison’s action/motive contrast. Moreover, in a locution similar to Nivison’s translation of Mencius 4B19, Ivanhoe says that Confucius “didn’t just want children to know about filial piety, nor even simply to act filially; he wanted them to act out of filial love for their parents” (Ivanhoe 1993, 12). Ivanhoe attributes to Confucius the view that “[w]ithout [the] emotional component, according with ritual becomes hollow performance” (Ivanhoe 1990, 6).¹⁴ Along the same lines, Ivanhoe presents Confucius’s values through a contrast between mere imitation and character development: “[Confucius] was not seeking simple rote learning nor was he promoting inflexible styles

¹⁴ Ivanhoe cites *Analects* 2/7 as evidence that Confucius is concerned about emotions in actions: “Tzu-ya asked about filial piety. The master said, ‘Nowadays, one who provides for (his parents) is called filial. But even dogs and horses are provided for. If there is no reverence—what’s the difference?’” (quoted in Ivanhoe 1990, 6). Ivanhoe does not cite *Analects* 2/8, which, when read in tandem with 2/7, might imply that the relevant factor is more a matter of a reverent appearance than an emotion. “Zixia asked about filial piety. The master replied, ‘It all lies in showing the proper countenance. As for the young contributing when there is work, and deferring to their elders when there is wine and food, how can doing this ever be considered filial?’”

of behavior. He wanted people to use this knowledge and these practices to develop certain traits of character" (Ivanhoe 1993, 11). Thus, like Nivison, Ivanhoe interprets early Confucianism in terms of a contrast between something approximating motivation and action. While he does not describe the proper attitudes, dispositions, and character traits as "real," his presentation seems closer to that kind of dualistic perspective than the studies that stress the direction of an action's trajectory or its appropriateness to a situation.

3. Conclusions

Confucian ethics derives from (or at least corresponds to) a Confucian cosmology that may well account for the uniqueness of the ethical vision. To greater or lesser degrees, these studies in Confucian ethics express the view that the uniqueness of Confucian cosmology lies in its conception of the "ultimate" as part of the consistent pattern of natural and social change rather than as transcendent, and in its conception of the relation of the "ultimate" to the rest of the cosmos as one of complementarity rather than inherent superiority. This has implications for the study of ethics because, typically, the denial of transcendence shifts the onus of providing ethical foundations from a source outside of humanity to humanity itself (perhaps in conjunction with the natural cosmos). Nonetheless, Tu and Rosemont explicitly retain the term "transcendence"—to different effects. Tu's use of the term places Confucianism in dialogue with other religious traditions, while Rosemont's suggests a more humanistic perspective. Neither uses the term in a way that necessarily implies a foundation for ethics outside the self-generating organismic cosmos, although Tu's use occasionally suggests such a view.

In keeping with the notion of an organismic cosmos, some of these studies avoid any suggestion that the early Confucian tradition exhibited such dualisms as mind/body and reality/appearance. Peerenboom, Rosemont, Tu, Nivison, and Ivanhoe all deny the presence of any form of dualism in the early Confucian thought. However, Nivison and Ivanhoe seem more willing to speak of the early Chinese tradition in ways that are suggestive of dualism. Nivison attributes positions that evoke a mind/body dualism to non-Confucian early Chinese thinkers, while Ivanhoe implies that a form of mind/body dualism appears in the Xunzi. Moreover, in discussing the ethical problems involved in motivation, Nivison casts the difference between motive and action in the Mencius in terms reminiscent of a reality/appearance dualism. In a subtle way, Ivanhoe does something similar—suggesting that, for Confucius, attitudes, dispositions, or character traits are fundamentally more genuine than actions. This, too, has ethical implications because dualistic thinking changes the character of the ethical problem. Forms of mind/body

dualism introduce familiar images of the mind striving to conquer its morally hopeless host. Forms of reality/appearance dualism present the problem of imitation in terms of fostering genuinely virtuous motives for action, whereas those who are free of such dualism present the problem of imitation in terms of the failure of actions to respond fully to all elements of a situation. Although Nivison and Ivanhoe by no means dismiss the importance of complete responsiveness, their interpretations of the ethical problems involved in imitation employ hints of a reality/appearance dualism.

If the resurgence of interest in Confucian ethics continues, the possibility that its roots lie in a uniquely Chinese cosmology merits more attention. Moreover, if indeed that cosmology is appropriately described as nontranscendent and nondualistic, it is important to determine the extent to which the Confucian ethical tradition, which finds its root in that cosmology, must be interpreted as exhibiting nontranscendent and nondualistic features. Scholars of the Confucian ethical tradition may also want to consider that, unless there is evidence to the contrary, contemporaneous texts that seem to disagree with one another probably share a great many underlying assumptions. Hence, scholars of Confucian ethics may want to consider to what extent the cosmology that grounds the Confucian ethical vision was not unique to Confucians. That is, to what extent must we, as interpreters of the thought of this historical period, assume that the Confucian cosmology overlapped with the cosmology implicit in other schools of thought in the same period?

APPENDIX

^a *de* 德

^b *tian ming* 天命

^c *tian* 天

^d *yin yang* 陰陽

^e *xin* 心

^f *da ti* 大體

^g *si* 思

^h *qi* 氣

ⁱ *yan* 言

^j *se* 色

^k *you ren yi xing fei xing ren yi ye* 由仁義行非行仁義也

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