

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

The SACP Forum

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

ISSN: 1559-8489

Volume 24, Number 48, Fall 2007, Pages 1-108

2007 Editorial Staff

General Editor: Bradley Park

Special Guest Editor: Franklin Perkins

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

SACP Website www.sacpweb.org

Table of Contents

I. Special Topic: Desire

1. Fred Dallmayr (University of Notre Dame), "Desire and the Desirable: On Nicholas of Cusa"
2. Richard O'Reilly (Bonaventure University), "Is Desireless Desirable?"
3. Mary Jeanne Larrabee (DePaul University), "The Desire Before Desiring: Deleuze, Husserl, Chinul"
4. Thomas Sherman, S.J. (Loyola Marymount University), "Nature and the Paradox of Desire in Laozi's Sage in Comparison with Aristotle's Virtuous Man"
5. **Winner of the SACP Graduate Student Paper Award** - Daniel J. Stephens (University of Hong Kong), "Cultivating Proper Desires"
6. Robert C. Solomon, (University of Texas at Austin), "Whims of Desire"

II. Reviews

7. Meilin Chinn (University of Hawai'i), *Metaphilosophy and Chinese Thought: Interpreting David Hall*, ed. Ewing Chinn and Henry Rosemont, Jr.
8. Marthe Chandler (DePauw University), *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* by On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang

III. News, Announcements, and Calls for Papers

9. Henry Rosemont Jr., *Explorations in Early Chinese Cosmology*
10. May Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius*
11. SACP Monograph Series

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

I. SPECIAL TOPIC: DESIRE

Fred Dallmayr

University of Notre Dame

DESIRE AND THE DESIRABLE: ON NICOLAUS OF CUSA

The general theme of the Society's meeting this year (2006) is "Desire." This is an inspiring and attractive theme because it touches on deep motives and well-springs of human life. The theme is also readily accessible—for who does not know desire, who has not experienced, and even been held in the grip of, desire? Hence, desire is a topic not just for professional philosophers; it is a topic for everyone. In a way, it roams in the street.

Yet, there is something deceptive about desire. Maybe just because it is such an ordinary and well-known experience, we seem to be missing something. For, if we just stay with the obvious—the fact of desire, or that we desire what we desire—we quickly get stranded. If we are satisfied with just saying "we desire" or "we desire what we desire," this seems to be the end of the story. And today, in ordinary or common-sense discourse, this is indeed the end. In our age of consumerism and (what has been called) "emotivism," human beings are defined as desiring creatures, as beings who crave or desire to satisfy their desires—in fact, as beings who desire to have more and more goods and obtain emotional satisfaction from having these goods.

But can this really be the end of the story? Surely, humans are not only desiring, but also thinking and judging beings. As philosophers we remember an older tradition which distinguishes between what we desire and what is truly "desirable." In some traditions—for instance, a certain kind of Platonism and Kantianism—desire and the desirable are sharply differentiated and even segregated, to the point that a gulf is erected between the seemingly good (found in the Platonic "cave") and the really good and truly desirable (outside the cave). Yet, in this case a problem arises. For, if the focus is placed entirely on the "really good" and "truly desirable," the dimension of ordinary desire is likely to be sidelined or dismissed as spurious and misleading. But how can something be really "desirable," if it is not also somehow desired?

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

To be sure, desire or the “desired” and the “desirable” are not simply the same—otherwise we slide back into consumerism and emotivism. Yet, notwithstanding their difference, there must also be some kind of linkage or passage-way between them. We know of such a linkage in the work of Aristotle who distinguished but also connected desire and virtue (*orexis* and *arête*). Among more recent philosophers, John Dewey provides some helpful guideposts. In an essay on the “Moral Struggle,” Dewey writes—in a nearly Kantian vein—that “the heart of the moral struggle” is the opposition between desire and duty. We may distinguish, he notes, between actual desire as satisfaction and a desire “based on the idea that the end is desirable—that it ought to be desired.” However, going beyond Kant, the same essay insists that the desirable must also “appeal” to the human heart and mind, such that duty may “awaken” human desire and guide it toward the desirable.¹

In the following, I want to turn to another thinker who, while distinguishing desire and the desirable, also forged a passage-way between them. The thinker is Nicolaus of Cusa, also called Cusanus (1401-1464), and the passage in his case is ultimately the way of love—that is, the way of loving and being loved and the linkage between them. In his study devoted to his work, Ernst Cassirer maintained that Cusanus can rightly be considered “the first modern thinker.”² As I shall try to show, however, Cusanus was also a “more than modern” thinker, someone able to speak to us today (in, what some call, our “postmodern” time). Basically, as it seems to me, at the heart of Cusanus’s life-work is an existential transformation or pedagogy: a practical as well as philosophical journey animated by love (traditionally expressed as “*amor Dei intellectualis*”). In many ways, his entire life can be seen as a restless journey propelled by a sincere desire for learning and an intense love for the “desirable,” goodness and truth. For present purposes, I want to follow him on part of his journey, focusing on three major aspects: his emphasis on experiential learning; his key notion of “learned ignorance”; and his concern with inter-religious harmony and peace.

¹. John Dewey, “The Moral Struggle or the Realizing of Ideals” in his *Outlines of a Critical Theory of Ethics*, in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University, 1969), vol. 3, pp. 372-373.

². Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandi (New York: Harper and Row Publ., 1964), pp. 10, 13.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

A Layman's Pedagogy

In many of his writings, Cusanus privileges the outlook of the ordinary layman, the man of the street or the market place (“*idiotia*”). No fewer than three of his important texts carry the term “layman” in their titles: *The Layman on Wisdom*, *The Layman on the Mind/Spirit*, *The Layman on Experiments* (*Idiota de Sapientia*, *Idiota de Mente*, *Idiota de Staticis Experimentis*). This emphasis is philosophically significant at all times—and especially in our modern and contemporary era. In large measure, modern Western philosophy has been “professionalized” or transformed into an academic discipline; what is called “analytical philosophy”, above all, is almost entirely a discourse confined to academic logicians and epistemologists. Concerns voiced by ordinary people on the street, by contrast, tend to be sidelined as ignorant chatter unworthy of serious attention.

The privilege accorded to the layman is beautifully articulated in the dialogue titled *The Layman on Wisdom* (*Idiota de Sapientia*). Cusanus first sets the stage saying: “A poor untutored layman (*pauper quidam idiotia*) met in the Roman Forum a very wealthy orator whom he smilingly though courteously addressed in the following manner” (a manner clearly reminiscent of Socrates in the market place): “I am quite amazed at your pride, for even though you have worn yourself out with continual study of innumerable books, yet you have not been moved to humility. The reason is that the ‘knowledge of this world’, in which you believe to excel, is actually foolishness in the sight of God; it puffs men up, whereas true knowledge humbles them. I wish you would realize this because it is the treasure of all happiness.” In elaborating on an alternative path to wisdom, the layman does not dismiss book learning per se, but only to the extent that books are treated as final authority in lieu of actual experience. As he adds, reprimanding the orator (and academic philosophy in general): By relying on books, “you trust in [external] authority and in this way you are deceived; because someone has written a text, you are ready to believe. But”—and here comes the layman’s (and Nicolaus of Cusa’s own) *cri de coeur*—“I want to tell you that wisdom cries out in the streets, and her very cry indicates how she dwells ‘in the highest’” (*habitat in altissimis*).³

The last comment already reveals the uncanny quality of the layman’s “street-wise” wisdom, its peculiar mundane-transmundane character (if one wishes: its ontic-ontological status). The further

³. See John Patrick Dolan, ed., *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas de Cusa* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), pp. 101-102 (translation slightly altered).

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

course of the dialogue draws layman and orator steadily into the depth of this street-wisdom—a depth announced a few pages after the opening exchange with these words: “The highest wisdom consists in knowing how, in similes, the unattainable may be reached or attained unattainably” (*attingitur inattingibile inattingibiliter*). Here we are suddenly no longer simply on the street, but on a road filled with ordinary-extraordinary surprises. It is Cusanus’s very own road—although one charted by many earlier travelers. In her bilingual (Latin-German) edition of *The Layman on Wisdom*, Renate Steiger draws attention to a host of intellectual and religious precursors. As she points out, ever since the time of St. Augustine, the term “laypeople” (*homines idiotae*) was applied to individuals speaking and writing in a simple, vernacular idiom. The term was taken over by some of the large mendicant orders of the Middle Ages; thus, Francis of Assisi described himself and his followers as “laypeople” (*idiotae*). The orientation reached its pinnacle in the non-monastic lay movements of the late Middle Ages connected with the “*devotio moderna*,” and especially in the Brothers of the Common Life at Deventer (where both Cusanus and later Erasmus received formative instruction). The movements, in turn, were inspired by some of the great mystical thinkers of the past, stretching from Dionysius the Aeropagite, Johannes Gerson and Meister Eckhart to Bernhard of Clairvaux and the *Imitatio Christi*.⁴

Returning to Cusanus’s text *The Layman on Wisdom*, the linkage of the sensible and supersensible, the mundane and transmundane is forcefully underscored in the layman’s claim that wisdom cries in the street, but simultaneously dwells “in the highest” (*in altissimis*). The same nexus is subsequently reaffirmed and endorsed by both interlocutors in the dialogue. As the layman observes, the “highest” is actually nothing else but “infinity”—but an infinity which is not divorced from, but somehow intimated or anticipated in all finite phenomena and experiences. The text at this point unleashes a veritable torrent of seeming paradoxes which all center around this uncanny intimation: the supersensibility of the sensible, the infinity of the finite, the desirable intimated in desire. Rooted in this intimation, we read, genuine wisdom is “unimaginable in all imagination, insensible in all sensation, untastable in all taste, inaudible in all hearing, invisible in all sight, unaffirmable in all affirmation, undeniable in all negation, indubitable in all doubt.” What is involved here is not a simple

⁴ Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia—Der Laie über die Weisheit*, ed. Renate Steiger (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), pp. xii-xiv, xvi. Steiger also draws parallels between Cusanus’s text and Heinrich Seuse’s “*Horologium sapientiae*” as well as Johannes Tauler’s life history styled as a “dialogue between a doctor and a layman” (pp. xx-xxi). In addition, she finds inspiration for Cusanus’s text in St. Bonaventure’s “*Itinerarium mentis in Deum*” (p. xxiii).

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

contradiction nor an esoteric paradox but the circumstance that all phenomena and experiences presuppose, as their condition of possibility, a kind of groundless ground serving as their inexhaustible horizon. Since this ground is inexpressible in all formulations or propositions, “there can never be an end to attempts at expressing it, because in all thought *that* remains unthought whereby and by virtue of which everything is.”⁵

What needs to be noted is that, in Cusanus’s presentation, the sensible is never simply expendable in favor of the supersensible, the finite in favor of the infinite, desire in favor of the desirable—something which would transform his thought into abstract, quasi-Platonic speculation. Rather, sensation remains the preamble or gateway to learned ignorance or “unknowing knowledge”—just as, in hermeneutics, pre-understanding always is the condition of understanding and pre-judgment a condition of judgment. “Wisdom,” the layman asserts boldly, “is a matter of tasting (*sapientia est quae sapit*), and nothing tastes better to the human intellect than wisdom.” In fact, “one should never consider anybody wise whose words are based only on hear-say rather than actual tasting.” Rather than being a purely deductive exercise, wisdom is predicated on this kind of “internal relish and taste”—which does not mean that it is reducible to taste experience.

Cusanus, through the words of the layman, at this point develops the important notion of “fore-taste” or pre-gustation (akin to hermeneutical pre-understanding). Because it dwells in the highest, he notes, wisdom “is not [fully] tastable in any relish or taste. Therefore, it is tasted untastably”—which does not remove it from all tasting. “To taste in an untastable manner”, he adds, “is, as it were, to savor something from afar as, for example, we could say by the aroma of something that we get a fore-taste (*Vorgeschnack, praegustatio*) of it.” To be sure, this fore-taste or desire does not amount to a full grasp of the desirable but only to an intimation or cue—and yet it is an indispensable cue in the pursuit of ignorant wisdom, because without this cue we would not know what to look for and where: If the sweetness of wisdom could not be “tasted with an inner relish, it would not be able to attract us so powerfully.” Thus, the desirable draws the desire toward it. As finite creatures human beings need to follow the cue provided by taste or desire. In the words of Cusanus: Just as the aroma of something sweet-smelling or the odor of a precious ointment draws us to come nearer, so “the eternal and infinite

⁵. Dolan, ed., *Unity and Reform*, p. 106 (translation slightly altered).

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

wisdom resplendent in all things invites us, through a certain fore-taste of its effects, to hurry toward it with a wonderful desire (*mirabili desiderio*).”⁶

Following the desire for wisdom, the human intellect steadily draws closer to, and eventually finds what it is looking for—and actually much more, because divine wisdom is not just an increase in cognitive knowledge but a leap into something vaster and inexhaustible: namely, unknowing knowledge or “wise ignorance” which is a synonym for infinite life. Human intellect or spirit, the layman observes, “moves toward wisdom as toward its own proper life. And it is sweet-tasting to the spirit continuously to ascend to the font of life, even though the latter is inaccessible (in its infinity). For, to live steadily in a more happy way means: to ascend to life (*ad vitam ascendere*).” Cusanus through the layman at this point draws an explicit parallel between the desire for wisdom and the lover’s love for the beloved object or person—a love which is inexhaustible and continuously beckons the lover on: “If someone loves something because it is lovable, he is delighted to find that the beloved object or person contains infinite and inexpressible motives of love [hence is infinitely desirable]. And this is the lover’s most joyful experience when he comprehends the incomprehensible loveliness of the beloved.”

As Cusanus adds, navigating briskly along the chiasm or interface of the sensible and supersensible: “The lover would never delight so much in his/her love if the beloved were something simply comprehensible or manageable—as compared with the situation where the lovability of the beloved is utterly immeasurable, indeterminable, and incomprehensible.” For “this is the most joyful comprehension of incomprehensibility.” What the text here adumbrates or glosses is the notion of a gustation or nourishment which sustains not only finite or mortal but immortal life, a notion familiar from many biblical passages as well as from Christian liturgy: “Wisdom is the infinite and inexhaustible food of life from which our spirit lives eternally, because it is unable to love anything other than wisdom and truth.”⁷

⁶. *Unity and Reform*, pp. 106-107.

⁷. *Unity and Reform*, pp. 107-108 (translation slightly altered). In a nearly Heideggerian vein, Cusanus continues (p. 108): “Every spirit seeks after ‘being’ (*omnis intellectus appetit esse*), and being means to live, and living means to understand, and understanding means being nurtured on wisdom and truth.” In the Introduction to *The Layman on Wisdom*, Renate Steiger points to biblical passages speaking of the “manna” (*Exodus* 16:4) or “milk and honey” (*Exodus* 3:8) and also to Psalm 34:8: “*Gustate et videte, quoniam suavis est Dominus.*” See her edition of Niolai de Cusa, *Idiota de Sapientia*, p. xxxi.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

What needs to be remembered here again is that the movement toward wisdom and immortal life is not merely an abstract intellectual exercise—a cognition of the desirable as an abstract essence or idea—but a complete existential engagement involving body, soul, and mind. To this extent, the movement has also a practical-ethical significance, disclosing a profound layman’s pedagogy. The gist of this pedagogy is that the divine or immortal life cannot be possessed, appropriated, or controlled; instead, loving the divine involves a self-surrender or self-abandonment of the lover in favor of the beloved. In the layman’s words: “Hence it is necessary to surrender and let go of one’s belongings. For eternal wisdom does not allow itself to be obtained unless the human being relinquishes his possessions for the sake of wisdom alone.” Together with a long line of ethical teachings (stretching back to the ancients), Cusanus speaking as the layman perceives self-surrender or abnegation of selfishness as the key to ethical life. While selfishness or self-centeredness is the source of vice and moral corruption, turning lovingly or caringly to what lies beyond oneself is the seedbed of virtue and righteous conduct. “That which we have from our own” (or from our selfishly desiring selves), layman-Cusanus affirms, “are our vices, whereas the fruits of eternal wisdom are none but good things” (*non nisi bona*). Accordingly, the spirit of wisdom does not inhabit a selfish person who is a “slave to sin” nor a soul inclined toward evil; rather, it dwells in a “purified field” (purged of selfishness) and in its own cleansed image as in its “sacred temple” (*in templo sancto suo*). The layman’s pedagogy at this point joins classical as well as biblical instructions in extolling an ethics of transformation geared toward a steadily improved practice of virtues: “The field that wisdom tills is a plantation of virtues. From this field spring forth the fruits of the spirit: which are justice, peace, courage, temperance, patience, and the like.”⁸

Belief, Knowledge, and Wise Ignorance

In the manner of the street-wise Socrates, the layman’s arguments start from concrete sense experience and never leave that experience completely behind. In its multifaceted richness, sense experience antedates and pre-shapes rational analysis; and even under the aegis of rational analysis, it remains potent as an anticipation or fore-taste of a more than rational, that is, an unknowing or ignorant wisdom. In summarizing his discussion of Cusanus’s philosophical approach, Cassirer

⁸. Dolan, ed., *Unity and Reform*, p. 112.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

comments: “The mind can come to know itself and to measure its own powers only by devoting itself completely and unconditionally to the world.” Thus, the movement of understanding—although proceeding to rational insight—always departs from pre-understanding and hence passes “through the world of the senses.” Cassirer quotes at this point a passage from Cusanus’s text *The Layman on Mind/Spirit (Idiota de Mente)* which reads in his translation: “The human mind/spirit is a divine seed that comprehends in its simple essence the totality of everything knowable; but in order for the seed to blossom and bear fruit, it must be planted in the proper soil, which is the soil of the sensible world.” Elaborating on this passage and deriving from it a broad lesson, Cassirer states that the basic character of the “copulative theology” sought by Cusanus lies in the “reconciliation of mind and nature, of intellect and sense.”⁹

It is commonly agreed that Cusanus’s quest for knowledge or wisdom proceeds through three stages which are variously labeled “sense experience, reason (*Verstand*), intellect (*Geist, Vernunft*)” or else “sense, intelligence, and learned ignorance.” Cusanus himself alerts to this tripartition in several of his writings; thus, his *De Beryllo* states explicitly: “There are three modes of knowing: sense experience, reason, and higher intellect (*intelligentsia*).”¹⁰ In his study devoted to Cusanus, Karl Jaspers makes this tripartite sequence a cornerstone of his discussion. The stages in his (somewhat simplified) treatment are: “*Sinn, Verstand, Vernunft (sensus, ratio, intellectus)*.” Sense experience, he writes, aims with all sensory organs at “real” phenomena; reason, in turn, supplies “categories (forms, types)” for the comprehension of phenomena, while intellect draws “through the shipwreck of reason” closer to the divine. By itself, sense experience is amorphous and ambivalent; by contrast, reason introduces clarity by relying on “distinctions, oppositions, and the exclusion of contradictions.” Higher intellect, finally, opens the path—through the “coincidence of opposites”—to the realm of “learned ignorance.” An important aspect of Cusanus’s teaching—Jaspers adds—is that each of the stages of knowing has its own integrity and significance in the ascent toward truth. By the same token, none of the stages is by itself complete or exhaustive; rather, truth can only be found in the interrelation and interpenetration of stages—a relation which is not so much a linear sequence as rather

⁹. Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, pp. 44-44. For the reference see Nicolai de Cusa, *Idiota de Mente—Der Laie über den Geist*, ed. Renate Steiger (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1995), pp. 34-35. (Cassirer’s translation of the Latin text is quite free.)

¹⁰. See Nicolai de Cusa, *De Beryllo—Über den Beryll*, ed. and trans. Karl Bormann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987), p. 7.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

a circular movement (akin to the hermeneutical circle). This point is underscored in a passage from *De Coniecturis* (*On Conjectures*) which states that reason and intellect need to be nourished by sense experience which generates “wonder”: “Thus intellect in a circular motion returns to itself.”¹¹

In its ascent toward truth, human understanding moves through the stage of reason or rationality which Cusanus associates mainly with calculation and measurement and which he regards as a step (but *only* as a step) toward knowledge in the mode of learned ignorance. The movement or ascent is discussed in several of his writings, but with particular eloquence in *De Docta Ignorantia* which explores the relation between knowing and not-knowing (or un-knowledge). “Every inquiry,” the opening chapter states, “relies on comparison and utilizes the method of comparative relation or proportion.” Employing the rules of reason and logic, inquiry seeks to establish comparative values and relationships, whether in simple or in difficult matters. Now, since comparative method reveals “identity in some respect and difference (or alterity) in another respect,” such inquiry cannot proceed without number or quantification.

Although important in its own domain, comparative rationality cannot yield full knowledge of truth and, when claiming to be final, may actually obstruct further inquiry. The reason is that, beyond all comparative measurement, there is an un-measurable dimension which escapes the categories of more or less. This dimension cannot be plumbed by calculating reason as such; yet, despite this barrier—which is the barrier between finitude and infinity—it constantly calls upon human understanding to transgress itself in the direction of ultimate truth. In the words of Cusanus: Since the desire for understanding cannot be baseless or in vain, “we assuredly desire to know what we do not know (or to know our un-knowledge). If we pursue and achieve to fulfill this desire, we will attain to learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*).” This kind of learned ignorance or knowing un-knowledge is the highest mode of truth which is attainable for human beings. “It is evident,” the text adds, “that, regarding ultimate truth, we cannot know anything but this: that we know it as incomprehensible in its fullness.”¹²

¹¹ Karl Jaspers, *Nikolaus Cusanus* (Munich: Piper, 1964), pp. 48-49. The reference is to Nicolai de Cusa, *De coniecturis—Mutmassungen*, ed. and trans. Josef Koch and Winfried Happ (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002), p. 189 (Part 2, Chapter 16).

¹² See Nicolai de Cusa, *De docta ignorantia—Die belehrte Unwissenheit*, trans. Paul Wilpert, ed. Hans Gerhard Senger (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994), vol. 1, pp. 8-15 (Book 1, Chapters 1). For an English translation (which I have slightly

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

As can be seen, truth for Cusanus is not simply an abyss of un-knowledge—a pure negativity which could be dismissed or discarded by understanding—but rather an intelligent or knowing abyss which ceaselessly prods or “calls upon” human understanding to explore its depths.¹³ His writings are replete with, and famous for their explorations of these depths. One of his last texts, titled *De Venatione Sapientiae* (*On Hunting for Wisdom*), mentions among others three main fields or hunting grounds where wisdom might profitably be pursued: the fields of learned ignorance, of actualized possibility, and of “non-otherness”—among which I shall comment briefly only on the first. Cusanus here basically reiterates insights familiar from earlier works, especially the point that ultimate truth is neither completely unknowable—that is, inaccessible even to intimation or “fore-taste”—nor completely accessible to human reason. As he states, using theological vocabulary: “In their very being all things testify to God’s being, or differently put: everything derives its being from the divine ground.” This ground, however, is also an un-ground—echoes of Meister Eckhart—exceeding human cognitive competence. Hence, just as God’s being cannot be fully plumbed in its depth, so also “the essence of all things in their depths remains shielded from our cognition,” leaving us in a state of inquiring ignorance. It was for this reason that Aristotle described the essence of things as something “always looked or searched for” (*semper quaesitam*) or as an unending horizon.¹⁴

Toward Concord Among Beliefs

Nicolaus of Cusa’s writings are a treasure trove of startling insights—a trove too vast to be fully canvassed in these pages. One thing, however, which emerges clearly in all his writings, including those cited above, is the animating spirit pervading them: a spirit of goodwill, friendliness,

altered) see Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1981), pp. 50-53.

¹³. Compare on this point also the passage in Nicolai de Cusa, *Tu quis es (De principio)—Über den Ursprung*, trans. and ed. Karl Bormann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), pp. 26-27, 30-31: “We do not call God the ‘one’ as something fully known, but because prior to any knowledge our yearning/desire is directed toward the one. . . . And although (ultimate being) cannot be cognitively grasped, we are yet not in complete ignorance, because we ‘know’ what we desire (*scit ipsum esse quod desiderat*).” Regarding the notion of truth or ultimate being “calling upon” human understanding compare Martin Heidegger, *Was heisst Denken?* (3rd ed.; Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971); trans. as *What is Called Thinking?* by J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

¹⁴. Nicolai de Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae—Die Jagd nach Weisheit*, ed. Paul Wilpert and Karl Bormann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2003), pp. 44-51 (Chapter 12). As Cusanus adds, most past philosophers, with the possible exception of Plato (as interpreted by Proclus), have missed or fallen short of this standard. Thus, those “philosophical hunters” who tried to “hunt down the essence of things” and to transform the telos of all inquiry into “an object of knowledge,” have “labored in vain, remaining outside the field of learned ignorance.”

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

and reconciliation. The same non-opposition—or “coincidence of opposites”—which he discovered in his favorite “hunting grounds,” was also a guiding theme in both his intellectual and practical endeavors: I mean the balanced reconciliation (without identity or separation) between belief and knowledge, reason and affectivity, and learning and ignorance. Particularly important for contemporary thought is the accent on knowing unknowledge or learned ignorance—a perspective capable of making headway in some current philosophical conundrums, especially those relating to “foundationalism” and “non-foundationalism.” By placing ultimate reality beyond rational knowledge, Cusanus takes a stand against a dogmatic foundationalism claiming to have an authoritative grasp of truth. At the same time, however, by not abandoning the yearning for and “fore-taste” of ultimate truth, his work provides a bulwark against an equally dogmatic relativism (often coupled with skeptical self-indulgence).

There is a further dimension where Cusanus’s work speaks to us today with particular eloquence: the domain of inter-faith harmony and cross-cultural understanding. In our age of globalization when different faiths and cultures are more and more closely pushed together, cultivation of mutual understanding and respect is urgently required to counteract the danger of civilizational (and sometimes religiously inspired) violence. Cultivation of such harmony was one of Cusanus’s central, life-long commitments—a commitment fueled by multiple tensions and antagonisms festering during his own time. The basic motivation undergirding this commitment was his philosophical and theological “relationism” (not relativism): the conviction that truth or true knowledge cannot be seized or monopolized by a dogmatic authority, but is best promoted through the interrelation between distinct perspectives (with each sincerely searching for the truth). In the words of Norbert Winkler’s thoughtful introduction to the cardinal’s work: “The notion of ‘relation’ which scholasticism had reduced to an accidental property, is elevated by Cusanus to the rank of a constitutive category.” The upshot of this change is an unorthodox and innovative conception of the relation between the “one” and the “many,” where the “one” serves only as a common loadstar but not as the domineering master of the “many”: “The starting point here is no longer a compact substance to which the quality of a relation needs to be added as an accident; rather, the very being of an entity resides in its infinite relationality (which can never be exhaustively mapped).” Hence, Winkler notes, the universe

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

envisaged by Cusanus is one “in which all parts are indeed gathered together but in such a way that no part can be the sum or the universe itself.”¹⁵

The first occasion for Cusanus to test the viability of this outlook came in 1431-1432, at the time of the Church Council in Basel. At the opening of the Council, partly in response to corruption scandals in Rome, the so-called “conciliar movement” was at the height of its influence and popularity. Called as a legal adviser to join the Council, Cusanus immediately proceeded to formulate an ambitious new vision of church governance: a vision which would grant considerable power to the bishops while accepting the Pope as presiding officer or *primus inter pares*. This vision was the gist of his first major treatise which instantly gained him broad recognition: *De Concordantia Catholica (On the Concord of the Church)*. Reacting to the divisions tearing Christianity apart, the treatise boldly defended the idea of a universal church council, viewed as the publicly “assembled body of Christ,” in which bishops and Pope together would guide the affairs of the church on the basis of a collegial and amicable consensus. As Cusanus observed in the Preface of his book: “In trying to promote a general concord, I need to take into account the entire assembly of faithful people which we call the Catholic Church as well as the various related parts of that Church.” This task requires that proper attention be given to “the distinctive character and structure (of the Church) and existing relations between its members so that finally we can envisage a loving and harmonious concord among all, which alone can secure the well-being and eternal salvation of that assembly.”¹⁶

In the end, Cusanus’s conciliatory intervention came to nothing. As debates in Basel turned increasingly polemical and divisive, Cusanus left the conciliar fold and joined the papal party—a shift of allegiance which many observers (not without some justice) have deplored as a surrender to pragmatic politics.¹⁷ Irrespective of questions surrounding his conciliar engagement, there can be no

¹⁵. Norbert Winkler, *Nikolaus von Kues zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2001), pp. 104-106. Compare also my “Conversation Across Boundaries: E Pluribus Unum,” in *Dialogue among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2002), pp. 31-47.

¹⁶. Gerd Heinz-Mohr and Willehad Paul Eckert, *Das Werk des Nicolaus Cusanus* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 1963), pp. 44-42. For a complete English translation see Nicholas of Cusa, *The Catholic Concordance*, trans. Paul E. Sigmund (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹⁷. Among others, Jaspers reaches the harsh verdict that, rising to prominence in the turbulent conditions of his time, Cusanus ultimately was “impotent in the implementation of truth and goodness”; thereby, he became an “unwitting accomplice” in the course of events. Jaspers also refuses to consider Cusanus as a precursor of either Reformation or Enlightenment. See his *Nikolaus Cusanus*, pp. 216-221. Pointing to the cardinal’s attitude toward the Hussites, Winkler

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

doubt about the cardinal's continued commitment to religious harmony during the rest of his life. The next major demonstration of his irenic outlook came two decades later, in the immediate aftermath of the Turkish conquest of Constantinople (in 1453). In that same year, Cusanus published a text which is rightly viewed as a crucial stepping stone toward religious ecumenism: his *De Pace Fidei* (*On Inter-Religious Peace*). The book is not a doctrinal tract, but rather takes the form of a wide-ranging conversation among religious and philosophical leaders representing no fewer than seventeen major religions and cultures around the world. The goal of the conversation is not the imposition of a dogmatic unity, but rather the achievement of peace among religions and cultures despite their outward differences. Referring explicitly to the violence surrounding the fall of Constantinople, the Introduction of the book appeals fervently to God, as the Creator of all things, to "rein in the persecution, raging now more than ever because of different religious rites." The antidote to the raging violence could only be found in the true spirit of faith which alone can transcend interreligious animosities.¹⁸

The conversation recorded in the book ranges over many important religious themes—whose complexity exceeds the scope of these pages. The common tenor pervading the discussions is the primacy of sincere faith over rituals, of the need to love and search for the hidden God over the comfort of habitual practices. As the concluding section observes, speaking through the mouth of St. Paul: To seek "exact uniformity" in rites means rather "to disturb the peace"; in fact, "a certain diversity (of rites) may even increase devotion when each nation strives to make its own rites more splendid through zeal and diligence, thereby surpassing others and obtaining greater merit with God as well as praise in the world." As can readily be seen, the perspective adopted in *De Pace Fidei* is not far removed from, and actually quite consonant with Cusanus's arguments about learned ignorance and the divine "hunting grounds" for truth. In each case, the sincere yearning for ultimate horizons is accorded preference over dogmatic claims to possess and monopolize truth. This point is recognized by the translators of the book when they write that the crucial issue for Cusanus, in both philosophy and theology, was the loving and faithful surrender to God's grace seen as a precondition of peace.

reaches a similar conclusion: that Cusanus was "not a reformer before the Reformation"; see *Nikolaus von Kues zur Einführung*, p. 176.

¹⁸ Nicholas of Cusa, *On Interreligious Harmony* (Text, Concordance, and Translation of *De Paci Fidei*), ed. James E. Biechler and H. Lawrence Bond (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), pp. 3-7.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

The concord pursued in *De Paci Fidei*, they state, was “a peace not only *of* faith but worked out *by* faith, a peace available, indeed, only *through* faith,” emanating from the “experience of faith.”¹⁹

A major religion dealt with in the book—and in many ways its catalyst—is Islam. As it happens, Cusanus had been interested in Islamic theology and practices for quite some time. Already at the time of the Council of Basel he had obtained for his own study a twelfth-century translation of the Qur’an together with other texts relating to Muslim doctrine. Following his departure from Basel, he traveled on a papal mission to Constantinople in order to guide the Byzantine Emperor and Orthodox Church leaders back to Italy for inter-faith deliberations; on that occasion he also encountered numerous Muslims.²⁰ In light of this background, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 held for Cusanus not only a geopolitical, but also an intense personal significance. Tellingly he did not join in the clamor for revenge and violent retribution which the event unleashed throughout Europe; nor did he support the ongoing “demonization” of Muslims in general and Turks in particular—an attitude surely unpopular with many of his contemporaries. Pope Nicholas V called on European rulers to launch a large-scale crusade against the Turks and promised indulgences to those supporting the war effort. By contrast, Cusanus counseled restraint and a peaceful settlement of disputes. Together with some of his friends, especially John of Segovia, he even advocated the convening a top-level Muslim-Christian conference where grievances would be aired. Despairing of the prospect of such a conference, he decided to put down on paper his vision for interreligious harmony: his *De Pace Fidei*.

With the completion of this text the issue for Cusanus was not laid to rest. Less than a decade later (in 1460), he began an intensive scholarly exploration of the teachings of Islam; the result was a three-volume study titled *Cibratio Alkorani (Sifting the Qur’an)*. In opposition to polemical texts virulently denouncing Islam as ungodly, Cusanus’s study aimed to offer a more balanced explication

¹⁹. *On Interreligious Harmony*, pp. xxvii, xlv; the reference is to Chapter 19 of the text, pp. 61-62. They continue (p. xlv): “University and particularity, necessity and contingency, interiority and externality are enfolded as one in God’s mind, are unfolded as distinct in the finite world and coincide as one and plural in God’s plan for religious peace.”

²⁰. The interfaith deliberations took place at the Council of Ferrara-Florence (in 1439) and produced a short-lived success. In a later auto-biographical statement, Cusanus recalls: “When he was 37 years old, Pope Eugenius IV sent him to Constantinople, and he conducted the Greek Emperor, the Patriarch and 28 archbishops of the Eastern Church back with him. They then at the Council of Florence accepted the faith of the Roman Church.” Cited in Biechler and Bond, “Introduction” to *On Interreligious Harmony*, p. xi. It was during his return voyage from Constantinople that Cusanus was struck or inspired by the idea of “learned ignorance”—an idea which, in his dedicatory letter attached to *De Docta Ignorantia*, he calls “a heavenly gift from the Father of lights, from whom every excellent gift comes.” See Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance*, p. 158.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

of the Qur'an—although apologetic accents are not missing. As he states in the study's Preface: "It is our aim, by relying on the gospel of Christ, to 'sift' (*cibrare*) the book of Muhammad and to demonstrate that his book in many respects supports and corroborates the gospel (if such corroboration were needed) and that, where there is divergence, this proceeds from ignorance or ill will."²¹ In its entirety, the work is again much too complex to permit detailed review at this point. In the present context it must suffice to draw attention to the guiding spirit animating the entire text: the spirit of "devout interpretation" (*pia interpretatio*), that is, an interpretation which, guided by faith, seeks in the texts of an alien faith glimpses of a shared yearning for the divine. Listing a number of exegetical rules operative in *Cibratio Alkorani*, Jasper Hopkins properly emphasizes the faith-dimension of reading. *Pia interpretatio*, he writes, is not simply a neutral analysis; nor is it the same as "charitable construal, though it involves such construal in the sense of interpreting the Qur'an's teachings in such a way that through them God is glorified." Centrally, in Cusanus's sense, devoutness of reading means "an interpretation that gives glory to God and bears witness to Christ."²²

The practice of devout or (at least) friendly reading in Cusanus's case was not restricted to Islam or Abrahamic religions, but occasionally extended farther East into Asia. As indicated before, his *De Pace Fidei* presented a nearly global ecumenical conversation, including among its participants representatives of such distant cultures as the Persian, Chaldean, and Indian. It is known that the cardinal was familiar with Marco Polo's reports about Asian, particularly Chinese, customs which at the time attracted considerable attention in Europe. Above and beyond these direct references, however, one can detect an affinity between some of Cusanus's views and various Asian philosophical perspectives. Thus, the assumption of a deeper layer of experience antedating and pre-shaping human cognition bears some resemblance with the Indian notion of "*brahman*," especially as this notion has been developed in so-called "Vedantic" philosophy. The key concept of "non-dualism," emphasized by the school of "Advaita Vedanta," might in fact be fruitfully compared with the cardinal's accent on "not-other" (*non aliud*). Still, to prevent the equation of "non-dualism" with simple fusion or identity,

²¹ Nicolai de Cusa, *Cibratio Alkorani—Sichtung des Korans*, ed. Ludwig Hagemann and Reinhold Gleis (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1989), Book 1, p. 13.

²² Jasper Hopkins, "The Role of *Pia Interpretatio* in Nicholas of Cusa's Hermeneutical Approach to the Koran," in his *Miscellany of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis, MN: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1994), pp. 50-51. The *Miscellany* also contains chapters on fervently anti-Muslim writers, such as Ricoldo of Montecroce and John of Torquemada (the contemporary of Cusanus and fellow-cardinal). The reference is to *Cibratio Alkorani*, Book 1, Chapter 7, pp. 54-55.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Cusanus always insisted on the need to approach the divine humbly and with a loving spirit—an outlook approximating that of the Indian school of “modified non-dualism” (*Vishist-Advaita*, associated with Ramanuja). Regarding the cardinal’s favorite “hunting grounds” of learned ignorance and non-contradiction (or coincidence of opposites), one can readily find affinities with Buddhist teachings, especially the teachings of the Mahayana philosopher Nagarjuna and his delineation of a “middle way” (*madhyamika*) between opposites.²³

In *De Venatione Sapientiae*, composed a year before Cusanus’s death, we find a statement which might have been penned by the Asian philosopher, but actually is ascribed to a Neoplatonic thinker. “As Dionysius (the Areopagite) correctly stated,” we read there, “with regard to God it is imperative both to affirm and to deny opposing propositions”—which may allow us to come to know the truth “unknowingly” or attain the divine “unattainably.” The transgression of opposite propositions applies also to the conundrum of immanence and transcendence—where Cusanus denies both the coincidence of Creator and creatures and their radical otherness, citing the statement of St. Paul to the effect that God is not available in human “shrines” but at the same time is “not far from each one of us, . . . for we are indeed his offspring” (*Acts* 17:24-28).²⁴ Another one of his later writings, titled *De Visione Dei* (*On the Vision of God*), offers a “non-dualist,” or perhaps “modified non-dualist” formulation of the relation between humans and the divine.

As the text points out, we are only able to “see” or have a vision of the divine because we are first of all seen or “envisaged” by the divine. “You, Lord,” we read, “are where speech, hearing, taste, touch, reason, knowledge and understanding are the same and where seeing is one with being seen, and hearing with being heard, tasting with being tasted, and touching with being touched.” This relation

²³. See K. Venkata Ramanan, *Nagarjuna’s Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), p. 141; also David J. Kalupahana, *Nagarjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986). In the Buddhist tradition, compare also Nishida Kitaro, “Coincidentia Oppositorum and Love,” trans. Michiko Yusa, in Klaus Reinhard and Harald Schwaetzer, eds., *Cusanus-Rezeption in der Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: S. Roderer Verlag, 2005), pp. 221-225, and Michiko Yusa, “Nishida Kitaro and ‘Coincidentia Oppositorum’—An Introduction,” in the same volume, pp. 211-219. Regarding Indian philosophy, and especially “Advaita” and “Vishist-Advaita” Vedanta, see Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968); S. R. Bhatt, *Studies in Ramanuja Vedanta* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1975); and John B. Carman, *Theology of Ramanuja* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

²⁴. Nicolai de Cusa, *De venatione sapientiae—Die Jagd nach Weisheit*, Chapter 22, pp. 98-99. The reference to St. Paul is found in *Tu quis es (De principio)—Über den Ursprung*, trans. and ed. Karl Bormann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), pp. 42-43.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

between seeing and being seen, desiring and being desired is equivalent to the bond of love—which is a proper point on which to conclude these pages because Nicolaus of Cusa’s entire work is ultimately nothing but a sustained paean to the love of God:

You have shown yourself to me, Lord, as in the highest degree lovable, for you are indeed infinitely beloved. But ... unless there were an infinite lover, you would not be infinitely beloved, for your being infinitely loved corresponds to the power of loving infinitely. Hence, you my Lord, are love: a love that loves and a love that is beloved, and also the love that is the bond between the two.²⁵



²⁵ See “De Visione Dei,” in John P. Dolan, ed., *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas de Cusa*, pp. 149, 161.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Richard Reilly

St. Bonaventure University

IS DESIRELESSNESS DESIRABLE?

In an insightful pair of essays appearing in successive issues of *Philosophy East & West*, Professors John Visader and A.L. Herman develop three claims.¹

1. Buddhism has as one of its chief aims the “cessation” of desires and desiring, which is to say the “extinction” of desires or, in other words, the attainment of the “state of desirelessness.”
2. However, there is a very real paradox (“the paradox of desire”) here, since one who aims at liberation from suffering can become desireless only if he should so desire; but, in so far as one desires to eliminate all desires, desire can never be eliminated.
3. Hence, becoming desireless is achievable only through practices that do not have as their direct intention the elimination of all desires.

Is it both possible and desirable to eliminate all desires, to become desireless? Is becoming desireless necessary for Buddhist to attain “liberation?” In his recent (2000) monograph, *On the Buddha*, Bart Gruzalski answers both of these questions affirmatively.² However, I shall argue that his reasoning is not convincing on either score. This paper is divided into three sections. The first section examines the so-called “paradox of desire” and shows that if desirelessness is to be achieved this cannot result directly from a desire or intention to be (and remain) desireless. In the second section, I consider a Mahayana devotee who seeks enlightenment through the development of relative and absolute Bodhichitta. This section points out that the Bodhisattva is one who eliminates all cravings, grasping or “attachments;” nevertheless, the Bodhisattva’s enlightened activity “for the sake of all beings” may be seen, from the point of view of relative truth, as “compassion” and therefore as “intentional;” and, in so far as

¹ John Visvader, “The use of paradox in uroboric philosophies,” *Philosophy East and West* 28.4 (1978), 455-467; A.L. Herman, “A solution to the paradox of desire in Buddhism,” *Philosophy East and West*, 29.1 (1979), 91-94. Subsequently, a critique of these articles was published with rejoinders in *Philosophy East and West* 30.4 (1980): Wayne Alt, “There is no paradox of desire in Buddhism” (521-528); A.L. Herman, “Ah, but there is a paradox of desire in Buddhism—A reply to Wayne Alt” (529-532); John Visvader, “A reply Wayne Alt’s ‘There is no paradox of desire in Buddhism’” (533-534).

² Bart Gruzalski, *On The Buddha*, Belmont CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning (2000). All page citations to Gruzalski in the text are to Chapter 8, “The Possibility of Liberation.”

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

“intention” involves both belief and desire, the Bodhisattva is not void of “desire.” Finally, I will turn to Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings on The Four Noble Truths and argue that we not find therein a basis for thinking that the elimination of suffering requires “desirelessness.”

1. *Being Desiring and Being Desireless*

It seems that the issue of the possibility of one’s becoming desireless has been a general concern for Western commentators on Buddhism. Huston Smith’s influential view is that the goal of the Buddhist devotee is to overcome self-interestedness, to no longer have “the desire for private fulfillment.”³ Still, the intention to give up all self-interested desires may yet be rooted in a “self” that is seeking some goal, e.g. “liberation.” Must not this desire even be given up for one to become truly “self-less?”

Gruzalski employs a two-step analysis to explain the possibility of attaining desirelessness. First, he reminds us that desires may be “occurrent” or “dispositional.” “Occurrent” desires are presently active, usually “felt,” desires to do or to have one thing or another; they prompt us to act one way or another, unless they are counteracted by a stronger occurrent desire. Such desires are “extinguished” through satisfaction, by one’s doing or getting what one wants. Dispositional desires, says Gruzalski, are propensities “to have an occurrent want under certain conditions” (62). It is perhaps clearer to say that dispositional desires are propensities to fulfill certain kinds of occurrent desires under certain conditions. In any case, Gruzalski correctly points out that dispositional desires may have to do with being or becoming a certain type of person, e.g., being a good tennis player, and these may explain one’s having appropriate occurrent desires, e.g., to train or to practice. Of course there are other kinds of dispositional desires, e.g., to smoke or to criticize one’s opponents, that one may not wish to identify oneself with. Dispositional desires, then, would include our habitual tendencies to think, speak, and act in the ways we do. Gruzalski’s first step is to identify the desire to be desireless as the dispositional desire not to have any occurrent desires. One’s having this dispositional desire would result typically in one’s desiring not to have whatever occurrent desires one may have and not to have whatever other

³ Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Library Edition (1965), 113; reprinted in *The World’s Religions* (1991), 102. Smith rejects the translation of *tanha* as “desire,” for reasons similar to those that are mentioned in Section 3 below.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

dispositional desires one might have (which give rise to most all of one's occurrent desires.) So, it seems, the dispositional desire not to have occurrent desires at first would more than double the desires one would otherwise have! Nevertheless, it is not logically impossible for one who has the dispositional desire to be rid of all occurrent desires and all other dispositional desires to succeed, over time through spiritual practice, in being free of them all. It might then be thought that having reached this goal one's dispositional desire to be free of all other desires is satisfied and hence "extinguished." But, Gruzalski contends, one would still be in need of the dispositional desire to *remain* free of all occurrent desires. This point might be reinforced by the analogy of one's fulfilling and hence extinguishing all of his desires before going to sleep; upon awaking, might he not come to have an occurrent desire to have or to do something or another? It seems that to be free of all the desires that one may have need not guarantee that one is free from being a "desiring being," that is from coming to have desires that one seeks to satisfy. Consequently, one who does not have any occurrent desires would need to retain the dispositional desire to be desireless in order remain free from occurrent desires.

This brings us to the second step of Gruzalski's analysis where he points out that "knowledge as *direct insight*" is essential to solve the problem of suffering" (Gruzalski 63). In brief, Gruzalski holds that insight into the "impermanence of all phenomena" will dissolve one's desiring mind since one will realize the futility of seeking fulfillment in what is impermanent. To quote at length:

According to the Buddha, everything that we are involved in trying to get, maintain, or protect—health, relationships, job, professional status—is in the process of passing away.

All that is mine, all that is beloved and pleasing to me, will someday be otherwise, will someday be separated from me (*Anguttara-nikaya*, iii, 71-72).

...It is plausible to think that the person who has an awareness of the nature of all phenomena, including their essential impermanence, will not have any occurrent desires again. Since there will not be any more occurrent desires, it makes no sense to claim that there are any underlying dispositional desires, since a dispositional desire is nothing more than a disposition for occurrent desires to arise. Hence there need be no

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

dispositional desire—no desire to remain desireless—for a person to remain free from occurrent desire. For such a being there will be no desires or attachments of any kind at all (Gruzalski, 64-65).

I think there is a fundamental flaw in the above line of reasoning. It indeed might be “plausible” to think that a person who realizes the impermanence of all phenomena, as well as the impermanence of all desire-satisfactions, will not have any occurrent desires again; but, it also is plausible that a person with this understanding will continue to pursue admittedly impermanent desire-satisfactions. The underlying point, once again, is that the *de facto* cessation of all of one’s particular occurrent desires (and even of *their* underlying dispositions) does not guarantee the elimination of the “desiring mind” or the general propensity towards ego-satisfaction. Put otherwise, while having direct insight into the impermanent nature of phenomena--and what Gruzalski seems to specifically have in mind are objects of desire--i.e., an understanding of their dependent-origination or “emptiness,” perhaps is *essential* or necessary to the cessation of suffering, it is not *sufficient*. One also must have direct insight into the “emptiness” of one’s “self” in order to dissolve ego-attachments that underlie the desiring mind.

Visvader instructively distinguishes three stages in the “dialectic of emptiness.”
...the first is the emptiness of the self and the potential objects of clinging...In the second stage the emptiness of the doctrine is asserted, while the third stage points out the emptiness of emptiness itself...Once the emptiness of the doctrine and practice are asserted, then the craving mind does not have anything to cling to and thus its latest stronghold is exposed. This is where one is confronted with the desire to give up desires (Visvader, 1978, 463).

What I understand Visvader to mean when he concludes, “This is where one is confronted with the desire to give up desires” is decidedly not, “This is where one is confronted with the desire to give up the actual, particular desires one has” but rather “This is where one is confronted with the desire to give up the desiring mind one has.” But, of course, is not the desire to give up desiring self-defeating? A.L. Herman captures nicely the predicament of the devotee:

...seeing that there is no way out of the paradox of desire, understanding that as Mādhyamika [sic] Buddhism puts it, there is no way to *nirvāna*, no goal to be desired or achieved, then one “lets go” of the way and the goal. And that “letting go” leads to or is

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

nirvāna: For once the devotee realizes that there is nothing he can do then there is nothing left to be done (Herman, 1979, 93-94).

In other words, only when one both faces up to the point that all desiring is self-defeating, utterly useless, and has clearly realized the “emptiness” of self and phenomena, might one just “give up” desiring altogether. But here, becoming desireless is not achieved by directly acting on a desire to become or to remain desireless.

2. *Is the Bodhisattva Desireless?*

But is the being who is beyond suffering entirely “desireless?” Gruzalski proposes a distinction that he thinks can explain “action without desire.” It may seem that habitual actions are actions without felt, occurrent desires; for example, the ways in which we start and drive a car, do our morning bath, answer the phone, and so on, might be so routinely done that we do not experience any desire in doing them the way we do. Yet, as Gruzalski points out, such behaviors are rooted in desire, both in how we came to adopt the routines we have and with respect to the goals that such routines accomplish. In so far as our routines are merely habitual, Gruzalski points out, they certainly can lead to frustration as when they are not effective in achieving our goals. For instance, a person who gardens in habitual ways may be frustrated when unusual weather patterns prevent her from achieving the desired results. However, a person who gardens skillfully will follow certain principles but will be quite flexible in their application; moreover, an enlightened, skillful gardener would not be attached to goals and would be able to accept what arises.

As long as she is only trying to garden skillfully and is not attached to the results, she will no more be frustrated when she needs to cover her tomato plants at night for another week than she would be if, while only trying to play skillfully, she lost her most skillful game of chess to a player whom she knew to be much better than herself (Gruzalski, 66).

Gruzalski claims that “acting skillfully” may account for “coherent patterns of human activity unmotivated by desire” even though they typically occur in contexts in which desire plays a fundamental motivational role. Persons who garden skillfully are typically motivated by a desire for a supply of fresh produce, to consume or to sell; most skillful chess players are motivated by a desire to win or to do well

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

in competition. We are quite familiar with this teaching that bids us to remain in the present: when eating, eat, that is, just eat; when cooking, cook; when fishing, fish. If one engages in the activity fully, not attached to results, then we might say that there is no underlying, goal-directed desire that might be the basis for one's satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Even so, such activity is not totally "desireless" since it is intentional. What accounts for the underlying *pattern* of a skillful activity is the agent's intentionality; and, as Gruzalski himself recognizes, philosophers often analyze intention in terms of belief + desire.⁴ The person who is "just fishing" intends to fish, and this accounts for the activities of tying flies, wading, casting, and so on, even if she is not intent on or attached to the goal of catching and eating a fish. Of course, the activity of fishing may result in catching a fish; but, without the goal of catching a fish, one will not be disappointed in not doing so and one will be more open to ceasing to fish if another activity would be more appropriate for the circumstances.⁵

Even if it were possible to engage in skillful activities without desire, Gruzalski wonders (66), "Is it possible for an entire life to be devoid of desire?" As much as one might wish, I should think, fishing (golfing, gardening, running Microsoft, or whatever) cannot constitute or embrace one's entire life; the question may always arise, "Why fish (eat, sit, garden, etc.) *now*?" In any event, Gruzalski proposes that it is in the possibility of one's being fully compassionate that we can find a life devoid of desire.

Once one is fully compassionate, there is never an occasion for frustration over the suffering of others. If one can do something to relieve the suffering of another, and this is the overall compassionate act, one does so. If there is suffering that cannot be relieved, that cannot be relieved, an understanding of this reality would prevent frustration or any other suffering for a fully compassionate person... In all of this, because being compassionate requires alertness and allaying suffering with ones [sic] own being, the compassionate person will care for her mind, heart, and body. Likewise, because being compassionate requires being in relation to others, the compassionate

⁴ See, for example, Robert Audi, "Intending," *Journal of Philosophy*, 70 (1973), 387-403.

⁵ On May 25, 2006 *The Washington Post* reported that a fallen climber, David Sharp lacking oxygen, died on May 15th after some forty other climbers passed by him on their way to ascend Mt. Everest. While these climbers were deeply dwelling in their activity of climbing, clearly they were attached to the achievement of a goal. In *Miracle of Mindfulness*, Thich Nhat Hanh advises that when washing the dishes, just wash the dishes without even the goal of cleaning them!

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

person will nourish noble friendships, and her ties to her family and the various communities of which she is a member. In these ways compassion may inform and guide an entire life (Gruzalski, 67).

That compassion may guide and embrace an entire life, all of one's energies, and that one who is fully compassionate is not motivated by or attached to the attainment of results, does not entail that one's life is desireless, since all intentional actions are motivated at least in the sense that the agent wants/desires to do them for their own sake if not for the sake of some result to be thereby attained.

Of course, the paradox of desire seems to reemerge when one considers the possibility of the egocentric adept who engages in spiritual practices to transform himself into a fully compassionate being. Must not these efforts be motivated by the desire to attain the goal of becoming fully compassionate? And, further, might not this be one's goal since one wishes for oneself to pass beyond suffering, i.e., attain liberation? How is it that one can become non-attached to results/goals if one is, all the while, being motivated to attain a result or goal for oneself?

The path of the Bodhisattva in training provides a way out of this paradox. Part of the Bodhisattva vow reads: "For the ultimate benefit of all beings, without exception, throughout this and all my lifetimes, I dedicate myself to the practice and realization of enlightenment until all together reach that goal." The "goal" here is not "self-liberation" but the "liberation of all beings." Often the Bodhisattva way is expressed by the phrase, "one seeks enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings;" this aspiration is "relative *bodhicitta*" or "awakened mind." It is common to distinguish two forms of "relative *bodhicitta*"—aspiration (intention) and application, e.g., through such practices as the "exchange of self and other" and the six transcendental virtues (*paramitas*); perfection of application culminates in wisdom, or the "realization of (reality as) emptiness" which is "absolute *bodhicitta*." The Bodhisattva practices, in short, bring one to the realization of the emptiness (or inter-dependencies) of self and others, so that one may be equally responsive to the sufferings of all and be as intent to alleviate others' sufferings as one would one's own. One becomes self-less, ego-less, not by pursuing a goal for oneself but by pursuing the liberation from suffering of all beings. Moreover, the person who becomes *fully* compassionate, as Gruzalski points out, does not act deliberately to conform to an ideal; rather compassion "is just one's nature, the way one is" (67).

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Ideals of non-dualistic, spontaneous activity have been developed in various traditions, for example, as *wu-wei* by Daoists, as *līlā* (divine play) in Rāmānuja's Vedānta, and as "I-Thou" relations in Martin Buber's Hasidic perspective. In various ways, these ideals depict modes of acting with non-fabricated mind, whereby one acts "naturally" or "responsively" in "the present moment," without preconceptions, self-will or personal agenda. Similarly, the fully compassionate person's "awareness" or "responsiveness" is beyond any determinate horizon. This is nicely captured in the story of the Good Samaritan as well as in the following account by Pearl Oliner as to why she and her husband, Samuel, find the designation, "Righteous Gentiles," inappropriate.

We are now called "Righteous Gentiles" or even sometimes "heroes." We much object to this title, and I can tell you why. One day there was an air raid on the German barracks near our house, some five kilometers away. My husband happened to be there... When it was over, the barracks were very badly hit. A German soldier came running out with his head practically destroyed. He was bleeding heavily and obviously in shock. He was running in panic. My husband saw that within minutes he would fall down and bleed to death. So my husband put him on his bicycle—without thinking about it—and brought him to the commandant's house. He put him on the step, rang the bell, waited to see the door open, and left. Later some of our friends and people who were hiding with us heard about it and said: "You are a traitor because you helped the enemy." My husband replied: "No, the moment the man was badly wounded, he was not an enemy any more but simply a human being in need." As little as we would accept the title of "traitor," so little can we accept the title of "hero" for the things we did to help Jewish people. We just helped human beings who were in need.⁶

Just helping beings in need is what compassionate beings do, "without thinking," "naturally," and without discrimination or agenda. There is not even an "attachment" to the "fate" of the victim, e.g.,

⁶ S.P. and P.M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of the Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York: The Free Press), p. 228; quoted in Charles Taylor, "Sympathy," *The Journal of Ethics*, 3 (1999), pp. 74-75. Taylor characterizes compassion or sympathy as a "primitive response to the suffering of another" (86, n 15) by which he means that one's assisting the suffering other is not mediated by reasons, but rather, in its spontaneity, expresses a constitutive element in our conception of human nature; it is "primitive" also in the sense that it cannot be explained empirically in terms of more fundamental categories or facts about human beings. This view was insightfully developed in Max Scheler *The Nature of Sympathy*, trans. Peter Heath, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

whether he recovers from his injuries or not, even though one does all that what one can do under the circumstances.

Yet, being *fully* compassionate does not seem so straightforward, so “natural” for us. “Just helping” a being in need is something we all do “naturally” *on occasion*. Yet, we do not find ourselves living a life that “just helps beings in need,” that is, is always open and responsive to the needs of beings (others and ourselves). Whereas we might “just sit” on occasion, it is not so easy to “just sit” as an on-going practice. In Dzogchen, “just breathing is the meditation;” but, how often does one “just breathe?” While sitting or breathing is natural and easy, *just* sitting or *just* breathing is not easy for us; similarly, *just* helping others seems perplexingly difficult. Why? Because of our having a “desiring mind.” As Herman pointed out, one must just “let go” of desiring altogether. And, living in our “everyday” world, amidst its mundane concerns, makes such “letting go” a practical impossibility for most of us. Thus, The Buddha observes, “While living at home, it is not so easy to live the higher spiritual life that is completely fulfilled and completely pure like a polished shell,” and proceeds to delineate the ways in which the *bhikkhu*’s renunciations and trainings lead to the cessation of craving and, thus, of suffering.⁷

A fully compassionate person simply lives; her openness or responsiveness manifests compassion spontaneously in her conduct; nevertheless, since even spontaneously generated conduct is intentional, we cannot say that a liberated person-in-the-world is entirely desireless. However, we can say that such a person’s desires are fully embedded in her compassionate intentionality; she has no desires that motivate her beyond or over and above her bodhicitta.⁸

⁷ *Mahātanhāsankhaya*, 15-19, in Shakyamuni Buddha, *Early Buddhist Discourses*, Ed. and Trans. By John J. Holder, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co. (2006), 69-72. Between drafts of this paper, I spent some time weeding the stone sidewalk leading to my house. In doing so, I disturbed numerous sentient beings, including ants, mother spiders with their eggs, and various types of worms, a couple of which were (accidentally) disabled. So, how is one to “just help beings” if one also is acting with other goals or purposes? Patrul Rinpoche reflects on the suffering that is involved in order for one even to enjoy a cup of tea! (Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, 2nd edition (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1998), 79-80.

⁸ It should be kept in mind that the “goal” of liberating numberless sentient beings “throughout all my lifetimes” is “indeterminate” *par excellance*; it is not a standard by which one might measure one’s “progress,” let alone anticipate completing, in “the here and now” of action.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

3. *Right View: Does the Cessation of Suffering Require the State of Desirelessness?*

In his original article, John Visvader claims that Buddhism has as one its chief aims the “extinction of desire” without qualification (Visvader, 1978, 461) and A.L. Herman specifically rejects any attempt to distinguish between desires that should be eliminated from those which need not be, because, he says, “Buddhists themselves seem to reject it” (Herman, 1979, 92). As we have seen, Gruzalski concurs with this viewpoint.

In his subsequent article, however, Visvader makes a crucial parting observation: The word “desire” as used by Buddhists is a technical philosophical term and is not coextensive with the ordinary use of that word in English. It is to be expected that an enlightened person, being free of such things as *grāha*, *kāma*, *klesa* and *trsnā*, will still desire to do such things as drink tea, go for a walk, or help other people (Visvader, 1980, 534).

Indeed, is not Shakyamuni Buddha the exemplar of a liberated being who acted intentionally, compassionately, and hence with desire in at least some sense?

In the *Discourse on Right View*, Buddha Shakyamuni is recorded as saying:

...Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; not to obtain what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering. This is called suffering.

And what is the origin of suffering? It is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being and craving for non-being. This is called the origin of suffering.

And what is the cessation of suffering? It is the remainderless fading away and ceasing, the giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting of that same craving. This is called the cessation of suffering.⁹

⁹ *Sammaditthi Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 9), 15-17, trans. from the Pali by Bhikkhu Nanamoli, edited and revised by Bhikkhu Bodhi, The Wheel Publication No. 377/379, Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society (1991). web.mit.edu/stclair/www/sammaditthi.html.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

It seems clear that the cause of suffering is said to be “clinging” or “craving” (as *grāha* and *tanha* may be rendered) and not “desire” more generally.¹⁰ The essential teaching here seems (at least to me) to be that the cessation of suffering lies in one’s being free *from* desire rather than in being free *of* desire. A person who is utterly desireless would have no basis for intending “the giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting of that same craving.” In realizing the “emptiness” of the object of desire, there is nothing to dwell on; in realizing the emptiness of one’s desire, it is therein let go of and one is liberated from it. In the realization of the emptiness of all things, there is no grasping or thirsting for “objects of desire” and, so, there is no “desiring mind” in this sense.

In the discourse *Feelings That Should Be Seen and the Dart* (*Samyutta Nikāya* 4. 207-210), The Buddha clearly teaches that the difference between an ordinary person and a noble disciple who both experience a pleasant feeling, a painful feeling, or a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, is that the latter “feels it as a person who is detached from it.” The Buddha’s main teaching here is that the unlearned ordinary person when touched by an unpleasant feeling or by a pleasant feeling, experiences a corresponding second, mental feeling, i.e., one of either aversion or craving, which are sources of suffering. On the other hand,

One who has fathomed the *dhamma*,
A person of great learning,
Sees the world with this difference:
Such a person’s mind is not disturbed by pleasing things
Nor by undesirable things is that person repulsed.

By one’s disinclination, dislike, and opposition
They are scattered, extinguished, and exist no more.
Having understood the reason
One is free from stain and sorrow

¹⁰ Similarly, in the Christian tradition, Augustine claims that the root of sin is “lust” by which he means “inordinate (unlawful) desire” and not “desire” *simpliciter*. See Saint Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, I. 3-4, 11-13. The Western philosophical notion of “desire” captures broadly any “motivation” one may have for doing what one does. “Paradoxes of desire,” as well as religious condemnations of “desire,” often are rooted in equivocations on the term.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

One understands rightly and has gone beyond becoming.¹¹

Further, in this context, to experience a pleasant feeling includes the experience of an object as pleasant, to experience a pleasing feeling towards it; and this is not far from experiencing an object as desirable, to experience a desire for it. In *The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving*, The Buddha describes a youth as enjoying himself with sense-feelings and mental objects “that are wished for, desirable, pleasing, enticing, connected with pleasure, and exciting” (*Mahātanhāsankhaya*, 13-15).¹² In Western philosophy, it is common to define what is judged “good” as what is “desirable.” But, in The Buddha’s teachings, pleasant feelings, and even objects of pleasant feelings, are not “good” simply in so far as such feelings are pleasant or in so far as pleasing objects are desirable. John J. Holder summarizes The Buddha’s teaching this way:

According to the Buddha’s detailed causal analysis of the arising and cessation of suffering, craving arises at the most critical juncture. In the ordinary, corrupted mind, craving arises as a result of feeling (*vedanā*). By themselves, feelings are neither good nor bad—they are merely pleasant, painful, or neutral. But when feelings are filtered through a defiled mind, a person reacts to feelings by developing cravings that invariably lead to suffering. In contrast, a person having a liberated or morally purified mind reacts to feelings by developing wholesome mental states like equanimity and dispassion that lead to tranquility and happiness.¹³

We might say, for example, that a “lustful” person is one who takes delight in pleasant feelings, who favors the pursuit of pleasure, who, in short, judges pleasure as “good;” similarly, a “worrisome” person is one who has an aversion to painful feelings, whose interest is captured by the expectation of painful feelings, who favors the avoidance of painful feelings, who, in short, judges pain as “bad.” One way of understanding this is to take the experience of a pleasing feeling towards an object as akin to a “first-order desire” to wish for or to have that object; and, to take the experience of a painful feeling about something as akin to a “first-order desire” to be free from that thing. “Second-order desires” have as their object first-order desires; they are desires (or preferences) to have or not to have

¹¹ *Early Buddhist Discourses*, 93-94.

¹² *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 59.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

particular “first-order desires” constitute our ego-will, be the bases of our conduct.¹⁴ Ordinary-minded people reinforce their “first-order desires” by “second-order desires” whereby they favor some and oppose others on the basis of their “judgments” of what is “good” or “bad.” Such second-order desires are the “mental dispositions” (“dispositional desires”) rooted in one’s ignorance of the true nature of self and phenomena. Extraordinary-minded people are free from such second-order dispositions. If one is trained to “let go” of first-order desires, to favor neither the pursuit of what is pleasing nor the avoidance of what is painful, then these desires are “extinguished.” In The Buddha’s words:

And so having abandoned favoring and opposing whatever feeling he feels—whether it is pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—he does not delight in that feeling, he does not welcome it, and he does not remain attached to it. As he does not do so, delight in feeling ceases in him. From the cessation of delight in feeling, attachment ceases... Thus ceases this whole mass of suffering.¹⁵

Just as in meditation, one may have passing thoughts without “thinking” on or “holding” to them, so too “objects of desire” may pass by without being “held” or “craved.” With insight-awareness, “one’s” thoughts and desires are nearly instantaneously self-liberated.

Conclusion

In sum, I do not believe that there is a “paradox of desire” in Buddhism since I do not think that Buddhism teaches that if one aspires to liberation from suffering then one *must* desire to attain the goal of desirelessness. A person who no longer is subject to suffering (to karma) need not be utterly desireless since such a person characteristically engages (only) in intentional conduct to benefit sentient beings. Further, even if being free from suffering means that one is free from the results of action, and hence from goal-directed desires, this does not mean that one both must have had and fulfilled a desire specifically to be free of goal-directed desires.¹⁶ There are many paths to

¹⁴ I here follow the influential view of Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXVIII (1971), 5-20.

¹⁵ *Early Buddhist Discourses*, 72.

¹⁶ It is true that there is a practical paradox, as Herman relates, Buddhists themselves admit they face when they try to desire their way to desirelessness and *nirvāna*.” (Herman, 1980, 529) However, since it is not necessary to attain desirelessness, and hence to desire to attain desirelessness, it is best to avoid the distraction of trying to fulfill such a desire. Of course, if one finds oneself caught in the practical paradox, then even that can be utilized to attain liberation, as Herman

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

enlightenment. The possibilities include one's encountering the utter practical impossibility of attaining happiness through the fulfillment of desires and, hence, one's just "giving up" one's desiring mind, as Professor Herman described. And, they also include the *Bodhisattvayana* in which one gives rise to, maintains and perfects the aspiration to free all beings from suffering. Moreover, it seems to me, one's being free of a desiring mind means that one is free of dispositional, second-order desires and that this enables one to be free from, to extinguish, whatever "feelings" or first-order desires one may have. In any case, since being compassionate is the manifestation of the realization of the true nature of reality, and since being compassionate means that one intentionally acts for the benefit of beings, and since one cannot act intentionally without desire or aspiration, we may conclude: "No, desirelessness is not desirable."¹⁷



nicely points out. Alt (1980) holds both that Buddhism teaches the attainment of desirelessness and that this is possible by practicing in light of the intention (desire) to become desireless. While Alt does attempt to explain why Herman and Visvader have not established the logical impossibility of doing so, he does not attempt to explain, as Gruzalski attempts to do, how the desiring mind dissolves.

¹⁷ A version of this paper was presented at the June 2006 meeting of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy; I benefited from comments and suggestions made by audience members there as well as by Dr. Abraham Velez de Cea.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Mary Jeanne Larrabee

DePaul University

THE DESIRE BEFORE DESIREING: DELEUZE, HUSSERL, and CHINUL

The issue of desire in Buddhism yields a theoretical and pragmatic problem, in particular for the initiate. Early Buddhist writings, such as the Four Noble Truths, seem to say that desire must be overcome completely in order to get rid of suffering, the latter being apparently the goal of “nirvana” or realization or enlightenment. Yet the fact that desire seems so intrinsic to embodied human existence makes many think that nirvana consequently can only be reached at the cessation of embodied existence, for does not this body always desire for food when hungry, for drink when thirsty? If one additionally learns that the Mahayana Bodhisattva tradition speaks of some fully enlightened beings choosing not to “enter” their nirvanic state because of a desire to continue living in “samsara,” that is, this worldly life of the embodied human being, one could see this as compounding the difficulty, both by seemingly placing nirvana “outside” our lives here and in speaking of such enlightened beings having at least this one last “desire”—the desire after desiring.

If a Buddhist ontology wishes to be immanentist, claiming that realization happens here/now, that is, within an embodied human existence (see, e.g., Hakuin’s “this body is the body of Buddha,” 2005), then the question of desire needs to be addressed. For example, Buddhist practice could be seen by an initiate as geared toward either cutting out or keeping but changing desire, that is:¹ (1) cutting out desire completely, even while embodiment remains sustainable. According to this viewpoint, one’s physiology might still prompt for hunger when it needs nutrition (if it indeed needs it) and the appropriate action would follow readily without much effort or “active” desire (hence one would not act like an ascetic who denies such desires and acts counter to them—an alternative unacceptable for

¹ For an earlier discussion of this problem of desire in Buddhism, from a textual academic position, see the debate among the following: Visvader (1978 & 1980), Herman (1979 & 1980), and Alt (1980). I specifically cast my discussion as the paradox might appear to an “initiate,” that is someone who is new to Buddhist practice with some moderate degree of conceptual understanding. Such initiates, unless already a Buddhist scholar, would not be thinking through the paradox in such complex terms as the three philosophers are doing in their essays. In addition, the initiating essay in this debate centers on Visvader’s understanding of a broader paradox that urobolic philosophies are engaged in such that they exist in order to erase themselves, like a snake swallowing its tail (Visvader 1978, 455); given my immanentist understanding of the specific Buddhist (Zen) philosophy I will discuss, I would probably object to Zen being classified in this way.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Buddha's middle way), or (2) maintaining desire but changing the manner in which desire is implicated in the "deluded self" (I use this phrase reservedly)—whether understood as repressive mechanisms (Deleuze with Guattari), self-centeredness or ill motivations (Buddhism), self-deception (Sartre), lack of genuineness (Beauvoir), or the like. These two options are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive and might be understood as occurring at different stages of realization or of cultivation following realization (if one sees realization as sudden). The first approach to desire would find parallels in phenomenology's descriptions of spontaneity and active passivity, such as those found in Sartre and Husserl. The second indicates a possibility of modifying desire or freeing it into its real way of being, such that "desire" mentioned as the cause of suffering would be distinguished from a more fundamental "desire" that underlies or is covered up by what we ordinarily take as desire or desiring in our earthly existence. The two roads, however, might be explored as co-implicated, as both pointing to the same "originating" desire, or the desire before desiring, which then might be said to "contain" within it the desire toward universal enlightenment.²

I will argue that Korean Zen Master Chinul's (1158-1210) shift to a form of koan practice might express one avenue for understanding desire in the Zen path, especially when some of his discussions are filled out in reference to the descriptions of Husserlian phenomenology. This paper will take a zigzag path by first looking at Deleuze's critique of Freud's description of desire, by amplifying Deleuze's understanding of nonrepressed or "pure" desire through his references to Sartre's spontaneous consciousness, and then by criticizing Sartre's critique of Husserl's transcendental consciousness by looking at genetic phenomenology and Husserl's idea of the Living Present. The end part of the essay will tie all these notions to Chinul's practice of *hwadu*, the "live word."

The essay will thus take up the following connections: One could say that for Deleuze the desire before desiring is the desire that is not under the regime of repression, either that of capitalist society or any other. It would be the pure desiring-machine, which then is desire producing desire, rather than producing the objects of desire for a subject who lacks said desired objects. This desire

² In taking this approach, I am moving in a different direction from Herman in his "Solution to the Paradox of Desire in Buddhism," specifically in Mādhyamika Mahāyāna Buddhism and thus Zen: "That is to say, seeing that there is no way out of the paradox of desire, understanding that, as Mādhyamika Buddhism puts it, there is no way to *nirvāna*, no goal to be desired or achieved, then one 'lets go' of the way and the goal. And that 'letting go' leads to, or is *nirvāna*" (Herman 1979, 93-4). From my position there is a bit more to do than this stopping of desiring to get rid of desires.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

production happens in many places, not all of which are the “place” we term the self-aware and thus active subject, the person. Pushing Deleuze’s critique further, I will show that the desire before desiring is better thought of in terms of Deleuze’s concept of “a life...” which can be thought through by connecting “a life” to Sartre’s concept of spontaneity, Beauvoir’s idea of freedom, and Husserl’s notion of activity-in-passivity—where Beauvoir expands Sartre and Husserl corrects him. But these thinkers can interestingly be reframed in light of Chinul’s claims concerning the value of *hwadu* practice, which is the practice of sitting with the “live word.” A phenomenological analysis of *hwadu* practice drawing on both Sartre and Husserl (as well as the work by Victor Hori) can eventuate in an ontology of becoming that resonates with both Deleuze and Chinul, positing as the desire before desiring an “is-ing” or “en-life-ing” that is nondualistic and thus nonmechanistic and always underway.

I. *Deleuze Counter Freud: Critique of Desire as Lack*

Deleuze, with Guattari, questions the understanding of desire as original lack. This view of desire as lack states minimally that desire arises in a person when recognizing the lack of some thing. Desire is then a response to lack that initiates a chain of events or processes or behaviors geared toward filling the lack. Hunger, for example, sends the baby into tears, which usually leads to the bottle or nipple being inserted into its mouth, sends the teenager to the chocolate hoard, the conscientious adult to the veggie-stocked refrigerator. This Deleuze’s critical questioning of desire as lack, found primarily in *Anti-Oedipus*, counters the deeper Freudian claims that see the empty space of desire as stemming from the Oedipally cast loss of “mother” (both at birth and through the castration prohibition). This deeper desire articulated by Freud might be taken to be the “desire before desiring,” since it is the foundational lack according to Freud which thereby puts in motion any other desire as a search for any possible alternative to the proscribed object—desires for chocolate or veggies or drugs or a spouse to fill the lack of the “mother.”

But Deleuze objects to Freud’s Oedipal twist on desire: “Desire does not lack anything: it does not lack its object” (with Guattari 1983, 26). Instead, he posits a desire that is located within plenitude because it is productive of reality. As Jean Khalifa puts it, “if Deleuze extols desire, it is . . . in the sense of a philosophy of life as variation and creation” (Khalifa 2003, 80). This notion of desire sees any desire as productive of its object, rather than as positing and moving toward filling the loss of an

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

object. And at its most fundamental, desire produces desire. Desire produces its desired objects, that is, reality as desired and desirable. Desire as well produces itself, or regenerates itself constantly (Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 26).³ Since Freud's theory of desire taken alone accounts for repression and its incumbent range of idiosyncrasies up to and including psychoses, Deleuze (with Guattari) recognizes that desires may appear as though they are governed by lack, but he sees that phenomenon as a variation on "pure" desire and as brought about, for example, by consumerist capitalism.

Behind his argument rejecting desire as lack is Deleuze's interest in a plane of immanence, a key concept in his ontology that allows him to reject anything transcendent—and hence the problem of metaphysical dualisms. If desire and its object were distinguished in the Freudian sense, then the object of desire would transcend desire, contrary to the real functioning of the plane of immanence, where differences occur but not through hierarchical separation. Both "pure" desire and repressed desire work on the same plane of immanence, along with the objects of desire. Another factor behind his argument on desire and concerning the plane of immanence is Deleuze's concept of "a life." Before elucidating the place of this concept in this essay, we need to take a seeming detour through Sartre, Beauvoir, and Husserl.

II. *Deleuze to Sartre: Spontaneity*

Deleuze finds part of his argument for taking desire as keyed toward production rather than lack through his reading of Jean-Paul Sartre's positing of a pre-reflective consciousness: Deleuze (with Guattari) states in *What is Philosophy*: "Sartre's presupposition of an impersonal transcendental field restores the right of immanence. When immanence is no longer immanent to something other than itself it is possible to speak of a plane of immanence" (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 47). Sartre's notion rejects the dualism of the subject-object distinction as primary and also hierarchical, with the subject or attentive consciousness having dominance over objects through its intentional activities. The original manner of the being of consciousness is pre-reflective and non-positional and thus it is nothingness—there is no ego involved. In other words, there is nothing but the free movement that "creates" or finds its intended object before it, hence constituting the real world through its movement of free

³ See Reynolds (1998, 192) and Colebrook (2002, 91).

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

intentionality. This is Deleuze's desire-producing desire. As Khalifa puts it: "if consciousness is a nothing, that does not mean that it is a lack. It is fundamentally creative, an idea which is at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire as constructivist" (2003, 73). As pre-reflective, consciousness in Sartre's sense is operating without standing back from its object or matter at hand, without thinking about it; as non-positional, it is making no active judgment such as a valuation concerning the object, and so it is willing nothing concerning the object or matter. As Sartre puts it in *The Transcendence of the Ego*: "This transcendental sphere is a sphere of absolute existence, that is to say, a sphere of pure spontaneities which are never objects and which determine their own existence" (Sartre 1957, 96). And a bit later: "Each instant of our conscious life reveals to us a creation ex nihilo" (Sartre 1957, 98).

It makes sense that Deleuze picks up something for his notion of desire from Sartre, since for Sartre this pre-reflective consciousness (but taken as nonpersonal by Deleuze) is creative (Sartre 1957, 99). Simone de Beauvoir elucidates this movement, which she insists must be one of genuine freedom. As genuine it operates in a two-fold manner—first, as itself producing the world in the sense of what we find surrounding us: "It is desire which creates the desirable . . . It is human existence which makes values spring up in the world" (Beauvoir 1976, 15) and, second, as producing freedom itself, both our own and that of others: "Just as life is identified with the will-to-live, freedom always appears as a movement of liberation. It is only by prolonging itself through the freedom of others that it manages to surpass death itself and to realize itself as an indefinite unity" (Beauvoir 1976, 32).

There is a caveat here: for Deleuze, the desire-producing desire and, for Beauvoir, the freedom-producing freedom can be curtailed—for Deleuze by repression and for Beauvoir by choices short of genuineness. In her *Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir describes how this genuineness can be curtailed in a number of ways, especially by either refusing freedom for oneself (e.g., the subperson, the serious person, and the nihilist) or using it over others (due to passion or adventuresomeness), such that their freedom is limited (Beauvoir 1976, Part II). Repression for Deleuze forces desire into the production of objects socially designated as valuable, so that desire is enlisted to ends other than itself (Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 119). In the case of both desire and freedom, when functioning under repression there is some sense in which each is not what it really is. Sartre's notion of spontaneity underlies both these concepts when either functions outside of repression.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

With his notion of spontaneity, Sartre is arguing against Husserl's transcendental ego. To do so, Sartre moves from an experiential description to an ontological claim about the "nothingness" of consciousness as a purely intentional responsiveness ascribing meaning to its surroundings, while lacking an "I" or ego taken by Sartre to be the deciding and reflectively aware self. This ontology, however, needs to be expanded in order to account for how humans actually live their lives—thus he adds the "in-itself" or stabilized aspects of human existence, so that the spontaneity of this moment effectively is connected to something other than this moment which might be "carried along," as it were, from one moment to the next.

But this ontology insists that "there is no *I* on the unreflected level" of consciousness (Sartre 1957, 48), rather it appears only through reflective consciousness (Sartre 1957, 52-53). He justifies this claim by examples of spontaneity: "When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no *I*. There is consciousness of the streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken, etc., and non-positional consciousness of consciousness" (Sartre 1957, 48-49). Experientially my sense of myself as an *I* doing these activities does not arise in the activity itself; rather the *I* is "lost" in the flow of the activity—there is only responsiveness to the surroundings in which I am involved. Sartre again: "In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousnesses; it is they which present themselves with values, with attractive and repellant qualities—but *me*, I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself" (Sartre 1957, 49). While literally there is no *I* annihilating the *I*, there is still a specific consciousness with a certain type of awareness of itself in these activities—there is what Sartre calls "non-positional" consciousness, one that takes no position or makes no judgment on the activity itself, or more importantly one that does not include the person judging or deciding to do the activity. The better way to state the happening with the streetcar is: "there is a running to catch the streetcar." Here "there is" reflects the usual translation of the German "es gibt," which more felicitously for our discussion is literally translated as "it gives," so that "this situation gives, yields up a running for the streetcar or a reading the book," rather than an ego or "I." This spontaneity has the quality of Deleuze's desiring-machine—it produces what it finds before it, without need of a person to register a lack and then to decide that it needs filling.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

The puzzle of Sartre's example and subsequent claim that consciousness is primordially nothingness is that the spontaneity of the streetcar-catcher is not totally spontaneous, that is, coming out of a nothingness, which is freedom for him. While that moment "creates" the streetcar-as-needing-to-be-caught, it springs from "determinations" already present in the subject: she wants to get to work on time and the advent of the streetcar prior to her being at the stop triggers the seemingly spontaneous response. Sartre is correct in claiming that there is no need for a willed decision so that her "I" does not need to arise. Sartre's spontaneity is really a situation of no-mind or no-self in a Zen sense, because the willing and thinking subject did not appear in order for the running to happen nor is it "present" in the running. Sartre's ontological move concerns pre-reflective consciousness as primary to reflective consciousness and supports the claim by certain passing experiences: the "self-annihilation" he says "is not a matter of chance, due to a momentary lapse of attention, but happens because of the very structure of consciousness" (49). But these experiences are not sufficiently analyzed to support such a claim. Perhaps his insight concerning consciousness as spontaneous and the self as annihilated in spontaneity is both true and not true, or it is saying something about the nondual nature of mind: a self or "mind" both is and is not present in such spontaneous experiences. This nonduality, however, can better be expressed by Buddhist ontology.

Let's foreshadow our discussion of Chinul's account of koan practice by comparing the vignette about chasing the streetcar to a koan from the *Mumonkon*. Number 24 is entitled "Think neither right nor wrong." The story is that the monk Enô, who will eventually become recognized as the Sixth Patriarch of Chan (i.e., Chinese Zen Buddhism), is traveling up the mountain Taiyu. He is being pursued by the monk Myo who thinks that Enô has stolen a bowl and robe from the Fifth Patriarch. Enô puts down the bowl and robe and invites Myo to take them, which Myo mysteriously cannot do. Myo protests that he did not really want them, but instead sought realization. Then Enô points Myo's attention to the time of the pursuit: "When you were chasing me up the mountain, intent on getting the treasure..." This pursuit experience parallels the streetcar-chasing: Myo was simply in a chase after the Patriarch and what he carries—it originated in a Sartrean spontaneous activity and hence occurred as pre-reflective or nonpositional consciousness. The Patriarch articulates the characteristics of this pre-reflective pursuing consciousness further: you were "not thinking of good or evil," that is, not thinking of anything or putting anything into concepts, neither of an object desired nor of one

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

rejected. The Patriarch then invites Myo to see what in fact was happening: “Where was your Original-self?” (Kapleau 2006, 303). At this Myo is enlightened. What does he see? Minimally he sees that, as the person he was upon hearing of Enô’s departure, he undertook immediately a pursuit of the treasure where “immediately” designates a spontaneous, but non-intellectual desire. Further, in the pursuing there was no self, just the flowing interaction of this monk, this mountain path, this desired treasure that was running away with the Patriarch—an acting out from the moment of spontaneity.

What exactly is it about this spontaneity—how does it happen and what is actually involved? Sartre refuses to locate the source of spontaneity in pre-consciousness, which he claims would then be passive: “The antecedent existence of spontaneities within pre-conscious limits would necessarily be passive existence” (Sartre 1957, 98). He sees that spontaneity must come from some form, mode, source of an activity, but it can’t be the personal self—hence his idea of an “annihilated” I. Sartre’s description here is a shift from a personal self, a consciousness aware of or reflecting on itself, that is, the usual concept of consciousness as including self-awareness of a positional or thinking kind. Instead, Sartre is claiming the existence of a *pre-reflective* consciousness (rather than of a pre- or sub-consciousness) and takes consciousness as process, as ongoing, as only becoming. This account recognizes what I would call the interaffectivity of this becoming with its situation, its surrounds, which themselves are also becomings in relation to pre-reflective consciousness. His example of the person running for the streetcar shows the complexity of such a becoming—an already-under-way. There is a running-in-response-to, in this case, a missed streetcar, but there is a flowing experience of a person’s intentionality in relation to the streetcar as “that which needs to be caught in order to be at work on time.” Thus, the running emerges in relation to the fact that specific elements within the person are already underway before the person’s arrival at the streetcar stop. Not everyone seeing the streetcar will “spontaneously” start chasing it; rather, the chasing needs to come out of an interaction between this person and this streetcar. Sartre seems to be claiming, however, that this running-toward-the-streetcar illustrates a pre-reflective consciousness which has no need to impose an additional level of reflective awareness, such as “I am now running...,” since it in fact does not happen; with this rejection he characterizes the pre-reflective level as a nothing. However, from a Husserlian standpoint, Sartre simplifies this case to make his point. And given the centrality of this description of pre-reflective consciousness to the development of Deleuze’s ideas on desire, we need to look carefully at

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

what is involved in this simplification.

III. *From Sartre to Husserl: Temporality and Genesis*

Where do we find the “real” consciousness in Husserl? In my mind, Sartre’s rejection of Husserl’s transcendental consciousness is a misreading stemming from Sartre’s reification of the transcendental consciousness as something standing “behind” ordinary consciousness. But look at the sources of Sartre’s ideas. First, there is a “pre-reflective” in Husserl; it resides in what Husserl calls the passive levels of consciousness. “Levels,” however, must be taken as an artifact of analytic description not an ontological dogma; they function in a way similar to Deleuze’s use of strata and sedimentation,⁴ tropes he recovers from geology to describe what ontologically for him is always “a” becoming and so inclusive of whatever can be said to be found there, which is on planes of immanence—with no “above” or “behind.” Deleuze’s rejection of anything “above” or “beyond” these planes of immanence parallels Sartre’s rejection of the transcendental I of Husserl, which the latter takes as distinct from the mundane and pre-reflective consciousness. Deleuze’s rejection is strongly anti-foundational, whereas Sartre’s is more weakly so, since Deleuze retains the transcendental, i.e., the plane of immanence, and rejects the I (see Deleuze 1990, 105).

The understanding of Husserl’s theory of consciousness demonstrated in Sartre’s critiques of “transcendental consciousness” and the positioning of its I is limited by the tendency to substantialize it. Husserl’s language of consciousness is in part responsible for this tendency. Granted, if one uses as a defining phrase for transcendental consciousness “that which makes possible that which is experienced” as pointing to some thing or entity, then it would seem that Husserl’s transcendental consciousness (along with its I) is some entity underlying the intentional relatedness of experiences and the experienced. And from that position, a discrimination of the (lower or less important) mundane ego or consciousness from the (higher and more important) transcendental consciousness or ego must follow; as well, the substantializing of the transcendental ego refuses its character as becoming.

⁴ Note, for example, the description of the book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, as containing “strata and territories,” “lines of flight” and “movements of deterritorialization and destratification,” incorporating various “flows”; Deleuze and Guattari (1987), p. 3.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Sartre, however, was unaware of Husserl's genetic phenomenology⁵ when writing his work on transcendence and transcendentalism. This part of Husserl's work fills out missing dimensions in Sartre's description of spontaneity. It gives us a complex picture of the acquisition and operation of what Chinul might call "habit-energies."⁶ These are the habituated senses (*Sinne*), the sediments, of previous experiences retained through the temporalizing of consciousness or, more accurately, through the temporal flux and remain somehow in consciousness, although out of the field of attentive awareness. This temporal flux is the three-fold functioning, as process, that associates the Now of what Husserl calls the 'Living Present'⁷ with retended past experiences and the protended future of the just-coming.⁸ The flux itself is a pure passivity, from which the temporalizings of time flows, but it is also an activity-in-passivity in that the temporalizings allow for a "liveliness" of habituations and sediments that can more articulately explain the spontaneity Sartre describes and the desire-producing desire that Deleuze discusses.

For Husserl the origin point of consciousness, or even consciousness itself, can be understood not as a substantive, but as a processual being, that encompasses receptivity (interbeing with surroundings) and actionality (responsivity to surroundings—so perhaps better, "interactionality"). Only some of the "happenings" (*Erlebnisse*) that are called consciousness are experienced in an I-awake or attentive mode.⁹ If the term 'consciousness' is taken to mean attentiveness of the I, consciousness is not "conscious" of all of itself. As I write these words my attention goes toward that activity primarily, the growing hunger in my mid-region partially, and my breathing and surrounding sounds barely at all, and usually never to the ways in which all of this is able to keep happening (unless I'm a persistent phenomenologist). Sartre had heard of Husserl's immanent time-consciousness and rightly took it as "passivity." It is, however, lacking in "activity" only if that term is associated with human agency, that is, with a personal subjectivity deciding something. Immanent time-consciousness

⁵ For a summary of Husserl's method of genetic analysis, see Larrabee (1989), pp. 485-6.

⁶ See Chinul (1983, 148): the reference to habit-energies indicates one of the reasons for following sudden realization with gradual cultivation—habit-energies have been built up over time and are unlikely to dissipate in the initial realization of most people.

⁷ It is important to recognize that Husserl's notion of immanent time or temporalizing is both seemingly serially but fundamentally nonserially temporalizing; see, Larrabee (1994) and Larrabee (1995), pp. 354-55.

⁸ See Larrabee (1997).

⁹ A person's history operates within consciousness often without any ego-attentiveness, hence passively. See Holenstein (1972), pp. 47-62, and Husserl's *Experience and Judgment* 133 (German 138).

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

might be termed “actional” or even “agential,” since there is accomplishment, an outcome, although not an “act” in Husserl’s sense of the I-involved “motions” of consciousness.

More importantly for our discussion here, the temporalizings of inner-time consciousness “produce” certain of the specificities of a living consciousness. These specificities include both the Living Present and habituated senses. The temporal flux through its retending aspect embeds the experiences and the experienced into sedimentations within consciousness and into habitualities that are the person’s proclivities toward future action (but nondeterministically).¹⁰ This genetic understanding of consciousness goes beyond the “pure” passivities of temporalizing (which are nonetheless actional or intentional) and recognizes the very active or interactional aspects, an “activity-in-passivity,” of an associational consciousness¹¹ that makes “available” all the past of a subject to the Living Present of a subject as it moves to create yet another future—the next Now, both with and without the active participation of that subject.¹² The subject finds itself always undergoing spontaneities, but many of these are due to the determinants of a temporalized and genetically modulated consciousness, still understood as a flowing becoming. Returning to our specific examples, we now see that both Sartre’s streetcar-chaser and the Zen koan’s Patriarch-chaser act spontaneously—that is, free from conceptualization and an active subject-deciding. Yet, the spontaneous shift to “RUN!” draws from (Deleuzian) lines of flight and coalescence, dependent on (Husserlian) genetic accretions which are activated and activating. These spontaneous moves spring to life but only because they spring out of this “here/now” life of these two persons.

Husserl incorporates this complex genesis and temporalizing in the term, Living Present. According to Husserl, the Living Present is itself a spontaneous opening out toward... a primal upsurge that is both “standing” and “streaming.”¹³ This Living Present is where life is, where desire happens, where spontaneity arises. It enfolds in itself the totality of what I have just described: passivity or

¹⁰ See Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* (German 109, 102).

¹¹ See Husserl’s *Analyses of Passive Synthesis* (German 142), Holenstein (1972), and Husserl’s *Experience and Judgment*, section 16; Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*, p. 142, and *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, pp. 160 & 279..

¹² This “activity-in-passivity” is described most concretely in Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* and *Analyses of Passive Synthesis*. See Larrabee (1989).

¹³ See almost any C manuscript; for example, C 10 (1931): 4 (typescript) states that “the streaming Present in its primal-streaming is thus somewhat like a standing and remaining one, however as ‘streaming Present.’” See Larrabee (2000), pp. 16-20, for a discussion of the Living Present.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

receptivity, on the one hand, and actionality, on the other. Because the Living Present “stands,” it can be described and ontologized, even reified in one’s theory, but as “streaming,” it is as illusive as the attempts to philosophize it. As standing, it is being what it is; as streaming, it is the primal desire—a desire toward being/becoming, both the “already” and the “more,” where the former ignites the latter and the latter pulls on the former. Yet this can’t be exactly the desire of Deleuze—he has picked a poor word. And it is not a pure desiring machine, but it might be Deleuze’s “life.” Perhaps it is being as becoming, reality as realizing itself, or, even better, life en-life-ing itself.

An understanding of time that sees this flow as only moving “forward” on a line is unidimensional and inaccurate to Husserl. Temporalizings as multiple are already multidimensional, a point captured in the standing/streaming image. The spontaneous opening-out-toward of the Living Present gives a Now’s intentional relatedness to its past in relation to its future, its future in response to its Now, etc. Both future and past come alive each moment as response to this, always “new,” Now. Streaming is multidirectional, so that it includes circularity and, in being circular, is also non-streaming. For Husserl, life is this Living Present in which happenings happen across the several divisions of self and other, persons and surroundings, and in some ways undercuts these very divisions. This lively Living Present, this very Present life or living is what might be pointed at in the experience of the “live word” of Chinul.

IV. *Husserl to Chinul: Words and Life*

The Korean Sôn Master Chinul was not the first to speak of koan practice in terms of the *hwadu* or “live word,”¹⁴ but I have selected him because one can trace the development of several practices over his life, with koan practice surfacing late and apparently as a corrective to the academic study of sutras. The characterization of koan practice is often put in terms of koan practice being directed, despite its use of words, toward the surcease of words, concepts, and, by implication, philosophy. We will see that Chinul’s understanding of koan practice can be understood in this way (following Keel), but I will seek a more complex understanding (following Hori) that looks phenomenologically at the way *hwadu* practice might have worked, given that it is the “live word” of

¹⁴ See Schlutter (2000, 178) concerning the “simple and efficient way of using kung-an [koan]” devised by Ta-Hui (1089-1163) using stories from the masters of the Ts’ao-tung tradition.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

the koan. Before he took up *hwadu* practice—the “path of direct cutting” (Keel 1984, 155), Chinul had developed other methods based on a syncretic approach, including *samadhi* and *prajna*. He had read Ta-hui (1089-1163) and, on the way to a new monastery in 1197, stopped on Chiri Mountain for a retreat. As the memorial stele erected for him in 1211 attests, Chinul recounts his experience: before using *hwadu* “something was still sticking to my heart as an obstacle, as if I were staying with an enemy.” But during the retreat, he says, “I acquired an understanding. Naturally the obstacle no longer stuck to my heart, and the enemy was gone....” (quoted in Keel 1984, 38). Hee-sung Keel (1984, 157) interprets this event as one in which Chinul achieved a “realization-enlightenment” rather than an “understanding-enlightenment”—the former avoids the gap or split between knowing and doing that the latter creates, because of its dependence on concepts and words. If Keel is correct, Chinul’s experience brought him the “final” break from the “tyranny of words” and what might be called a definitive shift from insight through cognitive work into spontaneous reality itself. Keel’s interpretation of Chinul rests on his taking Chinul’s prior awareness of the truth as stemming wholly from conceptual understanding of Shen-hui’s *Platform Sutra*: “It was an encounter with the Truth as presented by a text, and hence was inevitably intellectual and abstract” (Keel 1984, 39). But is this shifting experience of Chinul best described as a shift away from the “head” or as some type of integral response of the “two-sided coin”—here, mind/body, which might find itself at the exact point of the emergence of the Living Present? In other words, is there something more complex happening to Chinul that cannot rest on a dichotomization between a conceptual approach and a nonconceptual one? What is the connection or intersection point between these two approaches that might be found in an experience of the “live word” of the *hwadu*, in distinction from the “dead word” accessed by cognition alone, which Keel claims is abstract? I do not think that the difference between the two is using or not using cognition. It may be that words are not lost in this practice, but that a capacity not to hold onto them is attained. Hence a freedom is achieved, which is the originary “freedom” of the reality itself to which the “live word” points. Let’s look more closely at this point in view of Husserl’s genetic phenomenology.

What might Chinul’s experience have been at Chiri? He begins *hwadu* practice with what Husserl would describe as a mind or consciousness settled on or existing within a specific view of the world that has become part of his habituated mode of existing. It includes an understanding of

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

nondualism as the interfusion of what is often taken as “two”: we deluded folks or “sentient beings,” on the one hand, and Buddha, on the other. He explains this interfusion in “The Complete and Sudden Attainment of Buddhahood” by noting how the former arise from the latter. As he puts it, the sentient beings’ “own body, speech, and mind, as well as the forms in the sense-realms, all arise from the body, speech, mind, and sense-realms of the *tathagatas* [Buddhas]... their essences are indistinguishable” (Chinul 1983, 205). At least two forms of cognitive activity would have occurred prior to this habitualization—first, an intellectual analysis or an understanding from reading the sutras of how concepts and their meanings fit together and, second, an intuitive grasp that is an opening to an integrative or more holistic sense of the rightness of the intellectual as related to or yielding a reality. This second form probably flows in part out of Chinul’s practice of Sôn sitting meditation (which he clearly did not take as a road to a passive nonactivity). In sitting, reality is exactly what is given—an immanence of the momentary. The experience with *hwadu* practice, then, must result in an “excess” or “surplus” not achieved in sitting practice as Chinul had been doing it—he experienced an event that is sensed as superceding the intuitive/intellectual, often described as moving beyond words or concepts and the limited reality expressed by them, but also distinct from what he had achieved in his meditative samadhi prior to Chiri.

But Chinul’s experience in *hwadu* practice cannot have simply brought him to no-mind, taken as a state totally lacking in language and cognition.¹⁵ He makes this clear in his response in “Straight Talk on the True Mind” to the question, a response that states, “If people have no mind they are the same as grass or trees” (Chinul 1983, 169). We tend to think of language as a rigid structure of predefined words or rules yielding expressions that refer to ourselves and our surroundings with some accuracy. In reality, our language is a fluidity within us and surrounding us, but we often hold on

¹⁵ Keel distinguishes (3) the *hwadu* as a path of “direct cutting” from both (1) the sudden teaching, whose goal is negative or the realization of emptiness and thus a “transcending of words and thoughts” and (2) understanding-enlightenment which is sudden enlightenment or “complete-sudden faith” (1984, 155). The former (1) I would take to be the experientially noncognitive states of consciousness achieved in Son-sitting practice; the latter (2) would be a cognitively-informed faith that grows out of studying sutras, emerging when one accepts the world-view espoused therein. Where (1) and (2) work together, as they did for Chinul at least in the middle stage of his life, (2) is not completely separate from (1) because the sense of rightness that is brought to faith might come from the sense of emptiness engendered by (1). For Chinul, even though he worked *hwadu* practice without a teacher, (1) and (2) stood as yielding a predisposition to the enlivening of (3) in *hwadu* practice. In recognizing how the latter occurred in his own life, Chinul also sees that an alternate route to the practice of *hwadu* can bypass (1) and (2) for some people.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

tightly to aspects of it—taking a word as having one specific meaning or taking one statement as an accurate expression of a reality. But we swim in words, words swim in us. Husserl would place them, along with all acquired language, on the plane of genesis, into which experiences flow and out of which the next moment flows, not just as a generic Now of an unspecified subject but this here/now. By holding on to specified ways of speaking and using concepts, the subject would be functioning as the limit on the moment, and thus could be existing within Beauvoir’s inauthentic (ungenuine) freedom. Yet, *hwadu* practice is working within language. What if instead of a complete cutting away of language, *hwadu* practice were a realization of a different sort? What if it was a freeing or en-life-ing that included the bringing to life of the word: the “live” word?

Victor Hori would take realization to be, not a break from language/concepts, but rather a breakdown of subject-object dualism within the cognitive nuances of everyday experience. That is, the mind does not become a no-mind empty of cognition. Instead, the *hwadu* that awakens is alive with the plenitude of the Living Present, so that there is a resonating with the habituated cognitions, but also the displaying of a surplus, an inadequacy of them for this Now. Hori moves around the pitfalls of interpreting koan as an “irrational instrument” for attaining a noncognitive enlightenment; in contrast, he claims that koans are performances of *kenshō*, a *kenshōing* or realizing of what “ultimate” reality really is (*kenshō* is the name given by many Zen practitioners for the initiating realization or “enlightenment”). Hori comments: “eventually one realizes that one’s own seeking to answer the koan is itself the activity of the koan” (2000, 306); hence one’s “proof” of understanding the koan is a demonstration or what Hori calls a “performance”—itself an alive moment—a living out the *hwadu*. This performance could even use words, so that what happens in *kenshōing* can include both a conceptual and an intuitive entering into the koan as language representing an ordinary reality. There then comes a dual sense of realization happening—a bringing to one’s mind the real and a bringing oneself, one’s embodied totality, to the reality that the koan points toward. The nonduality between these two is performed and the person *kenshōs* “within ordinary conventional experience” (Hori 2000, 307), rather than in some nirvanic other-land or some bliss-state in this one. The realization of nonduality, then, “cannot be separate and distinct from ordinary dualistic experience” (Hori 2000, 307)—or as Chinul puts it in “The Complete and Sudden Attainment of Buddhahood”: “there is no inside, outside, or in between” of the nondual essences of sentient beings and Buddha (Chinul 1983,

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

205).

The discovery of this truth in a moment that has Chinul working within the “live word” of the koan, the *hwadu*, would cut through the remainder of Chinul’s delusion and thus certain aspects of his intellectual awareness, the “dead” words. But it would have left that Now full of the everything Chinul already had, instead casting it in the new light and cutting off the hold that the cognition had on him, but not cutting off all language and cognition. The performance of nonduality enlists as much or as little language, concepts, life as needed, but without holding onto them in any way—they flow in and out of the moment which itself is always a flow, even of conceptualizing. The performance as the answer to the koan is the leap of spontaneity drawing from the specificities of the koan’s words and situations and of Chinul’s life and previous study/intellection and intuition, but a spontaneity that is a genuine freedom in not being a becoming necessitated by any of all that.

Chinul recognized that there were two approaches to koan work, one which involved working through conceptualizations—that is, the meaning of the koan’s words—and another that broke from that approach to shift to the “live word” (Chinul 1983, 252; Buswell 1983, 68). I would say that the shift requires a non-willed movement that begins from the mind envisioning the import of the words—the persons in the story, the questions asked, the setting, etc.—and shifts into a space where the koan is working the person rather than the person working the koan. In that space perhaps only one word or a phrase becomes the focus and this is the *hwadu: mu*, original face, sound of one hand. For Chinul, the koan he refers to came from Ta-hui; it placed a conundrum before him, claiming that Sôn exists neither in the marketplace (noisy, peopled places) nor in the mountains (quiet solitary places and Chinul’s favorite abode and where he was on his retreat working this koan), while insisting that one cannot leave either of these to find it (Keel 1984, 38).¹⁶ Perhaps he sat with the two counter-images of a person leaving and staying in these two opposite types of place. This work still involves conceptualization in the sense of a holding of the words in front of one but, at least eventually, that yielded to sitting without furthering thoughts about them (which usually one cannot help but doing when first working on a koan). The words give the concrete aspects of the koan, and it is these words (not others) that will break one into this specific realization, which is one in this Now, a Living Present

¹⁶ The reference is to what are probably Chinul’s own words as written down by his students and inscribed on a memorial stele erected in 1211 following Chinul’s death (see Keel 1984, XX).

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

that can never be completely denuded of cognition, according to Husserl. One realizes the liveliness of this Now—one connects to the plenitude of this specific moment of life and its openness into the next Now. The live word is an entering into this en-life-ing.

So, following Hori and not Keel, I would argue that *hwadu* practice does not cut off words except by freeing a spontaneous realization of the moment. This moment of the word becoming alive, en-lifed, gives one the experience of what living really is, of what reality is. This en-life-ing or as Hori calls it, this “*kenshōing*,” brings a seeing with cognitional (e.g., it’s all . . . interconnected), psychological (e.g., “it’s amazing, joyous. . .”), and ontological (e.g., “all is this-here”) impact, a release from previous limitations often tied to habituated language and meaning. It can be experienced as a “return” to a way of being that is originary—“prior” to such habitualizations and thus seemingly “prior” to the ordinary self or its personality, but a priority that is not temporal in the ordinary sense. Instead, it is “temporal” in the sense of the Living Present, which itself is the point of all temporalizing. This moment of the word becoming alive can thus be seen as the desire before desiring: an interactional point of life, that is, of all becomings surging forward into life. It is life-producing life or time-producing time or desire-producing desire or freedom-producing freedom. Life is at heart desire, the desire for itself as the becoming that it is exactly at this moment (and then the next...the next...). Time is an overflowing of Now in all directions while remaining Now, for a plenitude flows into it and it stands open to another plenitude, the specific possibilities that it opens onto: and consequently it is also the free move to freedom described by Beauvoir.

A new vocabulary is needed to name this, if these concepts are to be incorporated into a metaphysics so that this ‘it’, our “desire before desiring,” functions as the nexus point. This ‘it’ is not “a being.” For it is not yet “being x,” in the sense of *having* a characteristic x. Nor is it Deleuze’s “becoming”—this is not sufficient, although it expresses an opening up to..., as fundamental to that into which and out of which the interactionality enfolds. But, within the framework of metaphysics, ‘becoming’ is the conceptual other of ‘being’¹⁷ taken as stable, eternal even (e.g., Plato’s Forms or other philosophers’ substance/essence. This yields a dichotomy hard to overcome, paralleling that of the static and the dynamic, or what Husserl calls the “standing” and the “streaming” of the Living

¹⁷ This point acknowledges Deleuze’s dichotomization of being and becoming; see Colebrook (2002), p. 125.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Present. The interactionality exceeds these labels and categories and embraces both sides.

Perhaps “is-ing”? The “is” gives this moment as what it is and the “ing” designates its opening out into innumerable possible next moments such that whichever the next “is” is, only to the degree that it also “ings”—in that it points to these innumerable next moments and not another set one—determined, this is-ing *itself* designates freedom. Each “is” “ings” so that it can remain neither static nor nonstatic, neither becoming as pure flow nor nonbecoming. A move to the suggested term, en-life-ing, recognizes Husserl’s Living Present, but also Deleuze’s final work on immanence which both equates and distinguishes—a nondualistic move—immanence and “a life...” (Deleuze 2003),¹⁸ where the latter is not that of a subject ontologically, although it is lived out by subjects (the ontic reality). This desire or this “a life...,” which is not subject and not consciousness according to Deleuze, but is and is not immanence, is a free movement beyond the limitations of the person or the limiting personality. As Deleuze puts it, this is “a pure event freed from the accidents of inner and outer life; freed, in other words, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens” (Deleuze 2003, 171). Deleuze’s example comes from Charles Dickens: a moment when an unsympathetic man lies at the brink of death, only to be recovered by the medical attendants. This example has in it more “spontaneity” than found in Sartre’s streetcar chaser and the monk chasing the Patriarch, for there seems little in the moment that accesses the person’s habituated personality. But Deleuze admits the singularity of ‘a life...’—it is not the complete nothing of Sartre. What shows in this event of this immanence, this ‘a life...’, Deleuze terms *haecceity*, “which now singularizes rather than individuating . . . [so that] the life of such an individuality effaces itself to the benefit of the singular life that is immanent to a man [Dickens’ character] who no longer has a name and yet cannot be confused with anyone else” (Deleuze 2003, 172). For Deleuze, subjectivity, personality, individuality, and objectivity emerge out of this immanence, while still being it. The attendants in the hospital spring to life—to life-saving efforts—in facing ‘this life...’—and they grow somewhat sluggish—“cold”—as he, this person, begins emerging to consciousness, so that they begin interacting more with his unsympathetic self (Deleuze 2003, 171). Yet they are not saving some generic life, since life as generic is not alive. Life as singular is alive or is en-life-ing itself in this here and now, hence as this ‘this life...’. To confront ‘this life...’

¹⁸ This translation retains the ellipses in the title that are found in the text (on 171 and 172). Boyman’s translation does not, although they are still in the text.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

experientially is distinct from confronting *this person*, because this person is somehow *not in* the event, although the person is the virtual of ‘a life...’ actualized (Deleuze 2003, 173). This distinction is reminiscent of Husserl’s characterization of the Living Present as “anonymous” subjectivity which nonetheless “belongs” to a specific subject. Husserl’s descriptions of the Living Present point to what is met in the event where ‘a life...’ shows up in our experience.¹⁹ These distinctions that include seeming paradoxes continue to be difficult to articulate.

For Deleuze there is ‘a life...’ as a pure virtual and as actualized: he gives an example: “A wound incarnates or actualizes itself in a state of things and in a lived state”—ouch, I’m wounded! — “but it is itself a pure virtual on the plane of immanence which draws us into a life” (Deleuze 2003, 173). The desire before desiring may be the move of this “drawing into”—this person has “dropped” the entrenched persona and thus comes to touch this ‘a life...’ as its own event. This is the heart of the desire-producing desire: the en-life-ing life. In Chinul’s practice, the *hwadu* points to, and becomes *kenshōed* as, the nondual identity of the absolute as singular and also as individualized in this moment.²⁰ Deleuze is attempting, even in his last writing, to understand this absolute, this transcendental immanence. In contrast, sitting with the *hwadu*, the live word has brought Chinul to it.

REFERENCES

- Agamben, Giorgio. Absolute Immanence. In J. Khalfa, ed., *Introduction to the Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*: 151-169. New York: Continuum, 2003. Orig. Ed. In G. Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
- Alt, Wayne. There Is No Paradox of Desire in Buddhism. *Philosophy East and West* 30 (1980): 521-528.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. New York: Citadel Press/Carol Communications, 1976. Orig. Philosophical Library, 1948.
- Buswell, Robert E., Jr. Introduction. Chinul (1158-1210). *The Korean Approach to Zen: The*

19. Granted Deleuze rejects even Husserl’s genetic phenomenology of which he shows some cognizance (Deleuze 1990, 105). See Agamben (2003, 155).

20. Hori speaks to the difficulty in conceptualizing these matters: he describes the logical system of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* as yielding “the nonduality of duality and nonduality” (Hori 2000, 299-301). In this sutra a goddess tells Sariputra that liberation or realization cannot be put on the side of silence or no-words as over against language and concepts (in Hori 2000, 299, from Thurman 1976, 59).

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

- Collected Works of Chinul*: 1-95. Trans. Robert E. Buswell Jr. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983.
- Buswell, Jr., Robert E. Introduction: The Life and Thought of Chinul. *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen* 1-97. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.
- Chinul (1158-1210). *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen*. Ed. R. Buswell, Jr. Excerpts from Chinul, *The Korean Approach to Zen*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.
- Chinul (1158-1210). *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul*. Trans. Robert E. Buswell Jr. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983.
- Colebrook, Claire. *Gilles Deleuze*. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Deleuze, Gilles. Immanence: A Life. *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*: 25-33. Trans. Anne Boyman. New York: Zone Books, 2001. Orig. "L'Immanence: Une Vie," *Philosophie* 77 (1995).
- Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale. Ed. Constantin V. Boundas. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. Orig. *Logique du sens*. Les Editions de minuit, 1969.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix. *What is Philosophy?* Trans. H. Tomlinson and G. Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Orig.: *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1991.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans., Foreword by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987. Orig. *Mille plateaux*, vol. 2 of *Capitalisme et schizophrénie*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1980.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983. Repr. from Viking Penguin, 1977. Orig. *L'Anti-Oedipe*, Les Editions de Minuit, 1972.
- Herman, A. L. Ah, But There Is a Paradox of Desire in Buddhism—A Reply to Wayne Alt. *Philosophy East and West* 30 (1980): 529-532.
- Herman, A. L. A Solution to the Paradox of Desire in Buddhism. *Philosophy East and West* 29 (1979): 91-94.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

- Holenstein, Elmar. *Phaenomenologie und Association: Zur Struktur und Funktion eines Grundprinzips der passiven Genesis bei E. Husserl*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972.
- Holland, Eugene W. Desire. In Charles J. Stivale, ed., *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts*: 53-62. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005.
- Hori, G. Victor Sôgen. Kôan and Kenshô in the Rinzai Zen Curriculum. In Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, eds., *The Kôan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*: 280-15. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Analyses concerning Passive and Active Syntheses: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*. Trans. A. Steinbock. Boston: Kluwer Academic Press, 2001. Orig. *Analysen Zur passiven Synthesis: Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918-1926*. Margot Fleischer, ed. *Husserliana*, vol. 11. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966. ...
- Husserl, Edmund. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Trans. D. Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966. Orig. *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vortraeger (1929/30)*. Ed. W. Strasser. *Husserliana*, vol. 1. The Hague: Matrinus Nijhoff, 1950.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The C Manuscripts*, various, unpub.
- Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Trans. David Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970. Orig. *Die Krisis der europaeischen Wissenschaften und transzendente Phaenomenologie*. Ed. W. Biemel. *Husserliana*, vol. 6. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Experience and Judgement: Investigations in a Genealogy of Logic*. Trans. J. Churchill and K. Ameriks. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973. Orig. *Erfahrung und Urteil: Untersuchungen ur Genealogie der Logik*. Ed. L. Landgrebe. Hamburg: Claassen, 1964.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Formal and Transcendental Logic. Formale und transzendente Logik*. Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1929. Orig. *Formale und transzendente Logik*. Halle a.S.: Max Niemeyer, 1929.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*. First Book: *General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. F. Kersten. *Collected Works*,

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

- vol. 2. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983. Orig. *Ideen zu einer reinen Phaenomenologie und phaenomenologischen Philosophie*. Erstes Buch: *Allgemeine Einfuehrung in die reine Phaenomenologie (1913)*. Ed. W. Biemel. *Husserliana*, vol. 3. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1950.
- Husserl, Edmund. *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*. Trans. J. Brough. Boston: Kluwer Academic Press, 1991. Orig. *Zur Phaenomenologie des innerer Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*. Ed. R. Boehm. *Husserliana*, vol. 10. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966.
- Kapleau, Philip. Think Neither Good nor Evil. Gateless Gate, Case 23. In John Daido Looi, ed., *Sitting with Koans: Essential Writings on the Practice of Zen Koan Introspection*: 303-312. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006.
- Keel, Hee-Sung. *Chinul: the Founder of the Korean Sôn Tradition*. Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series. Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies & the Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1984.
- Khalifa, Jean. An Impersonal Consciousness. In J. Khalifa, ed., *The Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*: 64-82, 188-192. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Larrabee, M. J. Genesis, Motivation, and Historical Connections. *Man and World* 22 (1989): 315-328.
- Larrabee, M. J. The Genesis of Moral Judgment. *Analecta Husserliana* 15 (1983): 483-493.
- Larrabee, M. J. Inside Time-Consciousness: Diagramming the Flux. *Husserl Studies* 10 (1994): 181-210.
- Larrabee, M. J. There's No Time Like the Present: How to Mind the Now. In John Brough and Lester Embree, eds., *The Many Faces of Time*: 85-111. Boston: Kluwer Academic, 2000.
- Larrabee, M. J. The Time of Trauma: Husserl's Phenomenology and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. *Human Studies* 18 (1995): 351-366.
- Reynolds, Brian. Becoming a Body without Organs: The Masochistic Quest of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In E. Kaufman and K. Heller, eds., *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*: 191-208. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998.
- Schlütter, Morten. "Before the Empty Eon" Versus "A Dog Has No Buddha-Nature": Kung-an Use in the Ts'ao-tung Tradition and Ta'hui's Kung'an Introspection Ch'an. In S. Heine and D.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Wright,, eds., *The Kôan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*: 168-199. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*. Trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick. New York: Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1957. Orig. “La Transcendance de l’ego. Esquisse d’une description phénoménologique,” *Recherches philosophiques* 6 (1936-1937): 85-123.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Trans. & Intro. Hazel E. Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press/ Simon & Schuster, 1992 . Orig. English ed. Philosophical Library, 1956. Orig, *L’être et le néant*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

Thurman, Robert A. F., trans. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: A Mahayana Scripture*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.

Toscano, Alberto. *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. [Ch. 6]

Visvader, John. Reply to Wayne Alt’s “There Is No Paradox of Desire in Buddhism.” *Philosophy East and West* 30 (1980): 533-534.

Visvader, John. The Use of Paradox in Uroboric Philosophies. *Philosophy East and West* 28 (1978): 455-467.



SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Thomas Sherman, S.J.

Loyola Marymount University

NATURE AND THE PARADOX OF DESIRE IN LAOZI'S SAGE IN COMPARISON WITH ARISTOTLE'S VIRTUOUS MAN

The subject of this paper is the understanding of “what is natural” (*ziran*) in the *Laozi* and the paradoxical character of desire of the sage (*sheng ren*) in comparison with Aristotle’s understanding of nature and the non-paradoxical character of desire of the virtuous man (*ho spoudaios, ho agathos*) of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In this paper I shall take the term ‘desire’ to refer to an affective movement or motivation on the part of a human subject to possess or attain something he or she *lacks* and I shall take the description of a desire as the motive to possess or attain *what* is perceived *as desirable because it is not yet possessed or attained*. Desire for something follows upon a knowledge that one lacks that thing. This appears to be evident in the text of the *Laozi*. Desire (*yu*) follows upon some kind of knowledge (*zhi*) of what one lacks. In chapter 3 of the *Laozi*, for example, the sage is to make sure that people are free from both *yu* and *zhi*, for, as chapter 46 states, the greatest misfortune is not to know contentment and the worse calamity the desire to acquire. *Yu* generally is viewed negatively as a proclivity to acquire what one is aware of not possessing and as such is self-centered; such desires we are told in chapter 19 are to be made few. However, *yu* can also have something of a positive connotation as seen in chapter 64, where the sage is described as one who “desires to be without desire” (*yu bu yu*). This description of a “desire to be without desire” is paradoxical. Does not a desire to be without desire imply that the sage lacks the state of being without desire and is not a desire for such a desireless state self-defeating? Now the sage in the *Laozi* is described as the enlightened one who follows “what is natural” (*ziran*) and what is natural is the way or *dao* of non-action (*wu-wei*) as action free from self-centered desire. Edward Slingerland in his recent book *Effortless Action* has seen the sage’s following of the *dao* in *wuwei* a paradoxical desire to act without desire.¹ In this paper I shall argue that this paradoxical desire is actually rooted in a more fundamental paradox that arises from the *Laozi*’s

¹ Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, Oxford, 1993 pp. 77-117.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

understanding of the *dao* as “what is natural”. According to this understanding, what is natural is what is “originally so” - the nameless, constant (*chang*) *dao* –a reality which the sage is *already* united with and yet somehow (paradoxically) in need of *returning* to. I shall compare this understanding of nature with the Aristotelian understanding of nature as a way of explaining why the sage’s desire to act *wuwei* is paradoxical while the Aristotelian virtuous man’s desire to act virtuously is non paradoxical. The reason why the sage’s desire to act *wuwei* is paradoxical while the Aristotelian virtuous man’s desire to act virtuously is not, I shall suggest, is that the Daoist understanding of “what is natural” does not explicitly allow for development, while the Aristotelian understanding of nature does.

1. ‘What is Natural’ as Desired by the Sage in the Laozi

In the well known first chapter of the *Laozi* the *dao* is described as both the nameless source of heaven and earth and as what can be *named*, the “mother” (*mu*) of the ten thousand things. The *nameless dao*, we are told, is eternal, or constant (*chang*) and perceived (*guan*) only in the *absence* of desire while the manifestation of the *dao* as *named* is perceived *according to* desire. In subsequent chapters we learn that the activity of the nameless *dao* is that of non-action (*wuwei*), a highly efficacious activity free of self-centered desire (cf. 37) and that the good human being, or sage, is one who follows the *dao* in non-action, that is, in action free from self-centered desire (19, 48, 63). In chapter 25 of the *Laozi* human beings are described as imitating (*fa*) the *dao* as the *dao* itself imitates (*fa*) ‘what is natural’ (*ziran*) (25). The *dao*, then, as *ziran* ‘what is natural’ appears to be the fundamental motivation, or core value, of the sage.²

Ziran, variously translated as ‘what is natural’, ‘that which is naturally so’³, ‘so-of-itself’⁴, or ‘spontaneity,’⁵ refers to the way a thing is when its actions spring from its own internal essence, though scholars have observed in the *Laozi* multiple senses of what it means for something to be *ziran*.⁶ Among these senses, *ziran* can mean what is “originally so” or the primordial unspoiled state of a thing that has come about by itself without any outside force. In the *Laozi* metaphors such as “the

² As Liu Xiaogan argues in Liu 1998 and 1999.

³ D.C. Lau 1976: 82.

⁴ Xiaogan 1998: 217.

⁵ Isabelle Robinet 1999: 143-4.

⁶ See Edward Slingerland 2003:97-107. .

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

infant” (*ying’ er*) (10, 20, 28, 55) and “the uncarved piece of wood” (*pu*) (15, 28, 31, 32, 37, 57) appear to illustrate *ziran* in this sense. *Ziran* can also mean what is unconstrained by any outside force or what is “internal or enduring”.⁷ *Ziran* also refers to ultimate reality⁸ and in this sense may be expressed in the *Laozi* by metaphors like ‘what is nameless’ (*wu ming*) (1, 31) and ‘the One’ (*yi*) (39). All these various denotations of the term *ziran* are operative in the sage’s following the *dao* as ‘what is natural’. *Ziran* or ‘what is natural’ is what is the ultimate dynamic reality within all things and (most significantly for our study here) so within the sage himself.⁹ Yet for the sage to follow the *dao* because of its naturalness requires the sage to *return (fan)* or *return home, (gui)* to that root (*gen*) or primordial source and condition *within* himself:

“The teeming multitude of things, each returns home to its root and returning to one’s root is called stillness. This is known as returning to one’s destiny. And returning to one’s destiny is known as constancy (*chang*). To know constancy is called ‘enlightenment.’” (16, cf. 28, 52)

The activity of return is also the activity of the *dao* (40) so that by returning to the constancy (*chang*) of *dao* within himself, the sage follows the activity of the *dao* and attains *wuwei* of the nameless *dao*: action without desire (*yu*) (34, 37). In other words, in returning to the *dao* within himself, the sage *becomes* the *dao* in acting *wuwei*.

But there is a difficulty here in this description of the sage’s following the *dao* by acting *wuwei* as scholars, such as Edward Slingerland, in his book *Effortless Action*, have pointed out. Any effort on the part of the sage to act *wuwei* seems a paradoxical effort to achieve what is effortless in a paradoxical desire to act without desire. That the sage does have to exert effort to attain *wuwei* is apparent from a perusal of the text of the *Laozi*. We read, for instance, that the sage must, among other things, withdraw from the desires and distraction of the senses (12) and the world that takes him outside himself (26). He must cultivate (*xiu*) (54) or accumulate (*ji*) virtue (*de*),¹⁰ practice moderation

⁷ Thus, Xiaogan in Slingerland 2003: 97.

⁸ See Wang Bi’s commentary on *ziran* in Paul Lin 1977: 46-7.

⁹ *Ziran* as what is ultimate in the world and in the sage differs from *qing* used in later Chinese thought to refer to what is innate and specific to human beings, see Zhang Dainian 2002: 366-383.

¹⁰ For more detail on the nature of *de* see also: Zhang Dainian 2002: 341. Zhang notes that the term *de* can refer to the “power” of the Dao (51) as well as to virtue and virtuous conduct (21, 38). See also: Robert Henricks 1999: 162. I understand these references as equivalent in the *DDJ*. See also Phillip J. Ivanhoe, 1999: 239-257. Ivanhoe is concerned

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

(*se*) (59), avoid contention (8, 64), maintain his energy (*qi*) (10), exhibit caution with respect to favor and disgrace (13), cease from useless learning and its anxiety (20) and steer clear of all that is extreme, extravagant or excessive (29). In addition, the sage must eliminate (64), or reduce (19) problematic desires and keep to a minimum the appropriate desires (19). In short, the sage must make the effort (and so, presumably desire) to cultivate virtue if he is to attain *wuwei*. Of course once the sage acts *wuwei* he is able to perceive the desireless, nameless *dao*. The problem, though, is to explain without paradox how the sage is able to get to that desire-less activity without invoking some kind of desire to do so.

The paradox appears most clearly in the description of the sage cultivating virtue. If in Daoist usage *de* refers to the nature of a thing (because it is in virtue of its *de* that a thing is what it is),¹¹ then the requirement of the sage to cultivate virtue implies that the sage in some way *lacks* virtue and so *needs* to cultivate virtue by returning within himself. In cultivating virtue the sage is paradoxically both identified and not identified with the *dao* and so both without desire and with desire, both enlightened and in need of being enlightened. If the paradox is the desire to act without desire, the deeper paradox is in desiring to *become* what one *already is*. As we shall see in our comparison with Aristotle, the ultimate explanation for this fundamental paradox in the sage is the absence of an explicit notion of development in the Daoist view of ‘what is natural’.

2. The Good Human Being’s Desire for ‘What is Natural’ in Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics

Aristotle begins his *Nicomachean Ethics* with an analysis of the term good (*agathos*) as that which is desired (*tinōs ephiesthai*) (NE 1094a1-3). The general term for desire in Aristotle is *orexis*. *Epithumia* is the term he uses for bodily desire and *thumos* for passionate anger. The desire for an end or goal in action, is *boulesis*, or rational desire, and the desire for a good as means to that end or goal,

with comparing *de* in Laozi with *de* in Confucius’ *Analects* with respect to three characteristics, the attractive power of the person with *de*, the distinctive effect of *de* on those who come into its presence, and the relationship between *de* and *wuwei* in government. But *de* is also a term of approbation and I am concerned rather with Laozi’s *de* as descriptive of the goodness of the sage’s action (or non-action) as that compares with Aristotle’s notion of *arête* in the virtuous man’s virtuous activity in the *NE*. For a comparison between Ivanhoe and David Hall’s interpretations of *de* in the *DDJ*, see Erin Cline 2004:

¹¹ D.C. Lao, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching*, Penguin Classics 1976: 42.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Aristotle calls choice (*proairesis*) or deliberative desire (*orexis bouleutike*) (*NE* 1111b20-31, 1139a21-b13).

The fundamental desire of human beings according to Aristotle is the rational desire (*boulesis*) for the supreme good as ultimate goal or most final end of all that we do, what he calls the human good (*t'anthropinon agathon*) of happiness (*eudaimonia*) which for Aristotle (and for the ancient Greeks in general) is understood to be a complete lifetime of living well (*eu praxein*).¹² In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues in effect that living well for human beings must consist in a life that is naturally fulfilling for human beings. He reasons that just as every living thing has a natural function (*ergon*) or characteristic activity which makes them what they are, human beings must also have a natural function or characteristic activity and that living well must consist in a life of such activity.¹³ This characteristic human activity is rational activity. And as rational activity can be done either well or poorly, living well as a human being must consist in a life of rational activity done well, that is, *virtuously* (*NE* 1097b23-1098a18). But since human beings are not naturally born living well, they need to learn how to do so, they have a natural need, in other words, to *acquire* virtue.

'What is natural', or nature (*phusis*) is the fundamental reality in Aristotle's philosophy. In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle lists the meanings of the term *phusis* (*Meta* 1014b16-1015a19). *Phusis* can refer variously to the genesis of growing things, the primary element in a thing from which its growth proceeds, the source from which the primary movement of the thing's essence arises, the primary matter from which any non-natural object consists or is made of, as e.g. bronze is said to be the nature of the statue or wood the nature of wooden things, and finally, the substance of natural (that is, not artificial) objects. But *phusis* in the primary and strict sense is the substance of things as those things have in themselves a source of movement; nature being the source of their movement present in them somehow, either potentially or actually. As potential (*dunamis*), nature is the source of movement in the thing in process toward its characteristic activity; nature as actual (*energeia*) is precisely that activity.¹⁴ The primary instance of actuality and the good as final end or goal of all other natures is the

¹² For a study of the ancient Greek notions of happiness and virtue, see Julia Annas 1993.

¹³ For a recent analysis of Aristotle's function argument and its function in the *NE*, see: Gavin Lawrence, "The Function of the Function Argument" 2001: 445-475.

¹⁴ *Energeia* for Aristotle can signify either activity or the actuality of something in its activity, see John Rist on the *energeia* in Aristotle's philosophy in Rist 1989: 105-119.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

energeia of god's contemplative self-awareness – an eternally perfect, simple, blessed life of self-aware understanding.¹⁵ Diversified according to the myriad kinds of living things, non-divine nature as potential is in a developmental process toward this divine actuality in so far as each living thing of every kind strives for its own characteristic activity. As Aristotle explains in his *De Anima*, besides each living thing's instinctive desire for life:

... “the most natural act is the production of another like itself, an animal producing an animal, a plant a plant, in order that, as far as nature allows, it may take part in the eternal and divine. That is the goal towards which all things strive, that for the sake of which they do whatever their nature renders possible ... since then no living thing is able to partake in what is eternal and divine by uninterrupted continuance (for nothing perishable can for ever remain the same), it tries to achieve that end in the only way possible to it, and success is possible in various degrees; so it remains not indeed as the self-same individual but continues as something like itself – not numerically but specifically one.” (*De Anima* 415a26-b7)¹⁶

As the characteristic activity of human beings is rational, natural human striving for the eternal and the divine is not limited to the non-rational instinct for life and its continuance in procreation but is more specifically for a life of virtuous rational activity.¹⁷

Like the sage of the *Laozi*, the virtuous man desires to follow ‘what is natural’ as he understands this. But for the virtuous man ‘what is natural’ for human beings (as for all other beings not divine) is a developing process which has a *potential* as well as an actual aspect. In the *NE* this dual aspect appears in the distinction Aristotle makes between human nature as the original constitution or tendency to act apart from any outside intervention and human nature actualized in virtuous activity (*NE* 1103a26-34).¹⁸ Human nature in the sense of what is potential can be *contrasted* with virtuous habituation:

¹⁵ *Metaphysics* 1072b1-30; *NE* 1154b21-31..

¹⁶ Here and henceforth in quoting Aristotle I will use *The Complete Works of Aristotle* The Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes 1985.

¹⁷ See *NE* 1177a8-1179a33; *Politics* 1253a1-38

¹⁸ See also Aristotle's contrast between conventional and natural justice where he notes that what is naturally just is just everywhere in any culture for people who have properly developed: *NE* 1134b18-1135a5 and his treatment of the pleasure of unimpeded natural activity: *ibid.* 1153a12-15, b17-19. And in the *Politics* Aristotle states clearly that “nature is an end

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue come about as a result of habit. From this it is also plain that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature ... for nothing by nature behaves in one way and then by training behaves in another. Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit (*NE* 1103a14-25).

Human beings, then, are not by nature (nature as *potential*) virtuous but rather *capable* of virtue. They are not by nature happy or fulfilled but can become so by actualizing their natural potential in virtuous activity. In acquiring the virtues, each individual human being actualizes his/ her natural capacities with the aid of others in their political community. The virtues then become ‘second nature’ so that acting virtuously becomes “acting naturally” for the good human being. Until the human being acquires the virtues, he or she is not actually a virtuous person, but as a student of virtue, is rather *capable of becoming* virtuous. But the capacity for acquiring virtue does not by itself render someone virtuous. Actualization of this potential requires the aid of others who are actually what the student of virtue is potentially. Thus the student of virtue cannot hope to become virtuous simply by his or her own efforts but needs the guidance and support of a good community, a community of parents, teachers, citizens and rulers.

Once the student of virtue has actually become virtuous, the characteristic psychological experience of this actualization of his potential is pleasure (*hedone*). According to Aristotle, every living thing experiences pleasure in actualizing its nature in an unimpeded performance of its characteristic activity (*NE* 1176a4-9). As human nature is perfectly actualized in virtuous rational activity, an unimpeded performance of such activity is most naturally pleasant (*NE* 1153a12-15) for human beings who are virtuous (*NE* 1099a5-24). Such pleasure arises from a perfect integration of the intellectual, appetitive, and emotional parts of the virtuous man’s soul (cf. *NE* 1144a1-37). The virtuous man appreciates and enjoys the goodness of his life (*NE* 1117b11-12, 1166a19-21) and,

(*telos*) since what we say the nature of each thing is, is what it is when its coming to be is completed”: *Politics* 1252b32-33. In this way the political community “exists by nature” as the fullest way human beings are social: *ibid.* 1252b24-1253b1. . .

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

without any grounds for shame in his thoughts or actions (*NE* 1128b10-35) can enjoy times of solitude as well as times of companionship with others, especially the companionship of good friends (*NE* 1166a1-35). He is spontaneous and at ease even in sudden danger (*NE* 1117a17-22), temperate (*NE* 1119a7-17), generous (*NE* 1120a23-27), and regardless of self (*NE* 1120b6-7). While he is self-confident in his worthiness of being honored, the value he places on the nobility of virtuous living makes him ultimately indifferent even to honor (*NE* 1124a16-20). He is good-tempered (1125b27-1126b31), congenial in social intercourse (*NE* 1126b12-1127a6) honest (*NE* 1127a33-b9), yet tactful (*NE* 1127b33-1128a23). Finally, in contemplative activity, the best and most pleasant of activities (*NE* 1178a5-8), the virtuous man experiences, as far as is humanly possible, the pleasure god experiences in divine contemplation (*NE* 1178b21-24). In effect, to the extent to which the student of virtue actualizes himself in virtuous activity, he experiences a satisfaction and cessation of his desire in the pleasure of fulfillment – an experience comparable to the sage’s experience of the cessation of desire in *wuwei*.

Conclusion: The Good Human Being’s Desire for ‘What is Natural’ in the Laozi and the Nicomachean Ethics

As we have seen, for both *Laozi* and Aristotle the good human being fundamentally desires ‘what is natural’ in his actions. The phenomenon of the good human being and the good human being’s fundamental desire to act well according to ‘what is natural’ for human beings is the same for both. Where they differ is in their understanding of ‘what is natural’ as the object of their fundamental desire. For the sage ‘what is natural’ is basically what is originally so. What this means of course is open to interpretation. But however one interprets “what is natural” (say, as is fashionable these days, in terms of *process*) the paradox in the description of the sage remains in the description of his having to cultivate virtue in order to return to “what is natural”. If he needs to cultivate virtue and virtue is what he is by nature, then the sage is both at one with and estranged from his nature (again, however that nature is understood). As the *Laozi* makes no distinction between the potential and the actual in ‘what is natural’ as a developing reality comparable to Aristotle, the description of the sage’s cultivation of virtue inevitably ends in a paradoxical state of being both united with and not united with the *dao*. Without some sort of notion of *development* in the sage which employs some sort of

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

distinction between what is potential and actual in *ziran*, comparable to Aristotle's account, the sage paradoxically returns (because he *needs* to return) to what he *already is*. In addition, it is interesting that while the sage paradoxically needs to cultivate virtue in returning to what he already is, there is no indication in the text of the *Laozi* that he himself attains *wuwei* with the help of anyone or anything else. He evidently must return within himself by himself and if he does benefit many others by this return he somehow (and paradoxically) achieves this by himself. He does not appear to need a community to help him. He must (paradoxically) work out his salvation by himself.

In contrast, Aristotle's understanding of 'what is natural' (short of the eternal actuality of the divine nature) is a dynamic potential for actualization that requires the aid of a community of other actualized individuals of the same nature. As potentially virtuous, the student of virtue desires his complete actualization in a life of virtuous activity but that actualization requires not simply his own effort but a community of fellow human beings, some of whom at least are themselves actualized as virtuous who can help him actualize his potential. Without the help of others the student of virtue could not become virtuous – he could not paradoxically pull himself up by his own bootstraps as sage apparently must do in the *Laozi*. However, once the student of virtue actually becomes virtuous, thanks to his own effort in cooperation with others in community, his fundamental desire to become virtuous is satisfied and the experience of that satisfaction is the pleasure of complete human actualization. The virtuous man is thereby free of the desire to *become* virtuous and to this extent he experiences the pleasure of fulfillment in virtuous activity that is analogous to the sage's experience of *wuwei*.

Thus, if the fundamental desire of sage of the *Laozi* is paradoxically a desire "to be what you already are", the fundamental desire of the virtuous man in the *NE* is the non-paradoxical desire "to become what you can be".

I will end this paper with a comparison of the image of the child in the *Laozi* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* as symbolic of the difference in their understanding of 'what is natural'. As the *Laozi* understands 'what is natural' as primordially what is so, among the dominant images of this primordial state is that of the child (*ying er*). For Aristotle, on the other hand, for whom the primordial state of natures (other than the divine) is a potential for actualization, the child is anything but a symbol for what is natural in the sense of the fully actualized virtuous man. Children, for Aristotle, are

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

incapable of happiness for they are incapable of virtuous actions. If people call children happy it is, Aristotle thinks, because of their *potential* to become happy as virtuous adults. If anything the child for Aristotle is rather a symbol of bare human potentiality and actually what is animal in our nature rather than what is rational and best in us (cf. *NE* 1100a1-9).

REFERENCES

- Annas, Julia. 1993. *The Morality of Happiness*. Oxford University Press.
- Barnes, Jonathan ed. 1985. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Princeton Bollingen Series. LXXI.
- Cline, Erin. 2004. "Two Interpretations of *De* in the *Dao De Jing*". *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. 31.2:
- Henricks, Robert G. 1999. "The Analogy of the Dao and the Field". *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi*. Eds. Csikszentmihalyi, Mark and Ivanhoe, Philip J. State University of New York. 161-173.
- Ivanhoe, Philip J. 1999. "The Concept of *de* (Virtue) in Laozi". *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi*. Eds. Csikszentmihalyi, Mark and Ivanhoe, Philip J. State University of New York. 239-257.
- _____. 2002. *The Daodejing of Laozi*. New York: Seven Bridges Press.
- Kraut, Richard and Lawrence, Gavin. 1995. "Nonaggregatibility, Inclusiveness, and the Theory of Focal Value". *Phronesis*. 42:32-76.
- Lau, D.C. 1976. *Tao Te Ching*. Penguin.
- Lawrence, Gavin and Kraut, Richard. 1995. "Nonaggregatibility, Inclusiveness, and the Theory of Focal Value". *Phronesis*. 42:32-76.
- _____. 2001. "The Function of the Function Argument". *Ancient Philosophy*. 21: 445-475.
- Lin, Paul J. 1977. *A Translation of Lao Tzu's Tao te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary*. Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies: The University of Michigan.
- Liu, Xiaogan. 1998. "The Core Value in Taoism: Its Meaning and Signification Today". *Lao-Tzu and the Tao-te-ching*. Eds. Kohn, Livia and LaFargue Michael. State University Press of New York. 211-228.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

- _____. 1999. "An Inquiry into the Core Value in Laozi's Philosophy". *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi*. Eds. Csikszentmihalyi, Mark and Ivanhoe, Philip J. State University of New York. 211-237.
- Rist, John. 1989. *The Mind of Aristotle*. University of Toronto Press.
- Robinet, Isabelle. 1999. "The Diverse Interpretations of the Laozi". *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi*. Eds. Csikszentmihalyi, Mark and Ivanhoe, Philip J. State University of New York. 127-159.
- Sherman, Thomas. "Human Happiness and the Role of Philosophical Wisdom in the *Nicomachean Ethics*". *International Philosophical Quarterly*. 42.4: 467-492.
- Slingerland, Edward. 2003. *Effortless Action*. Oxford University Press.
- Wang, (James) Qingjie, Wang. 2000. "Heng Dao and Appropriation of Nature – a hermeneutical interpretation of Laozi." *Asian Philosophy*. 10.2: 149-163.
- Zhang Dainian. 2002. *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. Yale University Press.



Winner of the SACP Graduate Student Paper Award

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Daniel J. Stephens

The University of Hong Kong

CULTIVATING PROPER DESIRES

I. Introduction

Despite attempts to label Confucianism a philosophy, a religion, a wisdom tradition, or simply a system of thought, no single label has been able to sufficiently classify Confucianism and capture the totality of the Confucian project. Recently, the most popular interpretation of Confucianism is as a system of moral and social development that includes, to various degrees, elements that we can consider moral, religious, political, and philosophical. This general interpretation of Confucianism as development-oriented is certainly not without merit when we take into consideration the very beginnings of the Confucian school and pedagogy as the moral and social training of pupils to become *junzi*.¹ Even given this general framework, however, further room for interpretation still exists, as the question of how we ought to conceive of the Confucian system of development still needs to be answered.

The purpose of this essay is to further clarify this development-oriented interpretation of Confucianism, by exploring the ways in which this moral and social development entails a transformation of the desires of the individual who takes it up, focusing particularly on drawing out an understanding of which desires the pupil should nurture, and which she should eliminate in her process of cultivation. Typically, a discussion of desire within Confucian moral discourse puts the terms *yi* (righteousness/appropriateness) and *li* (profit/benefit) in opposition to each other, leading to a consistent view of which desires should be eliminated,² but also creating an apparent tension within the Confucian system between the goals of moral cultivation and personal and societal thriving. This

¹ Wing-tsit Chan notes that the term *junzi* appears 107 times within the Analects, pointing to the great importance of this concept to Confucian philosophy. Chan, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 15. It is important to note that *jun* is often used in the pre-Qin period with the meaning of “ruler”, with *junzi* meaning literally the “son of a ruler”. *Junzi* then sometimes referred to a person of noble status, and sometimes meant a person of qualitative achievement, giving us an understanding that the development of people toward the level of *junzi* made them leaders, in the authoritative sense.

² What exactly this view is will be explained later on.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

essay will attempt to resolve this tension, and thus give a more cohesive picture of the Confucian system in general, through a reconstruction of our picture of desire transformation within Confucian moral development. This reconstruction will necessarily involve a reappraisal of the assumed opposition of *li* and *yi*, and a discussion of how this reappraisal affects our interpretation of desire transformation, and thus moral and societal transformation generally, within the classical Confucian system as laid out in the *Lunyu* and *Mencius*. Hopefully, through such a project, I will be able to give a more holistically balanced account of the Confucian system and a clearer picture of what Confucian cultivation involves with respect to desire transformation, in addition to shedding light on the usefulness of elements of the Confucian theory as reorienting insights that can aid modern ethical discourse as well as modern cultural critique.

II. *The Process of Transforming One's Desires – An Initial Analysis*

The process of changing one's desires within the Confucian project of moral and societal transformation is obviously complex. An initial analysis can be performed that shows that becoming moral within Confucianism involves either the cultivation or elimination of certain desires on two distinct yet mutually impacting levels. The first level involves the desires that directly motivate the performance of actions.³ On this level, a person must engage in a process of moral cultivation in which the desire to perform actions that are in accordance with righteousness is increased within the person, while the desire to perform actions that are not in accordance with righteousness is decreased.⁴ This is a situation-by-situation desire to perform what happens to be the appropriate action for each specific moral choice that confronts the agent.⁵ Underlying this transformation of desires is a second level, as the Confucian project of cultivation is often said to involve a shedding of what could be

³ I understand that this analysis in some way commits me, in this paper, to a form of the belief-desire psychology explanation of human action, and that this explanation is far from uncontroversial. Indeed, I would agree that applying alternate explanations of moral motivation or practical reasoning to Chinese thought is a fruitful endeavor for further work.

⁴ If Confucian righteousness is equated with the having of proper desires, then this formulation has an undesirable circularity. As such, it is clear that I am partial to the more consequentialist or situationist understanding of *yi* as appropriateness. The reasons for this partiality, however, would demand another essay. I thank Chad Hansen for bringing to my attention the need to make explicit this interpretive pre-supposition of mine.

⁵ This is different from the second order desire to “do the right thing” in a situation. This is more the desire to “do the thing that happens to be right” in a specific situation; it is the cultivation of the natural inclination to choose option A in a situation over option B, when confronted with a situation in which option A is what is appropriate.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

termed *renyu*, or “human desires”.⁶ This includes everything from desire of position, money, and sex, to even food and individual survival. It is important to note that developments and changes on either of these two levels will impact the other in a variety of ways. If an individual no longer is motivated by a desire for sex, for instance, the desire to perform an immoral action such as cheating on a spouse will also be weaker. The general desire to be faithful to one’s spouse can, in turn, allow one to temper one’s desire for sex in a situation in which one is presented with an opportunity to cheat. Throughout the course of an individual’s moral development, the interactions tend to reinforce each other in a number of ways. This should be kept in mind as we investigate these two levels of desire transformation individually and attempt to draw a coherent picture of how the cultivation and elimination of desires functions within Confucian moral development.

The first level on which desire is transformed within the Confucian system, that of cultivating the desires to perform moral actions while eliminating the desires to perform immoral actions, is the more straightforward of the two. This is the essence of the journey from *xiaoren* (petty person) to *junzi* (exemplary person), and it exemplifies the embodied transformation that characterizes Confucian moral development. A great deal of light is shed on this process by the existence of the Confucian golden rule, or *shu*. When asked by Zigong whether there was an expression that one could act upon indefinitely, Confucius responded that “there is *shu*: do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire”.⁷ There is within the understanding of *shu*, not only a call to empathy, what Mencius describes as “[taking] this very heart here and [applying] it to what is over there”⁸, but also an imploration to modify one’s actions, and indeed then, one’s desires to act, in order to act toward others in a way that they would desire one to act. It is, metaphorically, using the individual’s current desires regarding actions performed by others toward the individual as a meter stick with which to judge and alter the individual’s desires regarding actions performed by the individual toward others. In 5:12 of the *Lunyu*, Zigong says “I do not want (*yu*) others to impose upon me, nor do I want (*yu*) to impose upon others”. This is an example of *shu* in which the role of desire (*yu*) in the process of *shu* is made

⁶ See Tu Weiming, “The ‘Moral Universal’ from the Perspectives of East Asian Thought”, in his *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*. New York, SUNY Press, 1985, p. 19-50.

⁷ Analects 15:24, from Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*. New York: Ballantine, 1998. All subsequent passages from the Analects are also from this translation.

⁸ Mencius, 1.A.7, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

quite explicit. The fact that Confucius tells him “this is quite beyond [his] reach”⁹ shows that such a sentiment, not wanting to impose on others because it is something he desires others not to do to him, is a sentiment that must be cultivated in earnest within the individual. In Zigong’s case, his tailoring of his desires, toward the goal of making those desires congruent to the desires of other people regarding his actions toward them, is not yet fully complete.¹⁰

This tailoring of certain desires to act can also be taken more generally than in the example of Zigong, and in this case, moral development can be seen as an elimination of certain options presented to the moral agent. Joel Kupperman describes this type of moral development as a “closing off of possibilities, in that certain things (such as brutal or unjust actions) become unthinkable”. He goes on to say that a Confucian sage “would have no choices to make, in that a wide variety of unworthy actions would have ceased to be live options”.¹¹ This would help to explain Confucius’ statement in 2:4 of the *Lunyu* that he was able to “give [his] heart-and-mind free rein without overstepping the boundaries”.¹² We can interpret this statement as saying that he had cultivated within himself the desires to perform the appropriate actions within given circumstances, while completely eliminating from his character the desire to perform actions that would be immoral in certain circumstances.¹³

There are two further points regarding this level of desire transformation upon which I must elaborate. First, there is a difference between the motivation of action of somebody who is working toward cultivation and the motivation of action of somebody who has reached the point of cultivation that Confucius claims he has. The person in the process of cultivation must be actively controlling, reflecting upon, and changing his desires, while the person who is highly cultivated would no longer

⁹ Analects 5:12.

¹⁰ This points to another difference between second-order desires, and the desires that I am discussing that should be changed as a part of the process of becoming moral. Zigong clearly wants to not want to impose upon people. He has the second order desire to “do the right thing”. Confucius’ claim here is that the actual desires, in given situations, to act in the manner that would not impose upon others, are what need to be cultivated. It should also be noted that the second order desire “to act morally” is, in a way, a pre-requisite to taking up personal moral cultivation, and as such, is no more a part of the actual method of becoming moral than desiring “to know karate” is a part of the actual method of becoming proficient in karate.

¹¹ Joel Kupperman, “Tradition and Moral Progress”, in *Culture and Modernity: East West Philosophic Perspectives*. Honolulu: UHP, 1991.

¹² Analects 2:4.

¹³ Again, this cannot be taken as a second order desire, “to perform moral actions” in general. Within a specific situation, he desires to perform the action that would be considered the correct one. Second order desires will become relevant in the later discussion of the opposition of *li* to *yi*.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

have a need to control or alter his desires, as appropriate actions would be standard reactions to circumstances. This embodiment of morality is then like the embodiment of a skill insofar as the improv jazz saxophonist, for example, no longer needs to actively control her technique or think about chord structures and notes, but can nonetheless respond appropriately to given musical situations. Second, we can explain *shu* as a negative formulation of the golden rule and then contrast it with a positive formulation akin to that found, for instance, in Christian morality. As the negative Confucian formulation restricts action and closes off moral options, it can be meaningfully juxtaposed with a positive formulation, which compels action. While many interesting implications can come from a comparison of the two different formulations, the most relevant to this inquiry is the fact that the negative formulation compels an individual to pay attention to his own desires as well as the desires of others, and to change himself accordingly, whereas the positive formulation incurs no necessary change to the desires of the moral agent in question. *Shu* is essentially a relational process. However, the sensitivity to others that is thus characteristic of *shu* need not be present in someone abiding by the positive formulation, and this allows for somebody who takes the positive formulation as a moral precept to impose, sometimes harshly, upon others.¹⁴ These differences illuminate a consistency of interpretation, where *shu* as the negative formulation of the golden rule can be seen to reinforce the type of embodied change of desires and actions within the individual that can be seen elsewhere in Confucianism.

The second level of desire transformation within Confucian cultivation, while common to what is typically espoused in discussions of ethics and desire, is the more problematic for interpreters. This level involves general human desires, and underlies the overall cultivation of desires to perform moral actions and elimination of desires to perform immoral actions. In one's attempt to act morally, earthly desires such as those for power, food, and sex, if not properly controlled, can cause one to act in an inappropriate manner. This is perhaps why the concept of eliminating or controlling such desires is, to varying degrees, an essential element of so many ethical traditions. Aquinas wrote that "desire is said to be inordinate through leaving the order of reason, wherein the good of moral virtue consists, and a

¹⁴ Consider the early Americans' common moral justification for demolishing the native cultures: Of course we should force them to convert to Christianity. That's what we'd want if we were them.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

thing is said to be a sin through being contrary to virtue”.¹⁵ Augustine also warns us of the dangers of succumbing to inordinate earthly desires, stating that, “when the will abandons what is above itself and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil”.¹⁶ In the *Phaedo*, Socrates presents the practice of philosophy as a preparation for death that separates the soul from the body, and states that “only the body and its desires cause war, civil discord, and battles”.¹⁷ Desire for earthly things and survival is also something to be shed in Buddhism, as David Kalupahana explains, “with the elimination of such desire [one] can anticipate the possibility of overcoming future rebirth”.¹⁸ Likewise, Mencius also makes a statement about the moral necessity of shedding many of one’s desires: “There is nothing better for the nurturing of one’s heart than to reduce the number of one’s desires”.¹⁹

It would appear on the surface, then, that Confucianism is as against desires for all things earthly as the other ethical traditions from (or for) which these thinkers were speaking. However, Socrates, Aquinas, and Augustine are primarily concerned with what the soul is going to do after death, and how our desires in this life can be negatively effective to that end, and Buddhists are concerned with desire’s relationship to the escape from the Samsaric cycle. Confucianism, uniquely, is not concerned with the shedding of human desires as a moral precursor to a positively construed afterlife.²⁰ For this reason, any interpretation of Confucian moral theory must take into account the implications of this difference, especially considering that the lack of a focus on the afterlife entails Confucianism’s greater focus on the world that we experience, particularly on beneficial social change. The Confucian system is meant to have a positive impact in the world that we are currently experiencing, and this necessarily includes a sense of human thriving that entails a fulfillment of certain desires such as those for food, shelter, and survival. For example, within the *Lunyu*, when Confucius and his disciples are sharing what it is they would most like to do, Confucius says that he “would like to bring peace and

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Q148.A1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benzinger Bros, 1947.

¹⁶ Augustine, *City of God* XII, 6; trans. Marcus Dods, in *The Essential Augustine*, Vernon J. Bourke, ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974, p. 160

¹⁷ Plato, *Phaedo*, 66c, trans. G.M.A. Grube. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977.

¹⁸ Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*. Honolulu: UHP, 1992, p. 92.

¹⁹ Mencius, 7.B.35, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

²⁰ It is clear from certain statements in the *Analects*, such as 11:12 and 9:4, that Confucius did not speculate upon nor make central to his philosophy anything regarding what happened to people after death. It was in many ways, an afterthought. Coupled with the contemporary (yet of course, not uncontroversial) interpretation of *tian* as immanent (See, for instance, *Analects* 17:19 and David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*. New York: SUNY Press, 1987, pp. 201-216), it becomes clear that even the religious element of Confucianism was based in transformation of this world.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

contentment to the aged, and to love and protect the young”.²¹ Mencius also speaks of this type of benefit of the people in a positive light, saying that, “When those who are seventy wear silk and eat meat, and the masses are neither cold nor hungry, it is impossible for their prince not to be a true King”.²² These examples point toward a need to benefit the people, without necessarily implying that the sacrifice of one’s own material wellbeing is a necessary condition of achieving the desirable ends. Confucius did not, after all, say that his own peace and contentment must be sacrificed to bring these to others. The Confucian goal seems not only to include materially benefiting other people (which may possibly necessitate denying many of one’s own desires for material comfort), but also a fulfillment of one’s own desires as another member of the thriving community.²³ This may possibly set Confucianism apart from the aforementioned self-denying moral systems and create a more complex relationship between benefiting oneself and benefiting others as an element of a moral life.

These different ways in which we can find a contrast between the Good and the materially beneficial must be further clarified in order to avoid confusion as we proceed. Confucianism seems to be in agreement with the other moral systems I have mentioned in that selfish desires for the benefit of oneself at the expense of others are viewed negatively. It may be the case that Confucianism also mandates as a part of one’s development that one shed certain desires for personal material benefit, although a possible interpretive difference may come in that Confucianism does not necessarily deny altogether that one ought to desire material comfort. Furthermore, the lack of a focus on supernatural elements or the afterlife seems to make material benefit of others a higher good in Confucianism than in the other systems mentioned. This is because while benefiting others materially may be acceptable to Augustine and the rest, it is of far less importance than allowing and enabling oneself and others to achieve their metaphysical goal. This allows the other moral systems to come down strongly against material benefit in a way in which Confucianism seems to be unable. In other words, in the other moral systems, one’s own desires for material benefit are a definite wrong, and the desire to materially benefit others is a possible good. In Confucianism, the desire to materially benefit others is a definite

²¹ Analects 5:26.

²² Mencius, 1.A.4, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

²³ This can be accounted for by the Confucian understanding of a self as relationally defined. A person who is not materially thriving is not necessarily, to Confucians, an atomistic individual engaged in sacrifice. He is a non-thriving member of the community he himself is trying to make thrive.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

good, and the desire to benefit one's self is a possible wrong.²⁴ In Confucianism, then, the relationship between the Good and the materially beneficial is especially complicated, and this complication comes to the forefront when we attempt to make an interpretation of Confucian moral pedagogy that places it cohesively alongside the social goals of the Confucian system. In order to truly understand the way in which Confucian moral theory requires the individual to change his desires, we must get a clear picture of this complication and the resulting tension that it creates, and see if there is any way that it can be resolved.

III. *A Reappraisal of the Opposition of li to yi.*

At this point it is clear that shedding or controlling one's desires for material benefit, food, survival, comfort, etc. is indeed one element of the active process of Confucian cultivation. In addition, however, we must take into consideration the fact that Confucian social philosophy is based around properly ordering society in order to give all its members, including those considered to be living righteously, an enjoyable, flourishing human existence. So, Confucianism seems to contain a unique tension between its rejection of material things for the sake of righteousness, and its pragmatic focus on human benefit within the world of experience, especially considering the very plausible interpretive possibility of including the morally cultivated person as a member of the benefited community. This tension is most profound within interpretations of Confucian moral theory that ascribe an apparent opposition between the terms *yi* (righteousness) and *li* (profit or benefit). The step that Confucians are generally interpreted as taking as a result of this opposition is to place complete importance upon *yi*, either through an outright admonition of desiring *li* in much the same way earthly desires were vilified in the earlier discussion, or through a removal of *li* from the contemplations of the morally cultivated person as irrelevant, if not outright damaging, to human flourishing. One such interpretation is advanced by Fung Yu-lan, for instance, whose statement that "*yi* and *li* are in Confucianism diametrically opposed terms"²⁵ encapsulates this view quite nicely. Whether or not this interpretation is the one to which we should hold has great consequences in our inquiry regarding desire and its

²⁴ I would like to thank Franklin Perkins for bringing to my attention the need to clarify the complexities of this distinction.

²⁵ Fung Yu-lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, Toronto: Macmillan, 1948, p.42.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

specific place in the Confucian project. Therefore, an explanation and assessment of this interpretation are now necessary.

A first piece of evidence that a fundamental incompatibility between righteousness and benefit exists, especially in a manner that may lead us to the interpretation of *yi* as of fundamental or sole importance to the Confucian project, is found within several statements of the *Mencius*. In the very first discussion in the *Mencius*, King Hui of Liang asks about how to benefit or profit his state, and Mencius responds by asking, “What is the point of mentioning the word ‘profit’? All that matters is that there be benevolence and rightness”.²⁶ Mencius also asks of Song Keng the point of mentioning profit when Song plans on going to Chu to “explain to them the unprofitability of war”,²⁷ going on to explain that if people act because of whether or not something is beneficial or profitable, they cherish “the *li* motive to the total exclusion of morality (*ren* and *yi*)”.²⁸ Furthermore, Mencius goes on to say that, “If you wish to understand the difference between Shun (the sage king) and Zhi (a robber), you need look no further than the gap separating the good and the profitable”.²⁹ While many other examples can be taken from the text, these seem to show quite sufficiently that Mencius argued, at least to some extent, two things. One, that desiring *li* and desiring *yi* were separate almost to the point of being mutually exclusive; and two, that in light of this separation, we must desire only *yi*.³⁰

At first, it seems as though this textual evidence is enough to support the interpretation of Confucianism as *yi*-centered and *li*-denying. However, it is important to keep in mind the context of the intellectual climate in which Mencius’ statements about *li* were made. Mencius was not only attempting to espouse, explain and expand upon the Confucian *dao*, but was also in a position where defending Confucianism from other schools of thought had become necessary. The criticisms of Mozi and the Mohist School presented the first major challenge to the Confucian school of thought. As such,

²⁶ Mencius, 1.A.1, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

²⁷ Mencius, 6.B.4, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Mencius, 7.A.24, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

³⁰ This is where a second order desire comes into play: not in the process of cultivation, but in the discourse regarding the fundamental principles of the Confucian *dao*. This is where desiring benefit and desiring righteousness, as generalities, come under what is essentially a meta-ethical discussion, and is thus fundamental to our understanding of Confucian moral development. Of course, this second order desire then has implications for which desires, as spoken about in Section II, should be cultivated or eliminated. However, as was stated before, this second order desire is not necessarily a part of the method of cultivation, but more of a guiding motivation of it.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Mencius' statements regarding that with which he was arguing against Mohist positions in an attempt to defend Confucianism must be given a reading that is sensitive to the possibility that such statements were influenced in part by a desire to be rhetorically effective to that end.

The greatest point of contention between Mozi and the Confucians was probably their views on graded love vs. universal love, but it is Mozi's emphasis of the primacy of *li* that is most relevant to this discussion. Mozi disagreed with what he considered the Confucian position that *yi* had primacy irrelevant of the benefits that righteousness often brings about. Mozi argues that *li* must be most important since benefit is what keeps the people from suffering. The *Mozi* states, "[One] should work to promote what is beneficial to the world, both directly and indirectly, and avoid what is of no benefit. This is the way of the superior man. And yet, from what we have heard of the conduct of Confucius, it was exactly the opposite of this".³¹ Clearly, Mozi is concerned with social benefit and bringing about what is good for the people, not necessarily "profit" as we think of it today. In his article, "The Public Good That Does the Public Good: A New Reading of Mohism", Lai Whalen explains that in order to understand what Mozi was truly saying we must have "hermeneutical empathy for and suspicion of [the] landmark judgment on *li* that opens the book of Mencius".³² Lai argues that Mencius fundamentally misrepresents Mozi's view on *li*. Mozi equates righteousness with the benefiting of the people, but when Mencius speaks of *li*, according to Lai, he uses it in contexts in which "*li* is clearly short for [*si-li*] or 'private gain' and connotes material gain, economic interest, and political advantage - everything selfish that the Confucian gentleman would be against".³³ *Li* does not necessarily connote such things, as we can see when we examine *li* and notice that it is, etymologically, grain and a blade, signifying the harvest and sustenance - the very basis of human benefit in an agricultural society. There is nothing that signifies selfishness other than specific context, and so Lai's interpretation of Mencius, and Mencius' rhetorically motivated mischaracterization of Mozi as being concerned with self-benefit, appears plausible.³⁴

³¹ Mozi, Part I, 39, in *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967. This saying of Mozi is a misrepresentation of Confucian ideas, which we will see later.

³² Lai Whalen, "The Public Good that Does the Public Good: A New Reading of Mohism", *Asian Philosophy* 3:2, p.125.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ It is also important to consider the motivation of those who compiled the book of Mencius. That such a landmark judgment, as Lai puts it, should come in the beginning of the opening chapter is no coincidence when we consider how this may add to rhetorical effectiveness.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Furthermore, when we examine Mozi's critique of Confucius, it appears to be a mischaracterization as well, considering the many passages where it can be seen that Confucius showed concern for the benefit of the people. Confucius did criticize those who sought personal gain at the expense of others, and his statement that "wealth and position gained through inappropriate (*buyi*) means" are "like floating clouds" to him³⁵ displays this quite explicitly. However, it hardly shows a disdain for the desire to benefit the people, nor does it demonstrate that *yi* and *li* are diametrically opposed. So, in essence, Mozi mischaracterized Confucius as being unconcerned with the public benefit, and thus argued that the public benefit was important. Mencius then mischaracterized Mozi as being concerned with private benefit instead of *yi*. So, when Mencius is speaking of the separation between *li* and *yi*, he is not speaking of the desire to benefit versus the desire to be righteous, he is speaking about the vice of selfishness and the problems that selfishness brings about. It appears then, that the separation between *yi* and *li*, and the need to put *yi* at the forefront, is merely the result of the mischaracterizations of the terms that came about through Mozi's attempt to distinguish his thought from that of Confucius, and Mencius' attempt to distinguish his thoughts from Mozi.

There is a further way in which it is possible to interpret the point that Mencius is making to King Hui of Liang, apart from, and probably more plausible than, Lai's interpretation that Mencius is referring only to the evils of desiring *si-li* while either painting Mohism quite unfairly as a doctrine of self-interest or making a point irrelevant to Mohism that selfishness is bad.³⁶ One could say that Mencius' point is not that the Mohists argue that people ought to be concerned with private benefit, but rather that the most salient and effective term in our moral discourse and deliberation is and ought to be *yi* and not *li*. The consequences of a *li*-centered discourse are not necessarily those of a discourse in which people are asking only how to benefit themselves. Rather, such consequences can be seen to arise out of a different set of considerations that people make when they are attempting to benefit others versus when they are trying to act in accordance with what is appropriate. The efficacy of *li*-centered discourse is simply argued to be less than that of *yi*-centered discourse, even when attributing

³⁵ Analects 7:16.

³⁶ In addition to the two I am mentioning here, one could also advance another interpretation in which Mencius is seen as coming out strongly against benefit altogether. It should be clear from the rest of my argument that I find this view untenable.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

to both the goal of benefiting the people. We must note, however, that this interpretation still in no way positions *li* in an oppositional manner to Confucian morality. Therefore, to use the passages mentioned as a means of supporting a completely *yi*-centered and *li*-denying interpretation of Confucianism would be interpretively unsound.

A second prominent piece of evidence that, within Confucian cultivation, the desire for righteousness is more important than the desire for any type of earthly benefit is Mencius' statement about fish and bear's palm: "Fish is what I desire; bear's palm is also what I desire. Of the two, if I cannot have both, I will set aside fish and take bear's palm. Life is what I desire; righteousness is also what I desire. Of the two, if I cannot have both, I will set aside life and take righteousness".³⁷ Mencius goes on to explain his basic point, that even keeping oneself alive is not an excuse to act in a manner that goes against *yi*. Furthermore, he explains that if people are constantly acting only to keep themselves alive, there is almost no impropriety that they would not commit. According to Mencius, the end that is one's life, if it is taken as more important than *yi*, then justifies any means, including those that run in opposition to *yi*. It is, therefore, possible to interpret this passage in such a way that it tells us to diminish our love of life and hatred of death and focus much more greatly upon *yi*.

On this reading of the passage, it would seem again that earthly benefit and righteousness are terms in opposition to each other on some level, as the earlier etymological analysis of *li* shows that benefit is in essence, life giving. This echoes the passage in the *Lunyu* where Confucius states that the "*junzi* make their plans around the *dao* and not around their sustenance".³⁸ While the possibility of having both life and righteousness (properly following the *dao*) that is displayed through the passage disallows that the two are diametrically opposed, the necessity of choosing one over the other was obviously a pertinent matter. For this reason, this passage is generally regarded to be yet another defense of the *yi* and *li* divide, as well as the subsequent superiority of *yi*. However, it is possible to interpret the essential point of the passage in a different way, based on a few textual considerations.

³⁷ Mencius, 6.A.10, from Paul R. Goldin translation, in the *Hawai'i Reader in Traditional Chinese Culture*, Ed. Victor H. Mair, Nancy S. Steinhardt, and Paul R. Goldin. Honolulu: UHP, 2005, p. 61.

³⁸ Analects 15:32.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Let us first consider Mencius' statements that "...there is nothing more important to a *junzi* than helping others do good"³⁹ and also that "There has never been a person who could straighten others by bending himself".⁴⁰ Also let us consider Confucius' questioning of whether one can truly do his utmost for his lord without instructing him.⁴¹ With these three passages in mind, we can understand that the moral duty of the *junzi* includes attending not only to her own moral cultivation, but also to the cultivation of those around her. This makes sense especially in light of the Confucian emphasis on propriety in relationships as the core of human morality. People, because they are essentially intrinsically related to each other, affect the moral character of those others in which they are in relation. This is different from Christian morality where one's soul is his own individual task, and from certain Buddhist thought that says that no person can affect the karma of another. For Confucianism, an individual's improper moral choices corrupt not only his own moral development, but in a way, the moral development of the entire community. When we reexamine the passage regarding fish and bear's palm with this idea as a reorienting insight, a different reading becomes available, where Mencius was not necessarily speaking of life or earthly benefit versus righteousness but was making a point that no individual's life is ever important enough for him to choose to act immorally to save it.⁴² This is because doing so will have a detrimental effect upon the moral development of the community, and thusly on the community's flourishing as well. We are not to desire our own existence to the detriment of our commitment to *yi*, but this doesn't necessarily mean that human life is, in itself, less valuable than *yi*. In fact, it seems that Mencius could not at all have meant his statement as a general value judgment regarding humanity versus morality. This is because human life is what makes *yi* possible, as, without human life, the unity between heaven and human that forms the metaphysical basis for Confucian morality within the *Mencius* would not be possible. Mencius was stating that he would give his life in order to protect the sacred harmony that exists

³⁹ Mencius, 2.A.8, from D.C. Lau's translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

⁴⁰ Mencius, 3.B.1, from D.C. Lau's translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

⁴¹ Analects 14:7.

⁴² Consider also, on this point, the discussion of the parts of the body of greater and lesser importance that is found in 6.A.14. Clearly Mencius' understanding of what a person ought to do contains some idea of a hierarchy of ends. We are to love life and righteousness, but in a way that reflects our understanding of their graded importance, in the same way we are to nurture both our finger and our back, but with the understand that only a fool would disregard his back to take care of his finger.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

between life and righteousness themselves, which is indeed an act of selflessness meant to bring about both righteousness and benefit. As such, it seems unlikely that this passage from Mencius could be used to support an interpretation of Confucianism in which life, and more specifically the *li* which makes life possible, is so greatly divided from *yi*.

There is one final point that I would like to make regarding the relationship between *yi* and *li*, and what this relationship teaches us about the effects upon desire of Confucian moral and social development. Up until now, this discussion has attempted primarily to look at the ethical philosophy within Confucianism, as if it were separate in some way from the social philosophy.⁴³ This has led us to seek answers for the questions of what desires the individual is to cultivate and how she is to do that. However, in order to truly understand what Confucian cultivation entails in regard to desire, we must examine more closely the way in which the social and political ideas found within Confucianism are related to that task. When we do this, we begin to understand not only the process of the personal cultivation of proper desires, but also the process of the societal cultivation of proper desires from the Confucian standpoint. This may, hopefully, lead to a cohesive understanding of the two, and thus an interpretation in which the tension between the social and ethical philosophy does not exist.

As has been said, Confucian cultivation is meant to transform the individual, and from this transformation, positively impact society. Perhaps it can be said, then, that moral cultivation is all that matters within Confucianism, because the rest of the social development occurs merely as a supervening result of the moral cultivation, from the bottom up. If this is the case, then the distinction between *yi* and *li* makes sense, as desiring and working toward *yi* would be the only truly effective means of bringing about proper societal structure and human flourishing, and *li* would be considered merely irrelevant. This interpretation does not seem to take into account, however, the impact that societal structure can have on an individual's moral development. This impact can be seen in three distinct ways within Confucian discourse.

The first, through the idea that a benevolent ruler is able to impact the morality of his or her people, which we can see displayed in passages regarding the impact of a true king. We see this in the *Mencius*, where he states that a ruler should work to ensure that there is enough food for the people “so

⁴³ A separation that would allow for a lack of cohesion, allowing for the tension mentioned in the beginning of the essay.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

that the people always have sufficient food in good years and escape starvation in bad; only then does he drive them towards goodness”.⁴⁴ We also see this in the *Lunyu* where Ji Kangzi seeks Confucius’ advice regarding the troublesome number of thieves, and Confucius replies, “If you yourself were not so greedy, the people could not be paid to steal”.⁴⁵ The second, through the idea that proper sustenance and material comfort can make the moral path more easy for many, which we can see in the *Mencius* where Mencius says that “The people...will not have constant hearts if they are without constant means”⁴⁶, and in the *Lunyu*, where Confucius states that “it is difficult indeed for persons to be constant in a world where nothing is taken to be something, emptiness is taken to be fullness, and poverty is taken to be comfort”.⁴⁷ The third, from the idea that when a proper *dao* prevails, the choice between morality and thriving never needs to be made, because acting in accordance with righteousness is what will benefit, not just the individual but the society as well. Mencius sees this *dao* as being manifest when “men of small virtue serve men of great virtue, men of small ability serve men of great ability”.⁴⁸ Consider also Confucius in the *Lunyu*, stating that “it is a disgrace to remain poor and without rank when the way prevails in the state; it is a disgrace to be wealthy and of noble rank when it does not”.⁴⁹

What we understand from this part of the investigation is that moral development and social change are fundamentally interrelated in Confucianism. There is no one element of the Confucian project that manifests all of the others. Personal cultivation is important, but unless the Confucian *dao* prevails, cultivation will not seem like the natural path, as people will be forced to choose between, in many cases, survival or morality. When we understand this fact that moral cultivation and proper social order are not only interrelated but also mutually reinforcing, we begin to see that *yi* and *li* are not only not-diametrically-opposed terms, but terms that should always be considered together, when *li* is taken to mean the benefit of the people. This is because considering them together allows us to make a sensible account of the interrelation between the social and ethical philosophies within Confucianism, which in turn affords us an interpretation in which a tension between the goals of each is not present.

⁴⁴ Mencius, 1.A.7, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

⁴⁵ Analects 12:18.

⁴⁶ Mencius, 1.A.7, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

⁴⁷ Analects 7:26

⁴⁸ Mencius, 4.A.7, from D.C. Lau’s translation. New York: Penguin, 1970.

⁴⁹ Analects 8:13.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

What then does this whole discussion of *li* and *yi* do to clarify the implications of an individual's following of the Confucian system in regard to his desires? One thing has been made clear, that benefiting oneself at the expense of others, and the desires to perform such actions, are negatives that the individual should work to eliminate. This does also include a process of elimination and control of certain earthly desires, the fulfillment of which would lead a person to act inappropriately. However, exactly which desires should be eliminated is largely a situational matter, contingent upon which desires may and may not be fulfilled without recourse to harming others, which is essentially a function of societal structure. Considering everything that has been said here, it is important to understand that further answers that we might seek to this question regarding desire's role in Confucian cultivation, especially questions of a more meta-ethical nature, are dependent upon our view of the system as an interrelated whole. A person ought not only to desire those things that will lead her to her own righteousness, for this righteousness is meant to serve the purpose of benefiting the society, which is just as important. She also ought not only to desire the benefit of herself or her society, because this is all but impossible without desiring righteousness. What is left then is that people who follow the Confucian *dao* are to ultimately desire the positive ends within Confucianism at the same time. What they must desire, and what they must work to manifest, is the entire harmony of *yi* and *li*, a world in which moral goodness and benefit not only exist, but also come together.⁵⁰ This means to the individual on the moral path, that her path must be guided by the desire for a harmony between righteousness and benefit in her life, her relations, and her society.

IV. Conclusion

This understanding that, within Confucianism, ethics is necessarily as much a project of social reconstruction as of personal reconstruction can lend us some important insights that are helpful in an examination of our current ethical discourse as well as our attempts to critique and improve the current human condition. It doesn't take a great deal of reflection to realize that those who are benefiting in our world the most are often doing so in ways that harm others. Contemporary author and cultural critic Derrick Jensen goes so far as to advance the idea that the design of our culture (by our culture,

⁵⁰ It is important to note that in harmony, no one element is most important. If the soprano stops singing the "C" over the alto's "A", the harmony is ruined, and vice versa.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

think, wherever you can get Coca-Cola) puts human beings in a situation where desiring even our own survival compels us to compete, oppress, and subjugate to the point where hate is so imbedded and innocuous within human affairs that we barely recognize it.⁵¹ This does indeed create societies in which *yi* and *li* are mutually exclusive, and the shedding of all desires is the only way to act righteously. This generally leads ethical discourse to be centered on how to act properly with such a world condition as a given. It is taken as a foregone conclusion and a fact of human existence, rather than a function of social structure, that the benefit of one must come at the expense of others; hence, the tendency for our discussions of moral development to be desire-denying. What we can learn from Confucianism is that changing this situation, rather than merely accepting it as a constant premise of our ethical discussions, is perhaps the most promising strategy for those who wish to engage in meaningful, fruit-bearing ethical discussion and development.

Kant once looked at this culture of ours at work, in much the same way we do today, noticing that benefit and righteousness were not linked to each other in actual human experience, the way that reason demanded them to be. As a result of this, he posited the kingdom of ends as a final corrective that would allow us to make sense of the fact that righteous people suffered and unrighteous people benefited in this world.⁵² The Confucians, more concerned with this world than an abstract kingdom of ends, saw a similarly unjust society and sought to correct the injustice by creating, in this world, a situation in which people's desires to eat, be comfortable, live, and thrive could be satisfied by simply acting in the manner to which their morally developed hearts incline them, a situation in which we no longer need to choose between fish and bear's paw, so to speak. If we too wish to create such concrete results, then the insights that underlie the Confucian system regarding moral development, social structure, human needs, human desires, and the interconnectedness between them all, can be quite valuable to us.



⁵¹ See Jensen, *The Culture of Make Believe*, New York: Context, 2002.

⁵² See "The Existence of God as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason" in *The Critique of Practical Reason*.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Robert C Solomon (September 14, 1942 - January 2, 2007)

Robert Solomon was a distinguished scholar and teacher in the Philosophy department of the University of Texas at Austin. Although he is probably best remembered for his vast contribution to continental philosophy, particularly in the areas of existentialism and emotion theory, he was also a long-time friend of comparative philosophy. As a profound and sensitive thinker, he readily perceived value in the wisdom traditions of the world and welcomed dialogue with any thinking that authentically confronted the depth and complexity of the human condition. The following paper was presented by Robert Solomon during an SACP sponsored panel at the Eastern meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Washington, D.C., on December 29, 2006. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Kathleen Higgins for generously allowing it to appear in the *SACP Forum*.

Robert C Solomon

University of Texas at Austin

WHIMS OF DESIRE

What is desire? If this interests you, don't let philosophers near the question. What you'll probably get is either desiccation or hypertrophy; nothing like the "craving" (Sanskrit *trsnā*; Pali *tanhā*¹) that worried the Buddha or the grand passions that fascinated the western Romantics. On the one hand, analytic philosophers reduce desire to a banal sense of "wanting." Kathy and I were at a conference a few years ago and a clever young philosopher chose as his example of desire *wanting to eat a banana*. He was no doubt trying to be funny, choosing such a curiously specific appetite, not to mention its Freudian and Mae West implications. But the mantra now is that human psychology, that is, what is called "folk psychology," divides the psychological world into beliefs (information and cognition) and desires (anything that involves conation, broadly defined). This is, of course, pure fabrication. Think about what it means to be "upset," for example. Could one without contortions understand this in terms

¹ Thanks to Arindam Chakrabarti

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

of beliefs and desires? Think about almost any emotion. Of course one can readily identify any number of beliefs and desires that might be associated with emotions, but it is sheer phenomenological incompetence to think that this such an analysis could pass as an understanding of what it is to have an emotion. Or to think that what it is to have a desire is adequately illustrated by wanting to eat a banana. Apparently, some philosophers have lost all interest in desire and desire, accordingly, no longer seems interesting.

On the other hand, there is a recent “Continental” tradition in philosophy that tends to overdramatize almost everything. (Thus, the blood-curdling word “violence” gets used to refer to the misreading of texts.) “Desire,” accordingly, has come to suggest the fantastic as well as the virtually obscene. Jacques Lacan, notably, takes desire to be inseparable from fantasy and the desire for a socially and imaginatively constructed Other, and he virtually drools as he pronounces the word. (I’m not making this up. I actually saw Monsieur Lacan perform, some forty-five years ago in Ann Arbor. He drooled, and more.) True, desire can sometimes mean robust craving, lust, overweening ambition, desperate need, the sort of thing the Buddha warned against. But if the analytic desire is too wimpy, the Lacanian version is just excessive. Yes, desire has an element of fantasy, if minimally, of wanting to have what one does not yet have. But to insist that there are no desires that are merely “material” is misleading in the extreme. It is the very opposite of that reductivism that would make a desire to be nothing but a certain state of the body. Lacan’s desire is immersed in social structures and restrictions, not the body. (Thus, a phallus is not the bodily penis, and masturbation is the most honest expression of human desire.) Desire gets lost in the fantasy that dominates our lives after our “entrance into language.” I don’t know if this makes any sense to you, but the upshot is pretty clear: whatever Lacan is talking about, it’s not the “material” desires that concern us here, whether it is the hopeless craving after Beatrice or Heloise or simply wanting a banana.

Jaegwon Kim, an excellent analytic philosopher, illustrated the impersonal third-person bias in talking about desire when, in the 1960s, he suggested (to general acclaim) that both beliefs and desires should be construed as “theoretical constructs” for the explanation of behavior (like genes and electrons). In other words, there was no mention of or interest in phenomenology, no first person standpoint, no personal experience, no pretense of direct accessibility. But this approach at least had the virtue of not pretending to put forward anything by way of phenomenology. (Belief, I would quickly add, has never

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

been a plausible candidate for an aspect of experience. A belief is a disposition, not an experience.) But Lacan, too, makes the presence of desire mysteriously inaccessible, and this, too, closes off the phenomenological question, Desire, for him, is not present to consciousness either. Now both beliefs and desires are usually treated in folk psychology as “given,” both in the quaint Cartesian sense of transparency to self and in the more problematic sense of “privileged indubitability.” In the case of belief, this is surely false, but it also glosses over what is surely the most fascinating aspect of human desire, the fact that it often operates surreptitiously, if not subconsciously, against our better judgment, sometimes threatening our own survival. (What would it take to come up with an *interesting* instance of wanting a banana? Perhaps if the banana were poisoned, or if one knew that eating the banana would put a end to one’s marriage, or if one were hopelessly addicted to bananas, ruining his or her life.)

Desire is not a singular phenomenon. The word “desire,” like “want,” has been appropriated by philosophers as something of a technical term, suggesting a distinct and essential element in human functioning. But in analytic “folk psychology,” both want and desire include virtually any form of conation (itself not a very precise bit of ancient terminology). In “Continental” philosophy, desire tends to refer to the obscene underflow that runs beneath our lives. In this talk, I want to examine several species of desire not usually attended to either in emaciated “folk psychology” or in the heavy breathing of French psychoanalysis. They are (1) whimsical desires, (2) profound desires (“passions”), and (3) reflective, cultivated and refined desires. Perhaps a more pretentious title would be (with apologies to William James): “The Varieties of Conative Experience.” But I would rather stick with “Whims of Desire.”

Whimsical desires

Many desires are aspects of on-going intentions, projects, or activities (e.g., wanting to eat a banana to finish off one’s lunch). But desires are not always like this, especially for impulsive people and most teenagers. Sometimes, desires, even overwhelming desires, just “pop up” out of nowhere. Not only are they not in any sense an aspect of the Will (thus undermining at least one common interpretation of “Will”), but they also do not fit in any way with one’s intentions, projects and activities and what one wants and plans in any larger sense. Some desires, manifested as *urges*, are utterly impulsive and typically “meaningless” actions. On impulse, a middle age man leaps into a posture he vaguely

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

remembers from his younger days, and embarrasses or hurts himself. Another man has a “fling” and afterwards has no idea why he did it. (He will no doubt describe the event as “meaningless” to his infuriated wife.) But even when urges do not realize themselves in actions, the desire itself may be powerful, utterly unbidden, and humiliating. Saint Augustine, in his *Confessions*, admits to many such desires. But not every philosopher has been so despondent about whimsical desires.

In mid-century existentialist thinking, there was a great deal of anxiety about the free will problem, the idea that antecedent conditions plus the laws of nature made it impossible for anyone to ever perform a truly *free* action. The solution, according to such different authors as Fyodor Dostoevsky and André Malraux, was the “gratuitous act,” an action whose motivation comes out of nowhere and is unrelated to any previous conditions (genetics, upbringing, situational context etc.), breaking with any pattern of character or “rational” behavior. Of course, there were deep worries that such acts might be causally determined nevertheless, but such behavior apparently offered the only chance of proving one’s freedom. Thus in Camus’s novel, *The Stranger*, Meursault shoots an Arab for no reason whatever, unless you consider the blinding light of the sun to be a “reason.” In Sartre’s novel, *The Age of Reason*, the young woman Ivich impulsively impales her hand on a spike while chatting amiably with her friends in a café. Thus Camus, following Nietzsche, celebrates unreflective (“instinctual”) action, and Sartre, in his mature philosophy, makes much of the ideal of *spontaneity*, even though (I have argued) this seriously jeopardizes one of the most important themes of his philosophy, namely, that we are responsible for virtually everything we do.

A particularly powerful example of spontaneity is to be found in the very important distinction that Sartre makes in *Being and Nothingness* (the chapter on “Nothingness”) between fear and anxiety (*peur* vs. *angoisse* or *angst*). Fear is apprehension about something that might happen to you, and while we can manufacture or imagine fears, to be sure, fear is surely an example of an emotion that is typically “given” as a result of circumstances (real or merely perceived, or even *conceived*.) Anxiety, by contrast, concerns what one might *do*. It is a distinction that turns on the difference between victimization and responsible activity, obviously a central concern of Sartre’s. Sartre’s famous example is my walking along the edge of a precipice. I might be afraid of slipping, or of an avalanche, or of the ground giving way beneath my feet. But my anxiety has to do with the possibility of my having a sudden impulse, spontaneously deciding to throw myself into the abyss. It is an impulse that seems to come from

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

nowhere. It has nothing to do with my character or with any prior suicidal thoughts. (There were none.) So, too, I might be afraid of being fired, but I am anxious about what I might say to my boss in a moment of fury, for example, “Well, I quit!” Impulses, urges, and other “spontaneous” bursts of motivation may well be prompted or triggered by external events, but the main thing to notice is that no such circumstantial considerations explain the behavior, except, of course, insofar as the circumstances make the action possible. One cannot spontaneously decide to throw oneself over the edge of a precipice, for instance, if one is comfortably ensnared in one’s Lazy-Boy chair in the living room.

The decision to commit suicide is often impulsive, and it is perhaps the most obvious if horrible example of a decision that can be (and often is) both spontaneous and final. There are people who entertain thoughts of suicide over long periods of time (Nietzsche insists that such thoughts often help one get through a difficult night.) But even those people, when they actually do it, often act spontaneously. So, too, the urge to kill someone is often impulsive, not “cold-blooded.” It is almost always irrational, not to mention immoral, and it hardly ever serves one’s long-term interests. But this means that prohibitions aren’t really effective (especially in the case of suicide). Most murderers commit “crimes of passion” and are highly unlikely to ever commit any such crime again. But gratuitous acts—and the whimsical desires that prompt them—need not be so lethal. A recent *New York Times* Science piece on impulsive behavior (4/4/06) mentions “playing hooky, disappearing for the weekend, having a fling, and binge-shopping like a Wall Street divorcée.” These are whimsical desires. But it is not as if such desires cannot be explained. The author adds, “Spontaneity can be a healthy defiance of routine, an expression of starved desire.” But impulsive behavior can also be genetic and neurologically triggered. A genetic variation seems to increase high-risk behavior and affects the dorsal anterior cingulate, the brain’s “supervisory manager.”—either way, so much for spontaneity as an antidote to determinism!

How does one know whether a desire is whimsical or not? Certainly not by the suddenness of its onset. And perhaps not even by its frequency (although this is often a pretty good clue.) I would hazard the suggestion that it depends on its proximity to one’s soul (“my soul’s desire,” according to Hamlet). If it is truly whimsical, it is pretty peripheral (though these metaphorical spatial measurements here might well get dicey.) But by contrast, no matter how sudden and no matter how seemingly infrequent, a desire that is close to one’s soul is anything but whimsical. I do not want to say that it *emanates from*

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

one's soul, for Sartrean existential reasons, but such desires define who we are, even when they are at odds with the whole of one's character hitherto. Thus are heroes born, and so too greedy people betray themselves.

Desires as Grand Passions

In contrast to most whimsical and impulsive desires, however, there are profound desires, pervasive desires, grand passions, of the sort that define one's career, one's life, one's being. Whimsical desires may come to us unbidden, by their very nature, and they may have little relevance to the rest of our lives, but at least some of our desires are not mere ingredients in life but actually define our lives. (Soul-based whimsical desires are a special exception here.) When a person has a *passion*, when he or she is "madly" in love or *dedicated* to a cause; when he or she is wholly *devoted* to a religion, a philosophy or a guru; it would be a wholly flat-footed description to say that they "want something." I have elsewhere written extensively about the passionate life, a life defined by the passions, strong emotions, overwhelming desires. It is characterized by impassioned engagement and belief, by quests, grand projects, embracing affections. It is also sometimes characterized (for example, by Goethe in *Faust*, by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche) in terms of frenzy, vaulting ambition, essentially insatiable goals, and impossible affections. In such a life, desire is elevated from a psychological ingredient to a defining passion.

I would contrast this conception of life with ordinary morality and "being a good person," although I do not want to say that one should give up the latter in pursuing the former. In response to a good many classical and modern philosophers, I want to raise the question whether mere proper living; obedience to the law; utilitarian "rational choice" calculations; respect for others' rights and for promises and contracts; and a bit of self-righteousness is all there is to a good life, even if one "fills in" the non-moral spaces with permissible pleasures and accomplishments. The meaning of life is not reserved for those who are merely "good," and the vision of a life that burns out brilliantly rather than wears out slowly, a vision shared by the ancient Dionysians, the nineteenth century romantics, and contemporary Grunge and Hip-Hop musicians is not to be so easily dismissed, even by those of us now well over thirty.

The passionate life has a Dionysian temper suggested by dynamic rather than static metaphors, notions of "energy," "enthusiasm," "charisma," even "mania." It is also the erotic conception of life

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

suggested by such poets as Homer, Byron, and (Allen) Ginsberg, occasionally weighted down with despair and *Weltschmerz*, perhaps, but buoyed by joy and exuberance as well. But many philosophers, including Socrates, Spinoza, Schopenhauer and the Stoics as well as the Buddha, Confucius, and Chuang Tzu, even Adam Smith, to name a few, have defended some variation of “peace of mind” or “tranquility” (*ataraxia*, *apatheia*, *nirvana*, *tao*, *ân*) as the highest good. This, too, I want to call into question.

It is not as if these thinkers and their traditions have encouraged or defended the complete absence of emotion, to be sure. (Adam Smith was a firm defender of the moral sentiments, for example, and many Asian traditions defend the importance of compassion, even bliss.) But they have all been more or less staunch in their insistence that strong, violent emotion—the sort that is said to “sweep us away”—is at best untoward and often disastrous, even fatal. The passionate life, in other words, is a life that celebrates strong desires. Peace of mind and apathy have no place in it, nor do mere *wants*, or any other wimpish senses of desire—nothing less than *passion*.

We would be wrong, however, if we thought of passions just as especially “intense” or “strong” desires, at least as those adjectives are usually construed. The psychological measure of intensity is usually one or another measure of arousal, how excited one becomes, how fast one’s heart is beating, how one is breathing, sweating, frowning or grimacing. Such reactions may be the result or accompaniment of intense or strong desires, but the intensity or strength of our desires is instead determined by their profundity or importance, no matter how “cool” one might be in their implementation. Indeed, many classic epics, from the *Iliad* and the *Mahabharata* to Ian Fleming James Bond novels, celebrate passionate but totally “cool” action and motivation. There is no contradiction here, and for those who think that there is I can only ask you to reconsider what you think an ideal passionate life would be.

Reflective Desires, Cultivated and Refined

Indian philosophy has formulated a distinction between *bhavas* and *rasas*, where the *bhavas* refer to crude emotions and desires while *rasas* are cultivated and refined. The distinction between *bhavas* and *rasas* suggests that desires do not have to be “given” or crude but can be cultivated and refined. Most whimsical desires are bound to be crude, just because they “come from nowhere.” Passionate desires, by contrast, tend to be cultivated and refined. One might be overwhelmed by a crude passion, of

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

course, an obsession with breasts or chocolate or some other unbridled and unconstrained craving, but the passions that rule our lives are, happily, more often the result of a long apprenticeship, attention, and nurturing. One doesn't have a passion for music, for instance, just because one was demonstrably "turned on" to Mozart in infancy. One doesn't have a passion for justice just because one remains stung by an act of injustice early in life. We cultivate our passions, and if few of us do it as well as we would lie, almost all of us do it as we go on, encouraging ourselves in this directions, reigning in our desires in some other. We need to endorse such a distinction in western philosophy as well. We can find it, I think, in the philosophies of Aristotle and Nietzsche, to name two illustrious but rarely linked western thinkers, but also in the contemporary work of Harry Frankfurt.

Because of the traditional separation of reason and desire, many philosophers seem to think that desires are unaffected by reflection. Harry Frankfurt and many other philosophers, however, have stressed the importance of what they call "second order desires," and the important point is that second order desires affect desires in a profound way. Most important of all, desires are not just given, they *develop*; they are cultivated. So much of the philosophical discussion of desire makes them out to be *crude*, not *refined*. (Lacan may seem exemplary, but the wanting a banana fellow is, I think, a better illustration.)

Philosophers since ancient times have recognized the importance of "reflection," "thinking," and "reason," including what Frankfurt calls second order desires. One of the great mistakes of western philosophy, I have long argued, is the separation of reason and the passions, including desires. (The classic metaphor is Plato, the charioteer of reason mastering the twin irrationalities of appetite and spirited desires.) But as soon as one realizes that reason should not be wholly separated from passion (as Plato makes amply clear in his account of *eros*), it becomes clear why our desires concerning our desires have a profound effect on the desires themselves. Contrary to Frankfurt, it is often not possible to distinguish our desires from our desires concerning our desires, for the desire that's doing the shaping becomes the shape of the desire. But the way that desires affect and shape desires is not devoid of reason either, as our longer range and more passionate desires tend to set the agenda for what will count as rational and what will not. What we need to do, and not just in "cognitive science," is get a lot clearer about how this works and, consequently, what a desire is.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

We cultivate our virtues, as both Confucius and Aristotle continually remind us, and we reap the benefits of even our vices, as Nietzsche never tires of telling us. But this does not just *happen* to us. We are the authors of our own personalities. Character, as Heraclitus told us early on, is fate. If we are to understand desire, therefore, let us not restrict our attention to those hum-drum questions of everyday motivation that seem to satisfy most analytic philosophers, but neither should we allow ourselves to be led astray by the suggestions of obscenity that beckon us from the labyrinths of psychoanalysis. As philosophers, we should look harder at impulsive desires, passionate desires, and carefully cultivated desires. Let's elevate the question of desire to where it ought to be, nothing less than the existential question of who we are and what sort of people we want to be.



SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

II. REVIEWS

Meilin Chinn

University of Hawai'i

Ewing Chinn and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Editors), *Metaphilosophy and Chinese Thought: Interpreting David Hall* (New York: Global Scholarly Publications, 2005).

In May 2003, fellow philosophers of David Hall (1937-2001) gathered at Trinity University in a memorial conference dedicated to his life and work. The essays in *Metaphilosophy and Chinese Thought* were selected from papers presented at that conference and form a wide-ranging volume organized into three broad sections (Interpreting Philosophy, Interpreting Confucianism, and Interpreting Daoism). Rather than comprising a *Festschrift*, these papers offer “creative contributions” to the subjects of Hall’s lifelong philosophical investigations. The essays offer productive points of agreement as well as divergence from Hall’s ideas and one another in ways that expand the philosophical conversation in unique directions. This way of doing philosophy would likely have pleased Hall, for of the many ideas he engaged, his work continued to return, in many forms, to the idea that “insistent particularity” and difference were the basis for all co-creative integrity.

In the opening paper, “Romantics, Sophists, and Systematic Philosophers,” Richard Rorty addresses where his metaphilosophical views diverge most from Hall’s. Precisely because of their substantial philosophical kinship, Rorty thinks he and Hall make “good dialectical foils” for one another. Although A.N. Whitehead influenced them both, Rorty emphasizes his deep distrust of systematic philosophy by offering an account of the relationship between Platonism, Romanticism, and the Sophists that highlights his opinions on the appropriate uses and limits of philosophy. For instance, while Rorty and Hall each recognize how the Romantics broke with the onto-theological tradition, Rorty does not distrust their “self-glorifying anthropocentricity,” as Hall did, and rather admits to reveling in it.

The philosophical division apparent in Rorty’s admission is one that helped lead Hall towards the subject of Hans-Georg Moeller’s final essay of the book – Daoist anti-humanism. In *The Uncertain Phoenix*, Hall wrote, “The romantic stresses the *human* experience of nature; the Taoist

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

strives to construe nature in its own terms and not from a human perspective.”² Indeed, as Moeller notes in “The Discarding of Straw Dogs: Thinking through the *Laozi*,” Daoist texts often use images and allegories that star non-human creatures and the natural world, such as *Hundun* from the *Zhuangzi*, or the “straw dogs” of the *Daodejing*. From this “anti-humanist stance, the Daoist sage treats people as “straw dogs,” by revering them in particular contexts and then relinquishing their meaning once the situation has changed. In the absence of any essential order or hierarchy of meaning, the sage understands that human activism and “good will” are often coercive activities that impose human order on that which is perfect—the spontaneous *ziran* or “self-so” of things—without such humanization. Rorty is similarly content to leave the various pieces of reality incommensurable with a single order or with one another, as “poems” that cannot be synthesized. However, he unabashedly prioritizes the finite subjectivities of human imagination rather than accounting for “creative becoming” more generally, as Hall advocated, or considering the non-human, self-emergent processes of *autopoiesis*, as Moeller recommends.

In “David Hall as a Philosopher of Culture,” Robert Neville also discusses Hall’s work according to their shared Whiteheadian lineage and relationship as philosophical “alter-egos.” His outline of Hall’s philosophical trajectory provides a good discussion of Hall’s distinction between logical and aesthetic order, particularly with regard to how these two orders manifest “philosophical irony.” In Chinese philosophy, Hall found a historical tradition based on an aesthetic order that could serve as an alternative to the logical order of Western philosophy. Yet, in this very binary, Neville sees a great “irony,” calling the imposition of such categories on China and the West a “very Aristotelian procedure” (30). While Neville finds an ironic Aristotelianism in Hall’s approach, Joanna Crosby criticizes Neville’s own metaphysical treatment of Chinese philosophy in the subsequent essay. Neville sees an appropriate and necessary place for metaphysics in a reading of Chinese philosophy, for example in the need for an *ex nihilo* creator, and also maintains that ideas such as *dao*, heaven and earth must be addressed as metaphysical and ontological categories if Confucianism is to contribute to the global philosophical discussion. Against Neville’s view that metaphysics will provide the answers to our most important ethical and political questions, Crosby argues that this is a form of intellectual

² David L. Hall, *The Uncertain Phoenix: Adventures Toward a Post-Cultural Sensibility*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), p. 256.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

colonization best avoided by comparative philosophers: the equating of Western philosophy with world philosophy and the demand that other traditions adapt to certain metaphysical assumptions in order to gain access to the discourse.

Along with these metaphysical issues, Neville questions Hall's "peculiar" silence on the subject of God, especially given his ties to Whitehead and the demands of his own philosophy. Later in the book, Ronnie Littlejohn also asks whether the question of God cannot be left silent in any "legitimate understanding" of process and creativity based on Whitehead's work. In "On the Meaning of 'Target Discourse': The Use of Process Philosophy in Translating the *Zhongyong*," Littlejohn concurs with Hall and Ames' position that both creativity and a process world-view are central to Chinese philosophy, however he questions their choice of Whitehead's philosophy for the "target discourse" of their translation. He finds the relationship between Hall and Ames "focus-field" language and Whitehead's theory of objects to be unsustainable, and also protests their excision of Whitehead's God from his process philosophy. Whether or not one agrees with Littlejohn's conclusions, he does raise important metaphilosophical issues, particularly methodological questions about the unfixed boundary of being a translator and a comparative philosopher, and the attendant ways that metaphysical assumptions or omissions can distort this territory.

Objections to applying an *ex nihilo* model of metaphysics to Chinese philosophy frequent the collaborative work of Hall and Roger Ames, and Ames further develops this within the topic of creativity in "Making This Life Significant: The Serious Business of Creativity." Ames describes his long-time philosophical work with David Hall as "an object lesson on the Chinese world that it is purported to interpret" because the nature of collaboration demonstrates much about a Chinese understanding of creativity and meaning; most importantly that creativity is both self-creativity and co-creativity. So while Hall and Ames did much to "create each other" as Ames says, their collaboration also pointed to a Confucian sense of creativity in which humans mutually shape one another while simultaneously cooperating with the "heavens and the earth in the consummating process of cosmic meaning" (61). Ames examines a range of questions regarding the nature of creativity and the issue of why the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* is inappropriate to the Chinese world. While such models emphasize novelty and originality over meaning, creativity in the Chinese tradition is resolutely collaborative, inextricably situated, and emphasizes enhanced significance over radical originality—or as Ames puts

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

it, it is *creatio in situ*. A Confucian sense of creativity values the growth of significance and relationships instead of the heroics of a single, absolute source of originality. This entails the priority of appreciating, with deep affectivity, the particulars from which meaning emerges.

In many ways, Hall's earlier thinking and his later work with Ames can be correlated through the idea that particularity gives rise to significance. Joseph Grange's essay, "A Discussion of the Standing Together of Things," offers an imaginative reconstruction of this journey in his tale of how Hall "dug" his way to China by excavating the meanings of three concepts (Chaos, Cosmos, and Eros). Along the way, Hall continually questioned how order intertwined with these ideas—but his was a radical consideration of order in which chaos was the "the sum of all orders" and only navigable according to the unique particularity of all things. When Hall arrived at the gates of China, he had radicalized the process doctrine of creativity as the gift of chaos, and in the Chinese attitude toward the world, he found both "the gift for multiple flexible orders" and agreement with his view of the particular as the origin of all orders. The priority of the particular over the general yokes together what is irreducibly different with the larger cosmos through affectively structured aesthetic orders, or as Grange's essay might suggest, it brings Chaos, Cosmos, and Eros together. The best in a situation thus emerges from these contextually contingent, highly creative orders. In the *creatio in situ* model of creativity Ames finds in the Chinese tradition, collaboration amongst particulars is not just the stuff of good friendships and productive philosophical investigations, but "enchants the cosmos" as well. Hence, the "serious business" of creativity is at once ordinary and cosmic, as exemplified in the sage as a "virtuosic collaborator and communicator who inspires the cosmos by orchestrating a thriving human community in the ordinary business of the day" (69).

Questions of human community and the socio-political business of the day are explored further in two essays concerning democracy by Ewing Chinn and Sor-hoon Tan. Chinn's essay, "Democracy, Dewey, and Confucius," is inspired by Ames and Hall's influential book of comparative philosophy, *The Democracy of the Dead*, which argued for the compatibility of Confucian ethics with John Dewey's idea of democracy. Chinn expounds on the difference between a Deweyan-Confucian idea of democracy and the ideal of democracy rooted in the individualistic, rights-based liberalism found in the West, offering a critique of the latter in favor of a communitarian democracy that emerges from the ideas of Dewey and Confucius. This is a democracy that maintains a shared concern for the good

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

(without falling into the potential totalitarianism of *a* good) and recognizes that political freedom is both the privilege and obligation to participate in the activities of a robust and healthy community. More than the freedom to vote, or not, and freedom from interference, this freedom obliges one to recognize that self-cultivation is continuous and reflexive with a flourishing community.

Tan continues with the theme of communal development, focusing on the importance of rituals of friendship in a communicative democracy like the one articulated by Hall and Ames. Tan does an excellent job of presenting the way the affective, aesthetic structures that emerge from Confucian ideas of deference (*shu* 恕) and appropriateness (*yi* 義) offer a refined calibration of relationships and communication that goes beyond the anonymous structures of rights-based liberalism. Tan also correctly stresses the centrality of aesthetics to the Confucian idea of ritual community; rather than trivializing ritual, aesthetics both facilitate and indicate the authenticity with which people participate in their community. For Confucius, effective ritual achieves harmony between particulars and the whole, without sacrificing uniqueness or difference, and without imposing sameness or mere agreement. The rituals of friendship, as Tan describes, encourage personal and communal harmony while also offering a path to theomorphic religiousness without radical transcendence. Thus, spiritual growth occurs according to the unique focus one brings their community as an exemplary model of communication, deference, trust, and appropriateness worthy of reverence.

The Confucian idea of harmony is additionally discussed by Chenyang Li in “*Zhongyong* as Grand Harmony: An Alternative Reading to Ames and Hall’s *Focusing the Familiar*.” Li is sympathetic to a processual reading of the text and to their choice to highlight the creative aspects of *cheng* 成. As a musical term, the character for harmony (*he* 和) also means “responding vocally,” and so implies a necessarily dynamic and creative process (120). Li argues, however, that Hall and Ames failed to fully elucidate the central place of harmony (*he* 和) in the *Zhongyong*. While his reading is not wholly incompatible with theirs, Li disputes, for instance, their interpretation of *zhong* as focusing and instead claims that *zhong* and *he* form one inseparable notion—“central harmony”—in the text and in Confucianism. For Li, the ideal of harmony is the most important contribution of Confucianism to contemporary life and politics, so while the requirements for harmonizing the dynamic world are

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

certainly illuminated by a processual reading of the *Zhongyong*, its central theme is grand harmony more than “focusing” the familiar affairs of the day.

Chinese philosophy is indeed keen to the idea of music as an aesthetic-ethical phenomenon, and Erin Cline’s paper, “Bluegrass and *De* in the *Daodejing*” investigates the practical implications of *de* 德 by using musical illustrations drawn from Bluegrass music. As Cline notes, amidst the longstanding debates over how to translate and understand *de*, Hall and Ames interpret it as “the ‘insistent particularity’ of things generally, and usually of human beings specifically” (180). She uses their understanding of individuals with *de* as engaged in both co-creativity and self-creativity to analyze the dynamics of a music ensemble. Within a musical group, she rightly notes, one is not diminished by the “sacrifices” made for the benefit of the music; to the contrary, one develops musically as an individual according to the demands of co-creating with others in service of the music. Cline also incorporates David Nivison and Phillip J. Ivanhoe’s ethically oriented accounts of *de* to highlight how a person of *de* becomes more exceptional in direct accord with how she or he listens and defers to others. Likewise, when musicians defer to their connections with other players, they expand their own abilities while enhancing the quality of the music.

Moreover, Cline stresses, the most subtle perceptual abilities and actions distinguish an exceptional musician. Like a person of *de*, a virtuosic musician is attuned to the particularity of themselves, others, and the finest levels of their environment—or what Hall and Ames would call “one’s ‘field’ of experience” (188). This ability of exemplary persons to sense what is most subtle with the greatest impact is also addressed by Jane Geaney in her paper, “The Limits of the Senses in the *Zhongyong*.” She explains the unusual sensory references in the *Zhongyong* according to Hall and Ames’ concept of “extension,” or what the *Zhongyong* refers to as *da dao* 達道. The various, apparently contradictory descriptions of *de* and *dao*, for example as big, small, bright, hidden, and obvious, actually detail a sensory mode best understood as “extension.” Rather than a critiquing the limits of human perception, or gesturing toward an imperceptible realm of reality, the *Zhongyong* uses perceptual metaphors to instruct that what is barely sensed, hidden, or inchoate, extends with powerful consequences and vast influence as an “advancing pathway.” Therefore, the sage, rather than possessing super human powers, simply perceives what is subtle with intense consequences. Similarly,

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

an exemplary person's *de* may be incredibly subtle in its overt displays (speech or external appearance), but have a broad and harmonious effect.

These discussions of subtlety and extension are further reminders of Hall's recognition of the particular as the root of aesthetic and ethical orders of sense and significance—an insight that also expands the possibilities of signification between philosophical traditions, whether cross-cultural or intra-cultural. The way unique differences within a tradition can manifest “oppositional harmony” is the subject of Thomas Michael's paper, “Confucius and Laozi: Two Visions of the *Dao* of Antiquity.” He engages the long debate over the relationship between Confucianism and Daoism and their respective understandings of *Dao*, concluding that each explores a different area of the “unified field of signification” of *Dao*. Confucius and Laozi should therefore be seen as occupiers of a “fault-line” in this field, but nonetheless as mutual participants in the signification common to the “*Dao* of antiquity.” Here Michael quotes A.C. Graham in a description apt to David Hall as well as to good comparative philosophy: “the crucial question for all of them (was) not the Western philosopher's ‘What is the truth?’ but ‘Where is the Way [*Dao*]?’” (176).

Such a question took Hall from Whitehead through philosophy of culture to comparative philosophy, and the papers presented in this volume offer the reader a thought-provoking look at his philosophical path and its legacy. As well, they indicate how Hall's philosophical sensibilities and acumen reflected a feeling for the “art of life” he attributed to the Daoists – an art of possibility in which the ambience of the self includes the larger cosmos, the practical affairs of the day, and is centered on the pivot of *Dao*.



SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

Marthe Chandler
DePauw University

On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China is a comprehensive survey of how Chinese history was written, preserved and understood. In their fascinating and engaging history of Chinese historiography Ng and Wang develop a number of conceptions of the nature and function of their discipline and explore the continuing relationship between history, politics and philosophy.

Traditional Chinese history was written in one of three formats: chronologies of events, annals-biographies, and narratives. Annals-biographies used the lives of exemplary individuals to focus the events of the period and illustrate time honored moral principles. Narratives ordered and rearranged events to show the developments of a particular historical episode “from beginning to end.”¹ Ng and Wang use all three formats. The book is organized chronologically with chapters on the major periods and dynasties. The chapters are written like an annals-biography in which the major historians of the period are introduced and their works described. Annals-biographies also often contained short monographs on particular topics and Ng and Wang develop several themes to which they return throughout the book. As an historical narrative *Mirroring the Past* begins in the Classic period when historians, *shi* 史, recorded important events at court and in the heavens. Using their knowledge of celestial phenomena, the *shi* determined calendars and served as astrologers with responsibilities for rituals and prophecy. *Mirroring the Past* ends with in the mid-nineteenth century just before Western ideas about historiography began to influence the Chinese tradition.

This rich and detailed account of Chinese intellectual life raises a number of questions of interest to comparative philosophers. For example, although the authors describe the third of the

¹ On-cho Ng and Q. Edward Wang, *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), xvi-xvii.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

traditional formats as “full fledged historical narrative,”³ they also approve the “cool and cognitive understanding of the past”⁴ characteristic of Western ‘scientific history.’ Thus they conclude that despite its virtues the work of the great Song historian Sima Guang “is not, in the end a history.”⁵ But why should some formats be more authentic than others? Ng and Wang say very little about contemporary standards for ‘authentic’ historiography other than to note that a modern sense of history involves “a sense of anachronism, an awareness of evidence, and an interest in causation.”⁶ Nevertheless, what they do say is highly suggestive for the future of both disciplines and intimately related to another question *Mirroring the Past* considers on almost every page: what is the relationship between history and moral values, or more provocatively perhaps, what is the relationship between normative standards and their history?

From the very beginning Chinese historians believed that history should teach people, particularly the Chinese emperors, how to behave morally. Until quite recently most Chinese historians, intellectuals and philosophers were committed to the normative tradition of ancient China, the belief that there was a natural order of things which reflected the timeless moral order of the Way. History was written to teach rulers that cultivation of the Confucian virtues brought peace and stability and their neglect resulted in war and chaos; that states which benefited the people endured while regimes which neglected the public good were destroyed. The earliest historical writing in China—the *Classic of Documents*, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* and the *Zuo Commentary*—recorded the moral advice of great leaders and the judgments of praise and blame Confucius himself was said to have made about the people whose deeds the *Spring and Autumn Annals* recorded.

The *Spring and Autumn Annals* could not serve this didactic function, however, unless readers were familiar with the circumstances surrounding the events noted in its tantalizingly brief remarks. Commentaries written to explain how Confucius’ account served to praise the virtuous and condemn the vicious quickly became part of the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. With the passing of time the relationship between the Confucian values inherited from the ancient sage kings and more recent events and circumstances became increasingly problematic. Two concerns began to emerge in Chinese

³ Ng and Wang, xvii

⁴ Ng and Wang, 260

⁵ Ng and Wang, 150

⁶ Ng and Wang, 135

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

historiography: the historical problem of the relationship between the past and the present, and the philosophical problem of the relationship between eternal truths and contingent circumstances.

The chapter on Song historiography illustrates how the historical and philosophical problems are inextricably related. Ng and Wang begin the chapter by remarking that modern Western history requires a sense of anachronism that never fully emerged in Chinese historiography. The modern sense of anachronism posits an unbridgeable gulf between present and past which not only makes it impossible for us to share the philosophical and ethical standards of an earlier age, but renders the past fundamentally unintelligible to later scholars. Traditional Chinese historians and philosophers could not even entertain such a view, much less adopt it. Nevertheless Song Dynasty historians had some sense of anachronism. Although they focused primarily on the transcendent and atemporal principles of the Way, Song Dynasty historian-philosophers also wanted to understand the relationship between eternal principles and changing circumstances, and the process of development and change. Although Song Dynasty historians always believed that universal principles could be distilled from ancient texts, they were aware that the past was different from the present, and recognized that events had to be contextualized and values should be understood against the background of contemporary institutions and events.

Chinese imperial historians had the highly politicized task of writing dynastic histories to demonstrate the legitimacy of the current regime. Court historians were responsible for describing how the previous dynasty had degenerated to the point that the Mandate of Heaven was transferred to the current rulers. While official sponsorship made the task of imperial historians easier by giving them access to all manner of court records, it was a risky business. Historians were morally obliged to tell the truth, but emperors were seldom pleased to have their misdeeds and those of their relatives recorded for posterity. Many court historians faced death or went into exile rather than give in to political pressure to distort the historical records. Others, perhaps the majority, established the tradition of praising the moral behavior of the current rulers, blaming the vile deeds of the previous dynasty, and ignoring events that did not fit the required pattern. Confucius himself may have contributed to this tradition by writing the *Spring and Autumn Annals* in which moral judgments were typically made by leaving out significant facts and using language that required careful interpretation.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

The task of establishing political legitimacy was particularly difficult when the dynasties in question were founded by conquering “barbarian” tribes – the Jurchens who founded the Jin Dynasty, the Mongols who founded the Yuan, and the Manchu who became the Qing emperors. Non-Han dynasties had to show that they were indeed the legitimate successors of the Chinese rulers they defeated. To do this many historiographers argued that Confucian principles reflected a universal moral code applying to all human societies, and thus that rulers whose governments benefited the people established legitimate dynasties in which ethnic identity was irrelevant.⁷ Historians loyal to defeated regimes insisted on the necessity of blood relationships between members of legitimate successor dynasties and often wrote private histories setting the record straight.

The lack of connection to the imperial court did not guarantee that private histories were unbiased. Scholars were always tempted to praise their friends and families and justify their own political positions and prejudices. Chinese historiographers were thoroughly aware of the pressures on historians of the past, and became increasingly sophisticated in interpreting historical texts written under circumstances not particularly conducive to a completely accurate reporting of events – i.e. almost all of them. The effort culminated in the Qing Dynasty whose scholars devoted great attention to gaining an accurate understanding of the past. Although Qing historiographers wanted to reveal the profound principles concealed in the ancient classics, they were less concerned with metaphysical speculation than their Song predecessors had been. Qing historians were convinced that knowledge of how Confucian moral principles operated in the past was essential to solve the social economic and political problems of the day.⁸

Although Ng and Wang are scrupulous about not drawing invidious comparisons between Chinese historiography and the modern Western sense of history, comparative philosophers will find it instructive to compare the mid-Qing criticism of historical sources with western attempts to make history ‘scientific.’⁹ One of the most obvious differences between Western conceptions of historical

⁷ Ng and Wang, 170

⁸ Ng and Wang, 251 and 258

⁹ For discussions of the history of “scientific history” in the west see William H. McNeill, “Mythistory, or Truth, Myth, History, and Historians”. *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 1 (Feb., 1986), 1; Q. Edward Wang, “Objectivity, Truth, and Hermeneutics: Re-reading the *Chunqiu*.” *Classics and Interpretation: The Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture*. Edited by Ching-I Tu (Tu Jingyi). (New Brunswick? Transaction Publishers, 2000), 156; and John Lewis Gaddis. *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 2002.

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

science and Chinese historiography hinges on the conception of objectivity. Both traditions acknowledge that genuine knowledge is untainted by personal prejudices and political bases; but in the Western scientific tradition objectivity is often understood in terms of ‘value neutrality.’ Modern science originated in the West with the purported ‘scientific method’ which produced the explosive growth of knowledge used to predict and control natural phenomena. Attempts to apply the methods of the natural or physical sciences to the human (mental, moral, social or historical) sciences met with less success, and the belief that history can be value neutral was short lived. Historical narratives arrange facts, emphasizing some and ignoring others, on clearly normative principles. Indeed contemporary philosophy of science has demonstrated that choices between theories always involve some normative judgments, forcing philosophers and scientists to defend the objectivity of science by distinguishing between *scientific values*, such as truthfulness, respect for evidence, completeness, coherence, simplicity and fruitfulness, and *moral or ethical values* about the relative worth of things such as peace and justice, equality and personal freedom, material comfort and obedience to God.

Ng and Wang condemn the insistent use of moral values in Chinese historiography as “an orphan mode of expression,” but they are also concerned that the ‘scientific’ stance of contemporary Western historiography has made history useless. If history can neither make predictions nor reflect and illustrate any timeless values from which the present can learn, what good is it?

One might respond that knowing the truth is intrinsically valuable, but with the proliferation of communication between social groups, contemporary historiographers must contend with multiple versions of historical truth, each of which convinced that alternative histories are in some sense false. The historian William McNeill notes “[c]hoice is everywhere; dissent turns into cacophonous confusion; my truth dissolves into your myth even before I can put words on paper.” McNeill has faith, however, in the “free marketplace of ideas... [in which]... Truth will eventually prevail.”¹⁰

¹⁰ McNeill, 4

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

In the context of contemporary anti-realisms this faith in ‘truth’ is increasingly difficult to maintain. Although as a scientific value, ‘truth’ has been considered to be timeless, objective and ‘value free,’ the history of the conception of ‘truth’ is intimately connected with that of other purportedly timeless eternal moral and religious values, namely those of the Abrahamic tradition.¹¹

To avoid the blatantly anachronistic, and imperialistic, view that “All values, except mine, are historically contingent” we might reject the notion of any non-contingent values or standards at all and embrace a fairly radical version of relativism. Alternatively we might re-consider the existence of transhistorical trans-cultural human values. Truth might be such a value. The doctrine of Universal Human Rights asserts that there are others. Faced with multi-ethnic societies in which various groups viewed each other with hostility Chinese historians proclaimed the universality of the Confucian principle that good government results in the flourishing and well being of its people, and that the well being of the people is best attained by avoiding destructive warfare, encouraging education, and promoting worthy and talented officials. Ng and Wang would probably be uncomfortable with the assertion of Neo-Confucian universality, but philosophers and historians have much to learn about ourselves, our pasts and our future from sensitive historians like Ng and Wang.



¹¹ Henry Rosemont, Jr. *Rationality and Religious Experience: The Continuing Relevance of the World's Spiritual Traditions*. (Chicago and La Salle Illinois: Open Court, 2001)

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

III. NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

An Announcement from Henry Rosemont, Jr:

After being asked a number of times over the years by friends and colleagues about how to secure a copy of *Explorations in Early Chinese Cosmology*, which was published in 1984 by Scholar's Press but almost immediately became very difficult to get. I re-secured the copyright, and am reissuing the work as a publication-on-demand title through BookSurge Publishers. While I hope others will follow suit in attempting to place their hard-to-obtain works back in print, I *do not* recommend the particular publisher I chose, for reasons I will narrate to anyone interested, along with matters of copyright, cost, distribution, etc.: Henry_Rosemont_Jr@brown.edu In any event, the deed is now done in my case, and the book can be purchased through amazon.com for \$13.99, which is the lowest price I was able to negotiate while hoping someday to break even with my costs.

The Table of Contents is as follows:

<i>Introduction</i>	Henry Rosemont, Jr.
<i>Late Shang Divination: The Magico-Religious Legacy</i>	David N. Keightley
<i>The Speech of Prince Chin: A Study of Early Chinese Cosmology</i>	James A Hart
<i>The Concept of Change in the Great Treatise</i>	Gerald Swanson
<i>Ancient Chinese Cosmology and Fa-chia Theory</i>	Vitaly A. Rubin
<i>Concepts of Comprehensiveness and Historical Change</i> <i>In the Lu-shih ch'un-ch'iu</i>	John Louton
<i>Concepts of Comprehensiveness and Historical Change</i> <i>In the Huai-nan-tzu</i>	Jeffrey A Howard
<i>The Five Phases, Magic Squares, and Schematic Cosmography</i>	John S. Major
<i>The Contributors</i>	
<i>Index</i>	

SACP FORUM

Asian and Comparative Philosophy

Vol. 24, No. 48, Fall 2007

An Announcement from May Sim:

May Sim, *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) is now available. The web link to Cambridge:

<http://www.cambridge.org/us/catalogue/catalogue.asp?isbn=9780521870931>

SACP Monograph Series

The Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy Monograph Series was started in 1974. Works are published in the series that deal with any area of Asian philosophy, or in any other field of philosophy examined from a comparative perspective. The aim of the series is to make available scholarly works that exceed article length, but may be too specialized for the general reading public, and to make these works available in inexpensive editions without sacrificing the orthography of non-Western languages. Please send your manuscripts to: John Schroeder, St. Mary's College of Maryland, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, St. Mary's City, MD 20686. For further information, please contact: John Schroeder jwschroeder@smcm.edu.