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INTRODUCTION: AMERICAN PRAGMATISM AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Articles included in this issue represent some recent rival interpretations of Chinese philosophy in light of American philosophy: Some furthering the use of American pragmatism, represented especially by John Dewey, although by no means restricted to him, for interpreting early Chinese thought, while others either criticize the compatibility of Dewey and Confucius, or argue that Dewey along with process thought in general, and early Chinese thought can offer each other resources that can lead to mutual beneficial rectifications.¹

Whether the authors in this issue agree or disagree, they acknowledge that certain characteristics are common to both the pragmatists and the early Chinese thinkers. For example, they agree that social context or environment is all-important for moral development because the individual is always social rather than autonomous. Process thought in pragmatism and Chinese philosophy are equally averse to fixed standards and absolute truths, maintaining the variability of circumstances and thus the significance of our practical ability to be flexible and adapt to those variations. Accordingly, there is consensus too among these authors that both sides stress a process of lifelong learning rather than adherence to ethical rules for self-formation. Beyond such general agreements, the articles included here converge and diverge in their comparisons of Chinese philosophy and American pragmatism.

Heather Keith's "Transforming *Ren*: The *De* of George Herbert Mead's Social Self" takes on and elaborates Hall and Ames' suggestion that Mead's account of the emergence of the self from the social context comes close to Confucius' view of how the highest virtue of humaneness (*ren* 仁) is cultivated. Employing Mead's account of "cultivated autonomy" which emerges from one's context and social relationships where one naturally learns to take on the other's attitude (i.e., empathy), she elucidates the process the self undergoes to become *ren* for Confucius, as well as the *dao* 道 which forms the

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natural context or environment within which virtue (*de* 德) is cultivated for the Daoists. Appealing to the transformative nature of water as well as its tendency to be transformed for Laozi, and his urging us to be like water, Keith points to Mead's kinship with Laozi: "The nature of humans, according to Mead, is also to be transformed and transformative—evolving from, reflecting upon, and creating the culture in which we live." Because of the significance of social relations and the social context for moral cultivation for these three thinkers, Keith maintains that they all would agree that the self is responsible for maintaining not only strong relationships, but also healthy social contexts for oneself and for others. According to Keith, Mead's cultivated autonomy directed at growth and evolution offers Confucians an account of *ren* 仁 that not only transcends the social environment, but also encourages social and political reform, creativity, and even nonconformity. Cultivating *ren* for Confucius then, Keith maintains, is a process which illustrates a self that is much like Laozi's water for both share in the natural characteristics of undergoing transformation and being transformative.

Keith's account of the development of the self for Mead and the Chinese thinkers stresses the naturalness of both the social context and the emergence of empathy. Similarly, Joel Krueger's article, "Knowing through the Body: The *Daodejing* and Dewey" also considers the notion of naturalness (*ziran* 自然) in the *Daodejing*, examining in detail its connection with *wu-wei* 無為 (effortless action) and comparing it with Dewey's concept of "know-how" or practical knowledge. Showing that a bodily intelligence or skill-based expertise is prior to propositional or reflective knowledge for Dewey and Laozi, Krueger applies this finding to derive the primacy of a nonrepresentational moral cognition as opposed to the reflective or intellectual kind. Put otherwise, Krueger argues that "both the *Daodejing* and Dewey rightly highlight the foundational status of spontaneous action within our everyday moral experiences [suggesting] that moral excellence is not simply equivalent to the accumulation of moral principles or reasons." Rather, moral excellence for Krueger is more aptly modeled upon what he calls an "ethos of expertise," which is an affective expertise enabling our expert negotiation of situations calling for moral action without mental representation, so well illustrated by Daoism's *wu-wei* and Dewey's "thoughtless action." Unlike Keith's discussion of self-transformation which harmonizes the accounts of Confucius and Daoism by emphasizing the naturalness of social relations and the social context, Krueger contrasts the Confucians' emphasis on ritual learning (*li* 禮) and the Daoists' ideal of losing such "pre-established patterns of behavior." This difference between Krueger and Keith manifests itself again in Keith's emphasis

on the necessity of reflection in the transformation of the self and Krueger's de-emphasis of it, associating reflection with a "knowing that" which need not be invoked in one's practices. Instead of reflection, Krueger calls for a spontaneous, flexible, bodily coping, and selfless response to one's surrounding. Whereas Keith's appropriation of Mead's cultivated autonomy celebrates the resources enabling social and political reform and nonconformity, Krueger's combination of Dewey's and Laozi's insights about spontaneity celebrates equilibrium achieved by adjusting and yielding to one's environment in a bodily and natural way.

Daniel Stephens' "Confucianism, Pragmatism, and Socially Beneficial Philosophy" would concur with Krueger's downplaying of "knowing that" or reflection and his emphasis on practical knowledge. Characterizing Western philosophy's ill as its overemphasis on "irresolvable metaphysical arguments" and absolute truths, Stephens uses Dewey, William James, and Confucius to argue for a philosophy that is a transformative "method of living," engaging human life, experience, and social conditions. Comparing Dewey's criticism of classical Western philosophy articulated in "The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy" with Confucius' cultivation of humaneness (*ren* 仁) in his *Analects*, Stephens argues for their similar approaches to knowledge, philosophy, and education because both of them focus on the necessity of experience and transformative practice. Stephens' observation that learning requires interaction with the community, which leads to the assertion of individuality and relationality for both Dewey and Confucius, resonates with Keith's account of the emergence of the self from the social context. His comparison of James' "pragmatic idea of free will" with Confucius' nondeterministic approach to the way (*dao* 道) illustrated by Confucius' assertion that it is the humane person who can broaden the way rather than vice versa, emphasizing free choice and creativity in human action for both, also concurs with Keith's talk of the encouragement of social and political reform and nonconformity when *ren* is seen through the lens of Mead's cultivated autonomy. Nonetheless, Stephens' acknowledgment of the harmony between fate and choice for both pragmatism and Confucianism, inhibiting our ability to control everything, accords more readily with Krueger's talk of equilibrium which calls for yielding to one's environment.

May Sim, "Dewey and Confucius: On Moral Education," accepts for the most part the similarities between American pragmatism and early Chinese thought in general, and Dewey and Confucius in particular, regarding the significance of social relations, context, process of self-formation, and adjustments to circumstances the aforementioned authors and Hall and Ames echo. Nevertheless, she points to

significant differences between Dewey and Confucius, challenging Hall and Ames' assertion that Dewey's philosophy is the best candidate for explaining Confucius and cautioning skepticism toward appropriating Dewey's education for democracy for the cultivation of Confucius' exemplary individual. According to Sim, one contrast between Dewey and Confucius is the objective of learning for each. Whereas learning for Confucius enables one to exercise a fixed set of virtues like humaneness (*ren* 仁) and appropriateness (*yi* 義), Dewey encourages "reflection on the conventional virtues in order to seek the 'real value' and avoid mere conformity which could prevent moral growth." Although Sim, like Keith, acknowledges that Confucius encourages moral reflection too, Sim asserts that Confucius' reflection is for the proper execution of the standard values, unlike Dewey's experimental attitude directed at discovering new values. Accordingly, Dewey and Confucius also disagree about what makes an action moral for Sim. Whereas conformity to ritual propriety (*li* 禮) is a significant aspect of morality for Confucius, Dewey is critical of conformity to custom. In contrast to Stephens' and Krueger's downplaying of "knowing that" for Dewey, Sim argues that Dewey's view of experience is directed at increasing knowledge of things as they are, or "facts," such that discourse is rational and serves the purposes of science and technology, which in turn serve the creation of things that have never existed before. Dewey's account of discourse and scientific discoveries contrasts sharply with Confucius' view that communication is for the sake of getting the listener to conform to virtue, along with his self-professed behavior of being a follower of tradition rather than an initiator. Other differences Sim addresses concern their opposing attitudes toward hierarchy and equality, conformity and freedom, in addition to stability and change. Applying these disparities to democracy, Sim contends, "Dewey's democratic individual will not appeal to Confucius because he would disagree with Dewey's interactive activity involving science and technology, with his social conditions of machine and material civilization that facilitate these activities, as well as disagree with the resulting unstable creative and unique new individual who is not wedded to any tradition of virtue."

Unlike Stephens and Krueger who stress the value of practical knowledge and disparage knowledge of metaphysical and absolute truths for Dewey, Wes DeMarco, "Righting the Names of Change," proposes an activity-oriented metaphysics prefigured in the Chinese ancient classic of the *Yi Jing* 《易經》 for Dewey's philosophy. With some rectification, DeMarco offers the *Yi Jing* as a resource for strengthening pragmatism's application of notions like transformation and practice, and its ability to account for stability and equilib-

rium. Calling the characters of the *Yi Jing* “characters of change,” DeMarco proposes that they offer descriptions of the most elemental changes, movements, and ways of living. Because DeMarco’s focus is on his so-called “natural principles of formation and transformation,” he proposes three criteria, “primitiveness, breadth, and activism,” to rethink the *Yi* 易 to arrive at the “changeless forms of change.” These principles of change must possess the characteristic DeMarco dubs “supercommonality” in order to account for change in both the natural world as well as the operations of the mind. The ability to explain change in both the subjective and objective domains also becomes the “test” for the relevance of the traditional characters for DeMarco’s activity metaphysics. Using this test, DeMarco claims that the *Yi* 易 falls short of characters for explaining “structural operations such as segmenting and sequencing and adding and deleting.” “Context-generating operations such as nesting and embedding” are also lacking. Accordingly, he suggests the addition of some characters to this classic to complete its principles of change. Given that the *Yi*’s 易 account of all change “is interchange, all action is transaction, and all transformation is mutual transformation,” DeMarco believes that Dewey would find himself at home in this activity-oriented explanation of change. Despite Dewey’s aversion toward metaphysics as Stephens and Krueger affirm, DeMarco observes that Dewey explores and endorses certain generic traits of existence like “stability and precariousness, plurality, continuity, and transaction,” which observation resonates with Sim’s claim about Dewey’s positive orientation toward knowledge and science as well as the tension that plagues his notion of stability. DeMarco continues by charging that although Dewey mentions these generic traits of existence, he does not explain them, adding that his rectified *Yi* can offer Dewey the requisite explanation for his generic traits. By the same token, expressing dissatisfaction with Peirce’s account of symbol production and its variation with culture, DeMarco recommends his rectified *Yi* as a resource for a more adequate account of Peircean semiotics.

Whether the articles in this issue furthers the approach that American pragmatism as it stands offers the best resource for interpreting early Chinese philosophy, criticizes this approach, or offers rectification to make the two ways of thinking more compatible and complete, it is a testimony to the fruitfulness of their comparison. Not only are there revealing similarities and differences between the authors who agree in general that process thought and early Chinese thought are compatible, comparing these authors with those who are less sanguine about the compatibility of these two ways of thinking also yields stimulating questions regarding moral philosophy, metaphysics, and epistemology.

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ENDNOTE

1. When John Dewey visited China from 1919 to 1921, he was hailed as China's "second Confucius." See Joe Grange, *John Dewey, Confucius, and Global Philosophy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004); and Youzhong Sun, "John Dewey in China: Yesterday and Today," *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 35, no. 1 (1999): 69–88. More recently, David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987) made a case for using John Dewey's philosophy for interpreting Confucius' thought, arguing that Dewey's brand of democracy is best suited to Chinese culture. While there were commentators in the West who sympathized with Hall and Ames' appeal to American pragmatism associated with the process philosophies of Dewey, Peirce, James, and Mead in the interpretation of Chinese thought, such an appeal was not entirely without detractors who challenged the compatibility of Dewey and Confucius, or that between American pragmatism and Chinese thought.