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INTRODUCTION

With the exception of the papers by Chung-ying Cheng and Xiaoming Wu, the papers in this special issue were produced by members of a conference *Topics in Comparative Ancient Philosophy: Greek and Chinese* held in Oxford on June 22–24, 2006. The conference was designed to test the value of serious communication and collaboration among philosophers working on ancient Greek philosophy and those working on ancient Chinese philosophy. Its success in stimulating rich and enlightening discussion across entrenched boundaries of discipline, language, culture, and methodology led to the extension of our experiment to readers of this issue.

The papers are paired according to topics of importance for the study of both ancient Greek and ancient Chinese philosophy: change, language, action, the self, reason and feeling, and music. Rather than seeking an essence of Greek philosophy or Chinese philosophy, the papers concentrate on philosophically sensitive readings of one or more significant texts, relating them to important controversies of their time as well as to current philosophical concerns. Although there was no session on method, methodological issues emerged in the conference through the discussion of texts and problems. Broadly speaking, there was a creative tension between a “Cambridge” view, emphasizing factors of cultural, historical, and intellectual context, and an “Oxford” view, emphasizing philosophical analysis to some extent divorced from these contextual factors, a difference established in other areas of research, notably political philosophy. We hope that the papers will stimulate scholars with both of these orientations. We also hope that sinologists and classicists will recognize the value of asking distinctively philosophical questions about the texts that they also study.

Readers, individually or in groups, can extend our experiment by using their own philosophical background, sensibility, interests and methods to respond to the paired contributions and by addressing further issues in a similar way. Unfortunately, we were unable to

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include in this publication additional topics examined in the conference: paradox, commentary, political philosophy, and ritual.

We anticipate that the study of both Chinese philosophy and Greek philosophy will benefit from exploration of selected topics in a comparative context. The study of Chinese philosophy will gain from the sophistication that has characterized the best recent work on Greek philosophy. The study of Greek philosophy will gain from considering concepts, doctrines, arguments, and rhetorical strategies drawn from another ancient and complex philosophical tradition. Work along these lines can fruitfully enlarge the scope of the mainstream study of ancient philosophy, a process already initiated through the close study of Hellenistic philosophical texts.

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