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# Preface

This is a book on philosophy. More particularly, it is a book on Daoist philosophy. This means, however, that it is also a book on Daoism; for Daoist philosophy is an integral part of Daoism. The distinction between Daoist philosophy and Daoism, and even whether there is really such a distinction, has been a topic for much scholarly debate. One common way of distinguishing between Daoism and Daoist philosophy is to say that Daoism itself encompasses a wide grouping of ideas including cultural, religious, ritualistic, and philosophical ideas and practices that have their roots in an ancient school of Chinese thought. Daoist philosophy, on the other hand, refers mainly to the philosophical aspects of those ideas. The philosophical part of Daoism also predates the other parts of Daoism, though in one sense this is not fully the case. This is because even before the first overtly Daoist philosophical texts, there were shamanistic beliefs and practices in China that were later absorbed into what might be called religious Daoism. These beliefs and practices, therefore, existed before Daoist philosophy, though not of course as part of Daoism.

During the Warring States (480–221 BCE) and Spring and Autumn periods (770–480 BCE) when philosophical Daoism began to emerge, there was already a common cultural belief in a hierarchy of spirits and the related practices of venerating them with offerings. Connected to these practices were shrines to spirits who guarded various locations. So when Daoism later became an organized religion with its own shrines and veneration practices, as it did in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–219 CE), it was simply buying into an established tradition. Thus when the Han emperor in 150 CE raised a shrine to Laozi (Lao-tzu, fl. 550 BCE), the early Daoist philosopher, and organized ceremonies to honor him, he was continuing an ancient tradition. Laozi, however, had thereby been transformed in many people's minds, from a historical philosopher to a deity or sacred power (Wong 2011, 31–33).

These historical considerations indicate that Daoism as an organized religion or collection of rituals came well after the early Daoist philosophy. Thus although there were religious ideas and practices taking place before and during the rise of philosophical Daoism, the ideas of the first Daoist philosophers were primarily philosophical rather than religious in character. This, of course, will depend on how one understands religion, a concept that is notoriously difficult to define. For example, several of the Daoist philosophers show an interest in meditative practice. Someone who sees meditation

as a religious practice or ritual might therefore try to argue that Daoist philosophy cannot be separated from religion.

I think, however, that a careful reading of the Daoist philosophers will show that their concerns with meditation lay elsewhere. For they do not see meditation as a way of uniting or communicating with gods, spirits, or some transcendent reality, things that would indicate a religious motive. Rather, their concern is with meditation as a method for gaining perceptual clarity and freeing us from delusive ways of thinking. This, I would argue, is also a basic feature of the philosophical enterprise. A Western philosopher, however, might be tempted to disagree, claiming that psychological techniques like meditation have little to do with philosophy, at least as it is understood in the West.

The problem, however, is that one of the major areas in Western philosophy has its roots in just such a psychological technique. This is the area of skepticism. For it was the ancient Greek Skeptic Pyrrho who advocated the psychological technique of abstaining from beliefs that were not self-evident. The purpose of this was to attain *atrasia*, a mental state of tranquility. Such an approach does not sound too dissimilar to Asian ideas about meditation (Giles 2015). Interestingly enough, Pyrrho might well have got his inspiration from Buddhism when, in 105 CE, he traveled to Babylon.

This brings me back to my earlier point, namely that this is a book on philosophy. Consequently, although I am concerned with Daoism, my primary interest is in what Daoist philosophy has to offer philosophy. In other words, my interests are foremost philosophical rather than cultural or historical. This does not mean that I think cultural or historical features of a particular idea play no role in our getting to understand that idea. For taking these into account also assists us in arriving at a clearer picture of what someone is saying.

Rather, it means that I reject the social constructionist view that ancient Chinese ideas can only be understood within the context of ancient Chinese culture. This is because of my contention that despite the differences in time, place, and culture, all human beings share a common existential condition: we all find ourselves in a world that we never chose to be in, a world that demands some form of explanation, and a world from which we must, whether we want to or not, soon depart. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle said that to be human is to want to know, while the German existentialist Martin Heidegger said that it is the inevitability of our death that forces us to find meaning in our lives. This was as true for the ancient Chinese as it was for the ancient Greeks and as it is for modern Westerners. My purpose

in this book is to see what we, as modern Westerners, or modern Easterners for that matter, can learn from the ancient Chinese.

That being said, my goal is not exclusively to find out exactly what the ancient Daoist philosophers meant. For that is a project that is doomed to failure. The fragmentary, poetic, or allegorical nature of the texts, the fact that some texts appear to be transcripts by students, along with interpolations and redactions of later thinkers and editors, all conspire to make this an elusive goal. Consequently, my purpose is instead to construct a meaning from the various arguments, assertions, and examples using what could be called the principle of charity, namely the assumption that what the thinker in question is saying is both consistent and significant. To do this, and also for comparative purposes, I turn to the ideas and arguments of philosophers from different times and traditions. This also reflects my belief in the commonality of our human condition.

I am aware, however, that different cultures and epochs frame their similar concerns in different ways. The scholar approaching the ideas of another and ancient culture, therefore, has to be sensitive to the distinctiveness of that culture and attempt to avoid importing foreign elements into that culture, while at the same time being aware of our common humanity. I have attempted to do this throughout this study. One way in which I have tried to do this deserves special mention, namely my use of the word “awareness.” In Western philosophy, the phenomenon of awareness is usually referred to as consciousness. And this is fine; for the two words have meanings that are much the same.

There are, however, slight differences in the use of the words that, I feel, makes the word “awareness” more appropriate for Daoist philosophy. This is because the word “consciousness” has a long use in Anglo-philosophy and, in the mind of the English-speaking philosopher, might carry implications that are not appropriate in Daoist philosophy. For example, John Locke, an early modern Western philosopher, argues that consciousness, and not the soul or the body, is the essence of personal identity. But in doing so he seems to split human existence up into three distinct things or aspects. He thus seems to imply that consciousness has a form of independent existence. Other philosophers appear to have followed him in this regard.

I do not feel that the word “consciousness” necessarily carries this idea with it and am myself happy to use the word in other contexts. But because of this possible way of understanding the word, and because Daoists, or other ancient Chinese thinkers, do not understand the phenomenon of consciousness in this way, I have thought it better to use the word “awareness.” This is because “awareness” does not seem to carry such connotations with it.

Another aspect of the book that I should mention is my discussions of the identities of various Daoist authors. The identities and even existence of the early Daoist thinkers, along with the dating and authenticity of their texts, have been the subject of much dispute. I feel it is therefore important that the reader, especially one who has little background in Daoist philosophy, is introduced to these discussions and so has an idea of who these authors were and where the problems surrounding their identities lie. Otherwise, for someone coming to Daoist or Chinese philosophy for the first time, they are merely referenceless names. The difficulty, however, is that the lives of these ancient philosophers are shrouded in controversy. I therefore feel it necessary to take a stand in the debate and argue for what I feel is the most probable conclusion.

Before I come to Daoist philosophy, however, I should first say something about translations. There are numerous translations of the different Daoist works. The *Book of the Way and Its Power* (*Daode jing* / *Tao-te-ching*), for example, has been translated into English several hundred times. This has led to endless quarreling over which is the best translation of the text. But of course there is no best translation; for this judgment will depend on how one understands the purpose of translation. Is the purpose of translation, for example, to render a word-for-word transposition from one language into another? Or is translation more a process of interpretation where the translator attempts to give the gist of what is being said while translating foreign expressions and idioms into those of another language—expressions and idioms that make sense in one's own language, but do not make sense or even appear in the original foreign text? Or is the purpose somewhere in between these two, and if so, where?

This process becomes even more complex with a language like ancient Chinese where, unlike English, there are no tenses, no singular or plural, no gender, and nouns can be used as verbs. When this is added to the fact that many of the Daoist texts are obscure in themselves, the difficulties of deciding on the best translation become even more apparent. I myself have chosen to use a variety of translations, employing those which I feel best capture the meaning of what I think the author is trying to say, and which also avoid interpolating foreign or inappropriate meanings into the text. To this end, I have modified some of the translations.

I have avoided bringing Chinese characters into the text, as these can be distracting for non-Chinese readers. Where I have felt it helpful, I have instead chosen to transliterate Chinese terms using the pinyin system of Romanization, though I also give the Wade-Giles system for well-known terms

or names. I have not altered how modern scholars transliterate their own names.

Finally, like many books this one has had a long history in the making. Many of the ideas contained in here have their origin in either the courses or projects on Daoism that I have taught or supervised, or in the papers I have presented on Daoism over the years. The courses and projects were carried out at the University of Cambridge, Hawaii College of Kansai Gaidai University, the University of Guam, La Trobe University, and Roskilde University. The discussions in these courses have proven useful in the development of my ideas and I therefore owe thanks to my students.

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# The Context of Daoist Philosophy

## The Character of Ancient Chinese Philosophy

Daoist philosophy first made its appearance in ancient China, where it was one of the oldest schools of philosophical thought. It developed, in part, as a response to problems that concerned Chinese philosophers at that time. Consequently, to get a good grasp of Daoist philosophy it is important to understand the problems that concerned the ancient Chinese and also to understand the philosophers and schools of thought in China that attempted to deal with these problems. In other words, it is important to get a sense of the character of ancient Chinese philosophy.

But what characterizes ancient Chinese philosophy other than the fact that it was practiced in ancient China? This is a difficult question to answer, as there is a wide divergence among these philosophers' methods, values, and approaches. In one way, it can be said that, when compared to ancient Western philosophy, ancient Chinese philosophy has more concern with practical social ethics and the relation of human beings to society. That is, the problem of achieving harmonious human interaction, both at the individual level and at the level of society, was seen as an overriding issue by many Chinese philosophers. This led to accounts of moral psychology, theories of interpersonal behavior, and political theory.

The first Greek philosophers (ca. 625–430 BCE), on the other hand, were often concerned with explaining the constitution and origins of things, and how human beings fit into the cosmos. This led to scientific questions and theories and from there to questions about the basis of our knowledge, the nature of delusive beliefs, psychology, and metaphysics. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Empedocles, and Democritus all had views about the constitution of the physical universe, whereas Xenophanes and Heraclitus had concerns about the nature and validity of our knowledge claims. For Heraclitus, Parmenides, and others, a major concern was also metaphysical problems about the nature of identity and how it related to change.

The problem, however, is that there are various exceptions to this neat division. The ancient Chinese philosophers Mozi (Mo-tzu, fl. 479–438 BCE), Xunzi (Hsün-tzu, ca. 298–238 BCE), and Huizi (Hui-tzu, ca. 380–305 BCE) were much concerned about the nature and validity of knowledge. Zou Yan (Tsou Yen, 305–240 BCE) and Guo Xiang (Kuo Hsiang, d. 312 CE) were deeply interested in metaphysics. Indeed, Zou Yan's yin-yang metaphysics, with its two opposing forces and his view of the five phases (water, wood, fire, earth, and metal), bears an uncanny resemblance to Empedocles' idea of the two opposing forces of love and strife and his four elements (earth, water, air, and fire). Likewise, Guo Xiang's arguments concerning the inability of non-being to generate being echo Parmenides' arguments about the same issue. Daoist philosophers, as we shall see, were also keen metaphysicians. Similarly, Greek thinkers such as Democritus and the Sophists had strong interests in ethics, society, and social harmony. This was particularly true in the case of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

It is also evident that there are certain ideas that the earliest Chinese philosophers took from ancient pre-philosophical works and made the object of philosophical discussion. Chinese philosophers coming after them inherited the concern for these ideas and added their views to the debate. Thus the ancient literary works known as the six Chinese classics (dating back to the tenth century BCE) refer to certain concepts like the Way and heaven, or the decree of heaven in mostly non-philosophical contexts. Early philosophers like Laozi and Confucius (Kong Fuzi / K'ung-fu-tzu, 551–479 BCE) took these concepts and subjected them to philosophical scrutiny. Those coming after could not but be influenced by them and continued in the same discussions.

A similar thing happened in the West, where the earliest Greek philosophers took ideas from their pre-philosophical forbears, Homer and Hesiod (ca. 800 BCE), and set to work on them. Hesiod, for example, presents his concept of the birth of the world out of Chaos or emptiness and its issuing forth of numerous elements. Subsequent thinkers like Heraclitus and Parmenides took these ideas and analyzed them in terms of the concepts of permanence, change, identity, and duality. Again, those coming after these philosophers, like Plato, were heavily influenced by them.

Because of this, Chinese and Western philosophies went their different ways. Consequently, what helps to characterize ancient Chinese philosophy is that it developed around specific concepts. Throughout the Chinese texts, one is forever coming across such ideas as the Way, heaven, or the will of heaven. Although the idea of heaven also plays an important role in Christian thought as the abode of the dead or the dwelling place of God, the Chinese idea of heaven, which is the usual translation of *tian* (*t'ien*), has no rela-

tion to this. Although it can have seemingly personal qualities, for the most part it means the vaulted sky above, as contrasted to the earth below. It can also mean the universe itself or simply the way things are.

However, basic Western concepts such as substance, properties, identity, or duality seldom enter the discussion. What particularly characterizes Chinese philosophy is when Chinese notions such as those just mentioned, are brought to bear on the discussion of social ethics and social harmony. Still, Chinese philosophy seems to maintain its character by the use of specific concepts.

The question of why Chinese philosophy showed a particular interest in social questions is interesting. Although there are probably numerous contributing factors, one important cause seems to be that Chinese philosophy arose during the collapse of the Zhou dynasty (1030–221 BCE) in the epochs known as the Spring and Autumn period (770–480 BCE) and the Warring States period (480–221 BCE). During these times there was continual fighting in China as the various states vied for power. There had been fighting before this time, but nothing on this scale. With the onset of the Warring States period huge battles raged, with large-scale massacres, butchery of several hundred thousand prisoners of war at a time, and cannibalism (Sawyer 2006).

In the wake of these wars came famine, disease, crime, and general social disarray. It is thus understandable that the Chinese philosophers of these periods spent much time speculating over the nature of social existence and the way out of the social chaos that engulfed the land. Indeed, it seems it was just this social chaos that gave rise to Chinese philosophy in its finest hour. For these periods are also known as the golden age of Chinese philosophy (551–221 BCE), a time of intellectual flourishing that has never been matched in subsequent Chinese history (Billington 2002).

We will come to the Daoist thinkers shortly. But to start, let us get an overview of the other major philosophers and schools of the time. This will give us a context in which to place Daoist philosophy and show the background against which it developed.

## The Philosophy of the *Book of Changes*

Long before the first purely philosophical texts appeared in China there was the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* / *I Ching*). This is one of the six Chinese classics, a work that had its beginnings in the tenth century BCE. It was originally, and still is, used for purposes of divination. That is, it is a text to which persons could turn for advice concerning problems or questions in their own lives. The tradition is that it was produced by Fu Xi (Fu Hsi), King Wen, and

the Duke of Zhou. In contemplating the structure of the universe, the legendary sage-king Fu Xi allegedly recognized various patterns of lines and grouped them into threes. These groups of three lines, which contained solid lines, broken lines, or mixtures of both, were called trigrams and were supposed to reflect the interrelation of things. King Wen, the founder of the Zhou dynasty, later reorganized the trigrams, placing them in groups of two to form several hexagrams. To each hexagram he gave a name and a specific meaning. He then composed a line to describe each figure. His son, the Duke of Zhou, later added a commentary to each line.

The well-known Chinese opposing characteristics of yin and yang first appeared in these commentaries. Yin is a character that shows the shady side of a mountain; it represents receptivity, absorption, passivity, darkness, earth, and the female. Yang is a word that represents the sunny side of a mountain: it stands for activity, light, explicitness, heaven, and the male. These ideas were later developed by Zou Yan as cosmic principles that work through the five phases in continuous cycles of transformation. To consult the *Book of Changes*, people would typically carry out a specific procedure of dividing and counting fifty yarrow stalks to arrive at a number. This number would in turn indicate a specific hexagram. The consulter would then turn to the page for the hexagram and divine the meaning of the hexagram in terms of his or her situation (Wilhelm 1950).

Within the text, there are several key words that appear in both the lines that describe each figure and the commentaries to the various lines. One such term is *dao* (*tao*), a term that is central to Daoist philosophy. This word, which has several meanings, is usually translated as “way” or “path.” In the *Book of Changes* it is described as the “process of being and the course it traces for each specific person or thing” (Ritsema and Karcher 1995, 97). This process of being is thus something that happens beyond a person’s control. It is not something that people choose. It is rather something that marks out the path that our lives will take. Here is one the earliest references in Chinese thought to fatalism—the idea that the course of our lives is somehow decided beforehand and thus beyond our control.

The ancient Chinese did not distinguish clearly between fatalism and determinism; nor did the ancient Greeks for that matter. And even today there is no clear agreement among scholars about how and even if the two ideas are to be separated. It can, however, be said generally that fatalism is seen to refer to the view that the course of at least some aspects of our lives is somehow decided beforehand. The idea of “decided beforehand” is probably what best distinguishes fatalism most from determinism. For determinism is simply the view that every event—at least at the macro level—is caused. On

this view, it follows that our choices are also caused, and thus beyond our control. A corollary of this idea is that if one of the causes that led up to an event was different, then the event might well have been otherwise. With fatalism, however, the idea of an event being decided beforehand seems to rule out the idea that things could have been otherwise, even if what led up to the event was different. Still, as I will try to show, the early Chinese philosophers, including the Daoists, had different ways of understanding fate and destiny.

The word *dao* is related to another keyword, namely *de* (*te*), a word that can mean power, force, or virtue. Here virtue is used in both the ethical sense of a moral quality and the sense of efficacy or inherent power, as in “It was in virtue of her medical treatment that she is still alive.” Again, this is a term that comes to play a role in Daoist philosophy. In the *Book of Changes*, it means to “realize *dao* in action; power, virtue, ability to follow the course traced by the ongoing process of the cosmos” (Ritsema and Karcher 1995, 99). Thus for the authors of the *Book of Changes*, *de* is the ability to follow *tao*. Or, in other words, *de* refers to a person’s ability to follow the course that the process of being lays out for him or her.

These two terms are further related to the idea of *junzi* (*chün-tzu*), another common term in the *Book of Changes*. This term, we are told, refers to the “ideal person who uses divination to order his/her life in accordance with *dao* rather than willful intention” (1995, 95). An ideal person (*junzi*) is thus someone who has the special ability (*de*) to follow the Way of the process (*dao*). An ideal person is shown to be so in the process of divination: he divides and counts the yarrow sticks and lets them fall where they may, that is, in accordance with the process of being. He then allows this process, rather than his willful intention, to pick out the relevant hexagram, which he then looks up in the *Book of Changes*.

This, however, is not the end of the ideal person’s use of the special ability in the divination process; for the next step is to interpret the lines and commentary connected to the hexagram. Here the special ability must also be used. But how does one use this ability to interpret a text? The answer, I feel, is that the ideal person must simply read the text and let the meanings appear of their own accord. These meanings will include the relation of the meaning of the hexagram to his or her own situation. He or she does this by not actively trying or using “willful intention” to find a meaning in the text. That is, the person seeking to use the *Book of Changes* must avoid trying to decipher the lines and commentary in any discursive and intentional way. To do so would mean that he was not in the right state of awareness to learn from the divination process.

But why ought the consulter of the *Book of Changes* to be in this particular state to interpret the text properly? There are, it seems, two possible answers to this question. One is that the consulter must be free from willful intention in order to keep his own views from interfering with the response given by the *Book of Changes*. This interference might be his interpreting the text in a way that suits him, rather than in a way that it is meant to be interpreted. But how is it meant to be interpreted? In this view the reply to the consulter's question is produced by an oracle that somehow magically speaks to the consulter through the text. The oracle's meaning is thus the one that the consulter should allow to appear.

Another answer is suggested by seeing the *Book of Changes* in a psychological way. In this case, the text of the *Book of Changes* is much like a projective psychological test. In tests like these, the subject is asked to respond to an ambiguous or vague stimulus. In a verbal form of the test known as the Sentence Completion Test, the subject is given several beginnings of sentences, which he or she is then asked to complete (Holaday et al. 2000). Because the sentence is only partially completed, there is no definite meaning, and thus few indications of how the sentence is "meant" to be completed. The result is that the subject is left to provide his own meanings by completing the sentences. The theory behind this test is that the incomplete sentence works to trigger associations, which the subject uses to complete the sentence. These associations then provide information about the subject's psychological state—desires, anxieties, conflicts, and so on.

The text of the *Book of Changes* can also be seen in this way. When one turns to the meanings and lines that describe the hexagrams, these are much like incomplete sentences. To take an example, the text for the first hexagram, a hexagram named "force," says that the meaning of force is "spirit power, creative and destructive; unceasing forward motion; dynamic, enduring, untiring, firm, stable; heaven, sovereign, father; also: dry up, parched, exhausted, cleared away." A consulter of the *Book of Changes* who is led to this hexagram must make sense of these terms in a way that is applicable to his or her situation. That is, the consulter must take these terms and complete sentences around them in such a way that they address his or her concerns.

Now with the Sentence Completion Test, if it is going to be effective, the subject must try to complete the sentences in an unguarded, spontaneous, and honest way. That is, he or she must not try to complete the sentences in a way that he or she feels would please the examiner, be most appropriate, or suggest a picture of the person he or she would like to be. Rather, the subject

must respond openly without thinking about it. Doing so allows the subject's psychology to manifest itself in an unimpeded way.

The same is true for the *Book of Changes*; for here too the consulter must create sentences spontaneously around the descriptive words and phrases. In doing so he or she similarly discovers his or her own psychological states. In this way, the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* lead not to the advice from a supernatural oracle, but rather to an awareness of one's own desires, anxieties, and conflicts. This in turn gives the consulter valuable information about how to deal with the problem that is his or her real concern. On this interpretation of the *Book of Changes*, the "process of being" is the consulter's process of awareness. The "ability to follow the course" traced by this process, then, is the ability to allow meanings to appear from the text without attempting purposively to find those meanings.

## Confucius

The most influential of Chinese philosophers is Confucius. Indeed, such is the importance of Confucius' thought that his ideas can be said to lie at the very core of Chinese history and culture. Because of this immense influence on such a large country, it can perhaps also be said that Confucius is the most important philosopher in the world. This is supported by the fact that his influence did not remain in China, but spread to ancient Japan, Korea, Tibet, Mongolia, and much of Southeast Asia.

The influence of Confucius is striking when it is seen that, for the most part, he did not see himself as having any new doctrines or ideas but rather as being a bearer of ancient tradition. He says, for example, "I have transmitted what was taught to me without making up anything of my own. I have been faithful to and loved the ancients" (Chan 1973, 123). This transmission was carried out in his oral teachings rather than in writings. What we have from Confucius are transcriptions from his students compiled some time after his death. These are in the form of short sayings, brief dialogues, and statements by himself and his followers. These were collected into a work known as the *Analects* (*Lunyu* / *Lun-yü*). The authenticity of parts of this work has been avidly discussed by scholars. The results of this debate suggest that various sections of the *Analects* are of a date later than Confucius (Bruce and Brooks 2001). There is also a work known as the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* / *Ta-hsüeh*) which seems to have been compiled even later.

The ancient teachings that Confucius saw himself as transmitting were mainly those embodied in the six classical texts mentioned earlier. These were books dealing with ancient history, what were called the Spring and

Autumn periods, rites, poetry, music, and, as we have seen, divination. These books were revered in ancient China, particularly because of their antiquity. Consequently, throughout the *Analects* Confucius advocates the value of studying the knowledge of the ancients.

One question that naturally arises here is why Confucius himself thought the ideas of the ancients were so momentous. In some ways it seems that he is merely following the Chinese tradition of ancestor veneration. But in other ways he clearly feels the ancients had significant insights into the human condition. One of Confucius' main projects is to explore these insights and defend new interpretations of them. In one dialogue, for example, a student of Confucius argues that one year of mourning for a departed parent is enough, despite the fact that the *Book of Rites* (*Liji / Li-chi*) calls for three years of mourning. Confucius rejects this idea, pointing out that only after it is three years old does a child leave its parents' arms (1973, 214). His implication is that if parents tend to their child so tirelessly for three years, then the least the grown child could do is to mourn (and thus show appreciation and respect for) the dead parent for the same amount of time. Here is a good example of how Confucius gives a new interpretation of an old idea.

Therefore, it is not for its own sake that he promotes the study of the ancient texts, but rather for how this study can help us to see things in new ways. Thus he says, "He who by reanimating the old can gain knowledge of the new is fit to be a teacher" (1973, 90). The "new" for Confucius is primarily human character, while the reanimating of the old is the study of the ancients in such a way that it affects the character.

He says, for example, "Let a man be first incited by the [*Book of*] *Songs*, then given a firm footing by the study of ritual, and finally perfected by music" (1973, 135). Or again, "Courtesy not bounded by the prescriptions of ritual becomes timidity, daring becomes turbulence, inflexibility becomes harshness" (1973, 132). Thus although Confucius is a transmitter of ancient tradition, he puts that tradition to a new use, namely to the building of character. He does this by presenting a theory of character formation, virtues, and their relation in terms of a complex moral psychology. Herein lies his originality.

Confucius' theory is built on his more basic view of the nature of the individual and the individual's relation to the social world. Central to this view is his idea of *dao* or the Way. We have already seen the significance of this concept in the *Book of Changes*. And his use of this concept is a typical example of how he transmits ancient ideas. For although he at least in part takes this idea from the *Book of Changes*, he applies it to his theory of character rather than to a theory of divination. Thus for Confucius, it refers to the



proper way of doing something or to the rules of propriety. This involves fulfilling one's social roles and observing *li* or the rites. But it involves more than this, for it also implies carrying out these activities in a particular state of mind. Confucius says, for example, that in carrying out a rite for the departed ancestors, what is important is not that the spirits of the dead are present, but rather that one carries out the rite *as if* they were present, and that if one is not in this state of mind, then the rite has not really been performed. One only achieves this state if one uses *de*. The person who is able to achieve this *dao* through the use of *de* is what Confucius calls a *junzi*.

Again, we can see Confucius' transmission of ancient ideas; for both *de* and *junzi*, like *dao*, are basic concepts from the *Book of Changes*. As with his use of *dao*, however, Confucius reanimates the ideas of *de* and *junzi* by deploying them within his theory of character. Thus for him *de* is best translated as "moral force." That is, it is an aspect of character that is cultivated by resolute and untiring effort to acquire a particular virtue. The concept of *junzi*, someone who is able thus to cultivate this moral force, is probably best translated as "exemplary man." Sometimes it is translated as "gentleman." But this term, with its English Victorian implications or simply its use as a euphemism for "man"—as in "ladies and gentlemen"—seems inappropriate.

But what does the exemplary man apply his moral force to? He applies it to the building of his character through the exemplification of specific traits or virtues. The discussion of the nature of these virtues is a recurring theme in Confucius' dialogues and pronouncements. One of the main virtues discussed is *ren* (*jen*). This word has various meanings in Chinese, including kindness, tenderness, benevolence, and humanity. But for Confucius it primarily means "good" or "goodness" in a wide sense. It is also an intuitive ability to convert what one has learned into a character trait or a basic way of orientating oneself to the world. This orientation is one that will exhibit care or love for others beyond one's family relations. Confucius thought that such goodness was a fundamental human trait that had nevertheless been lost by social corruption. He thought, however, that by sincere practice we could regain something of this quality.

The problem is that it is unclear exactly what this goodness consists in and a full definition of goodness is never given. One reason for this seems to be that, for Confucius, goodness is an indefinable quality, something that can be hinted at or pointed to, but never fully described. Although it is plain that it is a human character trait that one can nurture and develop in one's interactions with others, it is a trait that eludes exact designation (The one attempted definition in 17.6 seems an interpolation from another text and is most likely not Confucius' words.)

In a way, it thus shares something with G. E. Moore's concept of goodness as simple and unanalyzable. For Moore, however, goodness is a quality of actions, whereas for Confucius it is a quality of human beings. Nevertheless, whatever goodness is a quality of, both Moore and Confucius seem in agreement that it is at least an indefinable quality that we observe or intuit when we see something (an action or person) that is good (Moore 2014). Because of this, it would also seem that Confucius' concept would be plagued by the problems that attend Moore's concept. For example, what is to be done when people's intuitions about which actions are good are in disagreement? Someone might intuit that capital punishment for murder is good, while someone else has no such intuition, or intuits it as being evil. Or someone might intuit that an abortion that frees a woman from an unwanted pregnancy is good, while another person intuits it as being morally wrong. On Moore's—and probably Confucius'—account of goodness, it is quite unclear how such disagreements could be resolved.

Despite the lack of definition, we are nevertheless told that fundamental to goodness is righteousness (*yi*). This refers to a tendency to choose what is good, though this tendency can be overridden by social factors. The exemplary man is someone who is able to cultivate this tendency.

The difficulty with this, of course, is that since we are never told what goodness is, and since righteousness is the tendency to choose the good, then we can hardly know what righteousness is. This means that two of Confucius' basic concepts remain somewhat inexplicable.

One could reply, I suppose, that since Confucius claims that goodness is a fundamental human character trait, and since we have an inborn tendency to choose what is good, then we could simply observe what people tend to choose. We could then, it might be argued, note what these choices all have in common and then come up with a definition of goodness.

The spanner in the works, however, is that Confucius allows that the fundamental human trait of goodness has been lost by social corruption. Consequently, as a matter of fact people do not always have a tendency to choose what is good. Thus simple observation of what people choose will not help in deciding what is to be considered good. The only way this could be done is if Confucius can give us some non-circular way of deciding which of the chosen acts display goodness and which display social corruption.

Further virtues discussed are those of filial piety, devotion to one's superiors, friendship, reverence, courage, and reliability in word. In the acquisition of these virtues, the concept of the "adjustment to names" (*zhengming / cheng-ming*) seems basic. This refers to the idea of correctly describing each thing and not mistaking it for something else. In the world of social con-

cerns, this means the acceptance of one's social role—as a child, parent, government minister, ruler, and so on—and acting accordingly. Here we see that Confucius has a sense of fatalism. Each of us is born, lives, and dies under the decree of heaven (*tianming* / *t'ien-ming*). Speaking, for example, of the early death of one of his disciples, he says: “The span of life allotted to him by heaven was short” (1973, 115). This concept is also one that Confucius inherited from the ancients: we have already seen how the *Book of Changes* refers to a course that is traced for each person or thing.

It is, regrettably, unclear exactly what Confucius understands by the term “heaven.” In some ways he seems to see it simply as referring to the way things are. In other ways, however, one gets the sense that heaven has personal qualities like benevolence that somehow enable us to modify our lots in life. There is, for example, always room for moral development.



