CHINESE PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHERS

AN INTRODUCTION

Revised Edition

Ronnie L. Littlejohn

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An Introduction

Second Edition

哲学

Ronnie L. Littlejohn

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To all my students during these last forty years, with inexpressible gratitude for the joy and fulfillment that has accompanied our learning together.

Contents

Focus Windows

哲学

Preface

This introduction to the study of philosophy by means of Chinese thinkers and texts provides a substantive overview to a vast and far-reaching tradition. If we do indeed mark the beginning of Chinese philosophy at 1500 years BCE and bring it to the present day, it represents the longest continuous heritage of philosophical reflection among human beings. Trying to mention each philosopher in this enduring tradition is an impossible task in an introduction such as this. In fact, even covering every *significant* thinker is not possible. So, by necessity, I have been selective, choosing those philosophers who, by virtue of the extent to which their thought has been discussed, are most representative of the key contributions Chinese philosophy can make to the emergence of a new type of philosopher whom I call a constructivist. This sort of philosopher engages the fundamental questions of philosophy no matter the culture of origin.

I should also say that I have engaged several thinkers who are often not included in a work on Chinese philosophy. I have no doubt that a first impression in looking at the table of contents of this work will lead those who know the field of Chinese philosophy rather well to conclude that I have allocated too much space to some thinkers and texts, and not enough to others. I have not tried to equalize the number of words given to each philosopher treated in this introduction. Neither have I tried to choose a thinker to represent every historical period of Chinese philosophy. In fact, I propose no periodization of philosophical reflection in China, since this work is an introduction to how Chinese thinkers have dealt with classic fundamental questions of philosophy, not a history of Chinese philosophical inquiry. Standard periodizations used in Western philosophy (i.e., Ancient, Medieval, Modern, Contemporary, Post-Modern) simply do not map with any accuracy onto Chinese philosophy. Sometimes, this means I have selected several thinkers who lived in roughly the same period, while some historical eras have no representative on a particular question. Likewise, another point to be made is that some philosophers make significant contributions in their

responses to particular questions but contribute almost no real advance in the philosophical conversation on others. For example, while Confucius may be said to have added interesting and worthwhile approaches to the understanding of moral and political philosophy, he does not further the conversation on ontology or epistemology in any novel ways.

I am well aware that the magnitude of Confucius's influence on Chinese cultural and intellectual history, and indeed over much of East Asia in general, can hardly be exaggerated. Even today, there is an active and vital reappraisal of Confucianism going on in China and East Asia. Some readers may insist that all Chinese philosophy is but commentary on Confucius! Alfred North Whitehead once observed of Western thought that the safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes on Plato. However, what often goes unnoticed is that Whitehead amplified this comment in the following way:

> I do not mean the systematic scheme of thought which scholars have doubtfully extracted from his (Plato's) writings. I allude to the wealth of general ideas scattered through them. His personal endowments, his wide opportunities for experience at a great period of civilization, his inheritance of an intellectual tradition not yet stiffened by excessive systematization, have made his writing an inexhaustible mine of suggestion. (Whitehead 1979: 39)

One could make an argument on the basis of Whitehead's amplification of his point that all Chinese philosophy is indeed a series of footnotes on Confucius, but actually I am rather skeptical of such a view. It does not account for the often-found uniqueness and contrariness of various Chinese thinkers regarding views on questions not addressed at all by Confucius.

Since the first half of the twentieth century, English-speaking philosophers have been dependent largely on the 1953 work of Fung Yulan (1895–1990) for an overall introduction to Chinese thought. What often goes overlooked, though, is that virtually the entirety of Fung's work can be classified as a history of Chinese philosophy, not a true introduction providing an account of how philosophers in Chinese culture generated and handled the fundamental questions human beings find the need to address repeatedly.

Fung's works were complemented and supplemented by those of Wing-tsit Chan (1901–1994), including his very significant work of primary materials, *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (1963b). In fact, Chan was unquestionably the leading translator of Chinese philosophical texts into English in the first half of the twentieth century. Together, both Fung and Chan contributed insights and interpretations to their expositions

of Chinese philosophy and their contributions were many, varied, and indispensable. Nonetheless, neither of these pioneering scholars tried to provide an overview of Chinese philosophy as it might be understood to address fundamental philosophical questions in a systematic way. This task is the principal objective of this book.

In the years since the publications of Fung and Chan, ongoing dialogue, discovery of new texts, greater appreciation for comparative philosophy, and the emergence of new scholars conversant with Chinese philosophy have become factors requiring the need for the introduction to Chinese philosophical thought as a part of constructive philosophical reflection (Littlejohn 2005). This evolving situation has not escaped the notice of scholars. In 1985, Donald Bishop edited a volume of expository and critical essays entitled *Chinese Thought: An Introduction*. This work follows the periodization conventionally employed when approaching Western philosophy and divides Chinese philosophy into Ancient, Medieval, and Modern periods, even though, in my view, such a demarcation is inappropriate for Chinese philosophy. In the essays included in Bishop's work, scholars wrote on key figures from each period. Bishop's volume has the virtues of making an effort to provide a comprehensive snapshot of the most important Chinese philosophers and often offering suggestive and significant critical observations. However, it too is mostly on the model of a history of Chinese philosophy.

Chung-ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin edited a set of essays focused on *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy* (2002). This work is a very fine collection, and it serves as a solid introduction to modern Chinese thinkers, rightly noting that what was known about Chinese thought by most Western academics, even so recently as 2002, was almost invariably confined to the "Classical" period (i.e., more specifically that of Confucius and early Daoism). Cheng and Bunnin divided the contemporary period into four stages designed by them to cover "all the major philosophical developments and philosophical positions of Chinese philosophy in the twentieth century" (2002: xiv).

In 2006, Jeeloo Liu published an *Introduction to Chinese Philosophy: From Ancient Philosophy to Chinese Buddhism.* Liu severely restricted the scope of her introduction by considering only philosophers through roughly the ninth century. Accordingly, her introduction can give the impression that nothing of significance has been done philosophically in China since the Classical period, or certainly since the Tang dynasty, although, of course, Liu does not believe this. For many, there is a concern even more significant

than the limited historical scope of Liu's book. A characteristic feature of this work is that it introduces thinkers on a historical frame, rather than by the philosophical topics and questions which most occupied them. Additionally, Liu approaches each thinker by means of Western analytic philosophical tradition. This kind of methodology tends to understand philosophical inquiry as limited to argument, conceptual distinction, and preference for the empirically verifiable as a determinative truth criterion. Often analytic thinkers do not consider "philosophical" any form of discourse that cannot be put into an argument form, with premises and conclusions. Consequently, in an effort to demonstrate to Western readers that Chinese philosophy is "real philosophy" as defined in this way, Liu recasts passages from Chinese philosophical texts into arguments of the sort consistent with what analytic thinkers expect and value.

I firmly believe Liu is right that many Chinese philosophers did make arguments, although I would claim they did so very rarely in the form that analytic philosophers would regard as normative for philosophical inquiry. Chinese philosophers often prefer analogy, as well as an appeal to historical allusions and metaphor in their way of doing philosophy. To so consistently force Chinese philosophy into the analytic model as Liu does may overlook the philosophical merits that emerge only if the method of the Chinese thinker is retained. Of course, this is not to say that Liu is not a skillful and well-informed interpreter of Chinese philosophy. She certainly is. Likewise, there are merits to sometimes exposing the argument of a Chinese thinker in such an explicit way. However, in this present work, I have endeavored to bring forward the argument structure employed as it is clearly used and intended by the Chinese philosopher, so I have also tried not to force a philosopher to make an argument of a certain form when he does not. Moreover, I have ambitiously taken on the project of considering philosophers up to the present in our overview, rather than so dramatically limiting the material historically as Liu did.

In 2008, two books of significance to an introduction of Chinese philosophy appeared. One of these was Karyn Lai's *An Introduction to Chinese Philosophy*. Lai, just as Liu had done, limited her introduction to cover only the period from the origins of Chinese philosophy to the emergence of Chan Buddhism (*c.* 700–800). Lai writes a strong introduction to the period she chooses; however, she makes no effort to talk about the contemporary philosophic scene in China and more attention to the concepts, themes, or aspects Western philosophy and Chinese philosophy both engage could have been included. When she does reference Western scholars, she is

almost always concerned with their readings of a Chinese philosopher or text and not with a direct comparison between a claim or approach to a problem made in the West and one put forward in China meant to address the same or similar fundamental questions.

The second work of importance to our project that came out in English in 2008 was Bo Mou's *A History of Chinese Philosophy*. This work is in the Routledge History of World Philosophies series and is not a monograph. Mou devotes the book's chapters to various movements or periods and assigns them to individual contributors. While having many merits, this work really cannot serve readership in the English-speaking world as an introduction to Chinese philosophy principally because the philosophical issues that each contributor has picked out of a Chinese school of thought to become the focus of the chapter depend on the general philosophical perspective, knowledge, scope, intellectual interests, and academic tastes of that author. This means that the component essays, while generally carefully researched and critically valuable, lack the flow and continuity needed for an actual introduction to the span of Chinese philosophy. Also, it is noteworthy that individual contributors generally do not engage other essays in the collection and the general editor does not provide a coherent narrative to connect the contributions into a unified story. Of course, I realize this is not the purpose of the work. I also readily acknowledge that as a sourcebook for an author writing an introduction such as this present work, Mou's book is of great value.

Now, having provided a brief survey of the range of works published in English in roughly the past thirty years and intended to be introductions of sorts and not anthologies of primary texts and the like, one thing is clear. Even though a number of these works present themselves as introductions to Chinese philosophy, they are all characteristically histories. But I suggest that for the person wishing to bring Chinese sources and philosophers into a coherent conversation about humanity's fundamental questions, these works typically spend too much time on the nature and structure of Chinese texts, historical events, and internecine debates among Sinologists and specialists in Chinese philosophy to provide a thoroughly usable and ready-at-hand look at how the most dominant minds in China formulated approaches and answers to life's most basic philosophical questions.

The purpose of this work is to introduce how Chinese thinkers and texts address some of the most fundamental philosophical questions of human experience in order to put the resources of this extraordinary philosophical tradition into the quiver of tools available for a new

generation of philosophers, the sort of philosopher I call a "constructivist." The stark truth is that the study of non-Western philosophical traditions has been understood within the West under what I call *the exclusionist paradigm*. This paradigmatic set of assumptions and filters originated from the initial encounters of European and British scholars with non-Western philosophies beginning in the late sixteenth century, but it has continued to exert influence until the dawn of the twenty-first century. The paradigm consists principally in the belief that there is no "real" or "true" philosophy outside of the West, especially not in China. For example, the Western thinker G. W. F. Leibniz claimed, "Among the Chinese, I believe, neither history nor criticism nor philosophy are sufficiently developed" (Leibniz 1994: 71). Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) lectured frequently on Chinese moral philosophy in his annual physical geography course, but in an unpublished version of these lectures, he stated:

> Philosophy is not to be met with in the entire orient. … Their teacher Confucius lectures in his writings on nothing but moral precepts for princes. (Von Glasenapp 1954: 103–4)

Such exclusionism marginalized non-Western philosophical reflection from China specifically.

There are two overarching explanations for the strength and endurance of the exclusionist paradigm. First, a great deal of what is known in the West as the early Modern and Enlightenment periods was both built on a rigorous empiricism and correspondence theory of truth that relegated classical Chinese thinking to mysticism or religious nonsense and locked traditions such as Confucianism into its place as a social etiquette. Second, Western philosophers until the beginning of the twentieth century quite simply lacked any reasonable familiarity with the vast history and range of issues addressed in Chinese philosophical texts. While there were Latin, French, and eventually English versions of the Confucian classics and the Daoist work called *Daodejing* from the late eighteenth century, vast segments of China's philosophical thinking were unknown. So, what we may call "the exclusionist canon of Chinese philosophical texts" that came into the hands of Western thinkers was severely limited. In fact, consider that the first complete English translation of the hugely important *Mozi* was not done until Ian Johnston's 2010 work. One wonders whether such a thorough exclusion of Chinese philosophy from "philosophy proper" would have been sustainable had the *Mozi*'s analytical sections been available to Western thinkers beginning in the eighteenth century.

Two essays that shine light on the deleterious effects of this paradigm were written by Bryan Van Norden: "An Open Letter to the APA" (1996a) and "What Should Western Philosophy Learn from Chinese Philosophy?" (1996b). Perhaps unsurprisingly, since paradigms are often quite difficult to dislodge, not much changed, despite Van Norden's protests. So, the exclusionist paradigm has been recently criticized again. "[We] ask those who sincerely believe that it does make sense to organize our discipline entirely around European and American figures and texts to pursue this agenda with honesty and openness. We therefore suggest that any department that regularly offers courses only on Western philosophy should rename itself 'Department of European and American Philosophy'" (Garfield and Van Norden 2016).

While this tenacious exclusivist understanding of Chinese philosophy continued to manifest itself, another paradigm for studying Chinese philosophy emerged known as *comparative philosophy*. Studies that introduce comparative philosophy and its methods include those of Tim Connolly (2015) and Ronnie Littlejohn and Qingjun Li (2019). Also extremely helpful to an understanding of the work of comparative philosophers we should include Sor-hoon Tan's *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy Methodologies* (2016) and Van Norden's *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (2017). Some uses of this present volume can also aid the comparative philosopher. The inclusion of "Focus Windows" is meant to suggest comparison, but these are limited by the fact that they are almost exclusively drawn from Western philosophy. A richer comparative philosophy would set many traditions in conversation, with each tradition like a vast categorical area of some giant Venn diagram expressing points of overlap, similarity, and uniqueness in the traditions of global philosophy. For many comparative philosophers the ultimate goal is to locate and work within the "sweet spot" of what Connolly calls "comparative universalism" created by the actual dialogue of traditions and not some "view from nowhere" standing above them with some privileged view of truth (Connolly 2015: 150–3).

But in this introductory book, I want to contribute to a third paradigm shift that has been emerging in the past two decades and goes beyond comparative philosophy to create not a new methodology for philosophy, but *a new type of philosopher*. I call this new philosopher a *constructivist*. These new philosophers seek out what is framed differently in other cultures, analyzed in novel ways, and so on. They integrate, synthesize, and create. Constructionist philosophers are seeking something more and other than

a consensus or middle ground between philosophical traditions of different cultures that emerge from comparative philosophy. They are reflecting, inventing, and making over philosophical understandings of fundamental human questions by appropriating insights and approaches from across cultures and traditions.

While similar introductions to Japanese, South Asian, African, and other traditions can also contribute to the constructivist project, in the present work my purpose is to help the reader develop as a constructivist philosopher by exposure to Chinese texts and traditions. In doing so, I fully acknowledge my debt to all those persons whose works I have mentioned above and to my teachers and colleagues who have labored to help me become a better philosopher.

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I want to acknowledge the support and encouragement I have received in developing this second edition of *Chinese Philosophy: An Introduction* from Ms. Colleen Coalter, Senior Commissioning Editor for Philosophy at Bloomsbury Publishing. Very soon after Bloomsbury's acquisition of my work from I.B. Tauris, Ms. Coalter contacted me and began working with me on how we might enhance my works in later editions. She sent this volume to three reviewers and all of them were quite kind in their remarks about the strengths of the work, while also making extremely helpful suggestions for its improvement in a second edition. I am grateful to them and to Ms. Coalter for taking the initiative to get approval for the production of this new edition and for her guidance along the way.

Note on Translations

The interpretation and understanding of a substantial number of important Chinese philosophical concepts and terms may be affected by the translation used. For those texts cited recurringly throughout this work, I have made use of the translations below. Unless otherwise specifically noted or cited, the reader may consult the translations given below as the standard ones used throughout for the texts mentioned. When I have added interpolations or comments in clarification of the translation, I have put the content in brackets. When I offer my own translations, rather than relying on the texts below, I cite the location in the original text and note "my translation." When I alter only part of a translated passage from one of the volumes below, I cite the location in the original text and note "my changes" in the in-text citation. When I provide the Romanized *pinyin* and/or Chinese character for the reader, I put this in parentheses.

Translations Used for Recurring Texts

Ames, Roger, and Henry Rosemont, trans. (1998), *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, New York: Ballantine Books.

Hutton, Eric, trans. and ed. (2014), *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ivanhoe, Philip J., trans. (2002), *The Daodejing of Laozi*, New York: Seven Bridges.

Johnston, Ian, trans. (2010), *The Mozi: A Complete Translation*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Lau, D. C., trans. (2003), *Mencius*, New York: Penguin Books.

Major, John, Sarah Queen, Andrew Set Meyer, and Harold Roth, trans. (2010), *The Huainanzi: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Government in Early Han China*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Watson, Burton, trans. (1968), *The Complete Works of Chuang-Tzu*, New York: Columbia University Press.

哲学
Introduction

Philosophy is sometimes thought of exclusively in terms of a specific intellectual movement or method of approaching fundamental questions associated with a prominent philosopher. For example, we can speak of Platonism, Aristotelianism, Confucianism, Mohism, Epicureanism, Cartesianism, Kantianism, and Hegelianism. At other times, the method used to approach fundamental questions, and even for regarding which questions are fundamental, becomes identified with philosophy itself. This happens when we speak of methodologies *as though* they exhausted the nature of philosophy such as Empiricism, Rationalism, Idealism, Positivism, Existentialism, Phenomenology, or Pragmatism.

Sometimes we can learn about an intellectual discipline just by looking at its name. We need not puzzle about the primary content of Literature, French, Mathematics, or Accounting. Unfortunately, this is somewhat less true about Philosophy. The word *philosophy* comes from the Greek *philosophia* (φιλοσοφία), literally meaning "love of wisdom." This is certainly a project in which Chinese thinkers have been as seriously engaged. Still, at first sight this does not tell us much definitively about philosophy's subject matter.

I do not find any of these approaches particularly helpful as ways to help us grasp what sort of activity philosophy is. Actually, the best way to expose how philosophers love wisdom is to look at the kind of questions that concern them. If I ask a student, "What do you want to do when you graduate?" she may certainly answer in a completely nonphilosophical way. There is nothing about this question that requires a philosophical sort of answer. She may simply say, "Be a doctor." I may go on to inquire, "How do you get to be a doctor?" Again, a reply may be given that is not philosophical.

But suppose I ask, "Will it make you happy to be a doctor?" This sounds more like a philosophical question, although it might also be a psychological one. But if I inquire, "What is happiness, anyway?" then I have moved to the level of a philosophical question.

What is it that makes the last question a philosophical one? It is a fundamental question about human life, and it cannot be resolved by empirical means alone. Indeed, philosophers sometimes understand their work to include the task of distinguishing those claims that are decidable by empirical evidence alone and those that are not. Such a task arises from the fundamental question, "Is all knowledge gained by the same means?" or simply "What is it 'to know' something?" We shall see that philosophers such as Mozi, Wang Chong, and Zhang Dongsun are all concerned with such questions about knowledge. Fundamental questions may be grouped into a number of categories, such as those having to do with epistemology (questions about the nature and scope of knowledge), ontology (questions about the nature of reality and its processes), morality (questions about the value appraisals of human conduct and how value judgments are made), logic, personal identity, meaning of life (including questions about religion), and a host of topics known as "philosophy of" (e.g., philosophy of politics [political philosophy], philosophy of language or philosophy of psychology).

It is important to remind ourselves that fundamental questions are of concern in the work of Chinese thinkers and they are not exclusively in the purview of Westerners. Accordingly, it is not cultural ethnocentrism or intellectual imperialism to recognize that questions quite similar or even identical to those in Western tradition also show up in Chinese philosophers' writings. In choosing to move fundamental questions to the forefront of the organization of our study, I have not placed a Western grid down on Chinese philosophy. The easiest way to see that fundamental questions are both implicit and explicit in Chinese philosophy is to let the texts speak for themselves. So, I have made use of quite a number of primary texts in our introduction because these disclose not only that Chinese philosophers are dealing with fundamental questions but also how they approach and answer them. For example, some Chinese thinkers are as occupied with questions of epistemology (how we know something is true and the scope and range of our knowledge) as are some Western philosophers. Of course, this no more means that every Chinese philosopher considers epistemology to be the most important or exclusive concern of philosophy, any more than it does that all Western philosophers believe in such a narrow understanding of their field.

Moreover, Chinese philosophers often approach questions of epistemology differently and provide answers to them that very much set them apart from those offered by Western thinkers. These factors explain some reasons why Chinese Philosophy should be introduced into the development of the type of constructivist philosopher I mention in the Preface.

Bertrand Russell, a significant Western philosopher of the twentieth century who visited China, held that the value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in the very uncertainty of its answers to fundamental questions (Russell 1912: 237–50). He argued that the person who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, or from the habitual beliefs and convictions that have grown up in the mind without the cooperation or consent of deliberate reason and reflection. To such a person the world tends to appear obvious; common objects rouse no questions. However, as soon as one begins to philosophize, on the contrary, one finds that even the most everyday things give rise to questions of wonder and puzzlement.

Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty the "true" answer to all the questions it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities that enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of mere custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, philosophy greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect (ibid.: 242–3). We will see that studying how Chinese philosophers have engaged these questions provides vibrant intellectual stimulation and sometimes a different approach to those offered by Western philosophy.

Elmer Sprague once wrote that philosophy is like the measles. It must be caught from someone who is already infected. He held that to learn to philosophize, one must try his luck arguing with a real philosopher or at least with another person who is engaged in the wonder of fundamental questions as well (Sprague 1962: 3). Another way of saying this is to follow Ludwig Wittgenstein's observation that philosophy is not a specific theory or content, it is an activity. It is with this exciting activity that I hope to infect the reader in the chapters that follow by using Chinese thinkers and texts as our springboard.

Four chapters make up this book, each taking up in a broad sense the positions of Chinese philosophers on one set of fundamental questions. In arranging things in this way, I am noticing that there are "family resemblances"

or recognizable similarities between the sorts of fundamental questions posed by diverse global philosophical traditions. These resemblances make it possible to use this typological model as an organizing structure for the study. Of course, while there are family resemblances in the fundamental questions asked by Chinese and other philosophical traditions, there are likewise quite fascinating divergences in efforts to answer them.

Chapter 1 deals with a set of questions in the category known as *ontology*. *Ontology* is derived from two Greek words: *ontis*, meaning "being" or "reality," "that which is"; and *logos*, meaning "the study of" or "the knowledge of." Sometimes, ontology is also called metaphysics, referring to what can be known about reality beyond that which physics or science tells us. I choose not to use this term because to speak of *meta*physics already implies there is something that is beyond what can be known through the empirical world. Some ontological questions are these:

- What is reality composed of/made of?
- Is reality of a single type of thing (monism), two types of things (e.g., minds and bodies; matter and spirit; as in dualism), or many types of things (pluralism)?
- Is reality composed of only constantly changing and transient things or are there enduring, even eternal and universal, components to it?
- Is reality actually as it appears to us or is it something different from what we think it is (the question of appearance versus reality)?
- Does reality have a meaning, is it guided by a mind or intelligence to occur as it does, or does it follow some internal pattern of its own nature, "purposing" of its own accord, or do humans attach meaning or purpose to reality that it does not have in itself?

Chapter 2 is occupied with fundamental questions that can be gathered under the concept of *epistemology*. Again, as with the term ontology, *epistemology* has its origin in the Greek language. *Epistemis* means "knowledge," and so epistemology is the study of knowledge. Some epistemological questions are these:

- What is it "to know"? Is knowing someTHING (fact) different from knowing someONE (person)?
- Can we actually *know* someTHING (fact) to be true, or do we only *believe* things to be true (the issue of skepticism)?
- Are all claims to know someTHING (fact) of the same sort or justified in the same way?

- What are the tools we use to know someTHING (e.g., reason, experience/senses, etc.)?
- Are we born knowing some things are true?
- Is there a limit to what we can know?
- Are there laws of thinking that must be followed to obtain knowledge?

Chapter 3 concerns philosophical questions of morality and value. Some fundamental questions addressed in this chapter are these:

- How should we live?
- What is the ultimate purpose of our lives (e.g., to pursue happiness or pleasure, obey moral rules, please others or higher beings, follow our own interests, or create harmony between persons)?
- What is the origin of our morality (e.g., do we invent it and agree to it, is it inborn or part of our nature, or is it given by a higher being or intelligence)?
- What really makes something good or right to do (e.g., is it the consequences of the action, doing our duties, or going by our passionate feelings)?
- Is morality universally applicable to all persons or is it relative to its culture or to the individual?
- What is most basic and important in morality: the actions we do or the sort of persons we are?

Chapter 4 undertakes to explore those fundamental questions related to the creation of society and government. Some of these are the following:

- What is the natural state of humans prior to government and law (e.g., are they free, equal and independent, or social and interdependent; are they inevitably in conflict or do they live in innocent bliss)?
- From where does government arise (e.g., a contract between persons, the recognized superiority of some persons to lead, or is it the decree of a higher power)?
- What are human laws and from where do they come (e.g., do we arrive at them by participatory exchange of views, or are they part of the nature of reality, or are they codifications of the lives of exemplary persons, or are they decrees of virtuous rulers or a divine being)?
- What is the best form of government?
- Are there checks and balances on government/rulers?
- Is revolt against the ruler or government ever justified?

- What is the proper balance between governmental authority and individual liberty of expression and thought?
- What is the role and responsibility of government to implement justice and how should it do it (in distributing goods, for example, are there rules of entitlement, fairness, or equality of opportunity)?

While I have followed the procedure of grouping philosophical questions into four chapters, it is quite obvious that how one answers a question in one category very often requires or presupposes an answer in some other. The chapter divisions of this text are not meant to imply impermeable or nonporous silos. In fact, while useful to organize our study, we must always remember that responses to fundamental questions in one category have implications for how questions in another are dealt with. For example, approaches to morality imply and even depend on positions taken on ontological questions. Consider that Chinese philosophers engage the philosophical question of the structure of reality by using the concept of Principle (*li* 理). This ontological concept helps them understand the way humans, wherever we find them, possess and use notions like time, space, and cause. The Chinese call these Principles. But some Chinese thinkers use the concept of Principles to answer questions regarding morality too. These philosophers reject the idea that morality is a human invention, but think of our moral beliefs and concepts as related to structures within nature itself or even commands put in place by Heaven (e.g., see Mozi). We could multiply instances of this process of transference and overlap between the fourfold grouping of fundamental questions used to structure our study. Throughout the text, I will call attention to many of these.

In fact, I wish to encourage further investigation of the connections between claims made in one chapter and those in another, whether these are made by the same philosopher or by different ones. To the extent that this happens, I will have been successful not only in introducing the responses and answers of Chinese philosophers to fundamental questions but also in contributing in some measure to infecting the reader with the wonder and joy of philosophical inquiry itself.

While this book cannot be considered a work in "comparative philosophy," nevertheless, I do sometimes break up the flow of the text describing a Chinese philosopher's views by inserting windows into the text that make brief comparisons usually drawn from Western philosophers and addressing similar philosophical issues. These are meant to be suggestive and provocative for the constructivist philosopher. They are not offered as anything like a

comprehensive or nuanced exposition of the Western thinkers' viewpoints, or a fully developed comparative description. Hopefully, they will entice the reader to investigate further the connections between Chinese and Western thought and learn more deeply about both traditions (Littlejohn and Li 2019). If this occurs, then I do think this present study will contribute to the response called for by Van Norden's defense of the philosophical character of non-Western thought in his *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (2017).

A great deal of work meant to introduce Chinese philosophy, even including those volumes mentioned in the "Preface" to this book, devotes what I consider an inordinate amount of attention to the contextualization for a philosopher's positions. Basically, I feel that a good analogy for what worries me about this approach is that it would be like thinking one must always contextualize the great twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein in his home culture of Vienna and the outbreak of the Second World War before addressing his philosophy. It seems clear to me that one can read Wittgenstein's works such as *Tractatus Logico-Philosohicus, Philosophical Investigations*, and *On Certainty* without referring each remark to a historical or cultural context. The merits of works such as Ray Monk's *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (1991) or Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin's *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (1996) are well known, but Wittgenstein's thought may still be described without them. For this reason, I acknowledge that I may not provide what every reader will regard as sufficient Sinological background for each thinker covered. Although I recognize that sometimes historical and cultural context influences a position, I address these issues when it seems germane to the approach taken by the philosopher. But I hold to my position that in a text devoted to introducing philosophy, cultural and historical context need not always be moved to the foreground.

Finally, before we begin our study, a few comments about the ways I have treated important Chinese philosophical terms are in order. Chinese, of course, is written in characters and the current alphabetical Romanization used to know how to pronounce the characters is called *pinyin*. Throughout the text, I almost exclusively use *pinyin* rather than the characters themselves in order to increase the ease of reading. However, in some cases the failure to use a Chinese character can be confusing. For example, the *pinyin* "*li*" can have several quite distinct major philosophical uses. One is to refer to propriety in relationships, rules, or even morality (*li* 禮) and the other refers to the Principles structuring reality (*li* 理). I will use the characters when I feel that the reader may be confused about which use of a term

such as *li* is being intended. I adopt the same practice for *qi* (氣) as the primordial substance of which all things are made and *qi* (器) as used for individual "concrete objects." Also, when the Chinese *tian* (天) is used as a nominative for a supreme agent I use the capital "Heaven." When it is used with *di* (earth) as in *tiandi* (天地), in order to indicate everything that is, the world, or reality, I use "heaven and earth" or "heaven" in lower case (Chang 2000). When speaking of the philosophical system of interacting correlative elemental phases of *qi* (氣) that actualize into the objects of reality, I use capitals (i.e., Five Phases 五行). When speaking of the elements themselves, I use lower case. In other instances of the use of Chinese characters I do so for clarification only.

1

哲学

Ontology—Questions about the Nature of Reality

Introduction

This chapter deals with a set of philosophical questions in the category known as *ontology*. *Ontology* is not a term that derives from Chinese thought. It comes from two Greek words *ontis*, meaning "being" or "reality," "that which is," and *logos*, meaning "the study of" or "the knowledge of." Although ontology is sometimes called "metaphysics," referring to what can be known about reality beyond what physics or science can tell us, I choose not to employ this term because its use may imply already that there is something beyond what can be known through science or empirical data. *Meta*physics is often taken to deal with that which transcends or is beyond natural phenomenon. While we shall see that some Chinese philosophers do include in their ontologies aspects of reality that lie beyond the way things appear to our five senses, generally speaking, all Chinese ontologies start and finish with what they regard as natural, even if sometimes the objects and phenomena produced by natural forces are not accessible by the limited range of human sensory powers (i.e., sight, hearing, touch, etc.).

We should also make a distinction between ontology and cosmology:

- Ontology is the set of philosophical positions concerned with the addressing fundamental questions.
- Cosmology is focused more specifically on the observable movements and processes of the phenomena of the universe.

While ontology concerns itself with the general nature of the entities, qualities, and relationships that compose and constitute reality, cosmology occupies itself with making empirical assertions about existence. Having said this, we may note that the contemporary Chinese philosopher Chung-ying Cheng prefers using the term *onto-cosmology* of Chinese thought about the nature of reality because he feels it is more accurate than the division of these two approaches, as is done in the West.[1] However, for our purposes, we will continue to refer to Chinese ontology, even if as we work our way through the texts and views of Chinese philosophers, we will notice that Cheng's term does indeed capture much of the Chinese approach to questions of reality. This chapter deals with the following questions of ontology:

- What is reality composed of/made of?
- Is reality of a single type of thing (monism), two types of things (i.e., "dualism": minds and bodies; matter and spirit; nature and supernature), or many types of things (pluralism)?
- Is reality composed of only constantly changing and transient, impermanent things, or are there enduring, or even eternal and universal components in its composition?
- Is reality actually as it appears to us or is it something different in its true nature from what we are most directly aware of?
- Does reality have a meaning, is it "purposing," or is it guided by a mind or intelligence to process as it does?
- Does reality follow some internal pattern of its own nature, or is it the case that humans attach and invent meaning and impose it on reality, although it is devoid of purpose in itself?

The Basic Vocabulary of the Chinese Theory of Reality: The "Great Commentary" to the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*)

The ontology of early Chinese thought comes down to us through a number of philosophical texts that are not traceable to any single author. One of the most important of these texts is the "Great Commentary" (*Dazhuan*) to the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*). The *Classic of Changes* is the name for

a complete work that includes two parts. One section is a quite ancient manual of divination known simply as the *Changes* (*Yi*) or, more correctly, as the *Zhouyi*, or the "method of studying the changes of reality developed in the Zhou Dynasty" (Cheng and Ng 2010). Important and usable translations of this text into English include Rutt (2002) and Shaughnessy (1997). It is a handbook traceable to the period and practices of the Western Zhou dynasty as is indicated, among other features, by its use of language expressions found on the bronzes of that period (*c.* 1046–771 BCE). The other section of the *Classic of Changes* is a set of seven commentaries attached to the *Zhouyi*. Three of the commentaries are composed of two parts each. Accordingly, taken as a whole, the commentary set making up this second section of the *Classic of Changes* is known as "The Ten Wings" (*Shiyi*).

One of these ten commentaries to the *Classic of Changes* (*Yijing*) is known by various titles, including the "Great Commentary" (*Dazhuan*) and "Appended Statements" (*Xici*). The "Great Commentary" is arguably the most important single text available to us for an understanding of the earliest Chinese ontology. The divination section of the *Classic of Changes* is much less valuable to us as philosophers.

The "Great Commentary" sketches out the early Chinese worldview that was basic to all of China's philosophical systems for over two millennia. Just whether it represents a period dating to *c.* 1500 BCE is still a subject of scholarly debate (Liu 2004). It also introduces the fundamental philosophical vocabulary of Chinese ontology that has been employed by Chinese thinkers up to the Modern period. In this case, we are mining out philosophical understandings from a text whose author or authors are unknown to us. However, the editor(s) of this text created what became one of the lasting "Classics" in Chinese intellectual culture.

What Western philosophy calls *reality*, the philosophers who created the "Great Commentary" generally called by the compound "heaven and earth" (*tiandi*). As for the process of reality's change, they used the term *dao* (道). While there are many uses of the term *dao* in classical Chinese, Western English-language translators have most often used "way." This text frequently employs the term *Dao* as a nominative "the Way" and portrays it as operating according to "heavenly patterns (*tian wen*)" or Principles (*li* 理).

The "Great Commentary" speaks of both change and continuity in reality. Reality is composed of one sort of fundamental indestructible substance that may be thought of as a kind of pure energy which Chinese thinkers called *qi* (氣). Here is how the "Great Commentary" uses several fundamental ontological concepts in relation to each other:

> The *Yi* [i.e., the *Classic of Changes*] being aligned with heaven and earth, can wholly set forth the *Dao* of heaven and earth. The *Yi* looks up to observe the patterns of heaven (*tianwen* 天文), and looks down to examine the Principles (*li* 理) of earth. Thus, it knows the causes of darkness and light, origin and ends; it comprehends the meaning of birth and death, it perceives how seminal *qi* forms into things. Now *yin* 陰, now *yang* 陽 move and this is *Dao.* ("Great Commentary," Part One, IV and V, Rutt 2002: 411)

In this passage, the author makes use of a robust philosophical vocabulary. Reality (heaven and earth) is *qi* substance in constant process, but its changes are not arbitrary, chaotic, or haphazard. The term used to capture this order is *Dao,* which is used for "the Way" that the changing processes of reality follow. This path reveals Principles (*li* 理) that are evident to one who reflects on the *Dao* process. The *Dao* of *qi* gives rise of itself to forces that move it: it is self-moving and auto-generative (i.e., it is its own cause), according to its internal dynamics of *yin* and *yang*.

The "Great Commentary" makes the philosophical claim that not only all reality is in process but also there are patterns to its changes. By tradition, a legendary thinker of antiquity named Fu Xi originally developed a system of eight symbols called trigrams to express these patterns. These trigrams had three lines or rows. An unbroken line was used to indicate the *yang* forces operative in change and a broken line represented *yin* forces. According to one interpretation of the trigram figure itself, the first two lines represent *yin* and *yang*, and the third represents the relation of the previous two lines standing for reality's creative advance. Taken in this way, there are eight possible figures. Thus, in Chinese, this set of eight is called the Eight Trigrams (*bagua*).

In a commentary appended to the *Classic of Changes* entitled "Discussion of the Trigrams" (*shuogua*), the trigrams are also used as explanatory devices for the emergence of prominent families, the natural seasons, diverse colors, and varieties of animals. There is no philosophical justification offered in the commentary for these explanatory associations, and we should attribute them to the practitioners who sought to provide more concrete interpretations for the use of the trigrams for the purpose of divination of the future. What is worth noting philosophically is that this elaborate system is rooted in the belief that as *qi* is in process, it moves according to patterns and not by mere randomness.

If we look in the *Zhouyi* section, that is, the actual divination or future-telling section of the text of the *Classic of Changes*, we notice not merely Eight Trigrams, but sixty-four hexagrams (Figure 1).

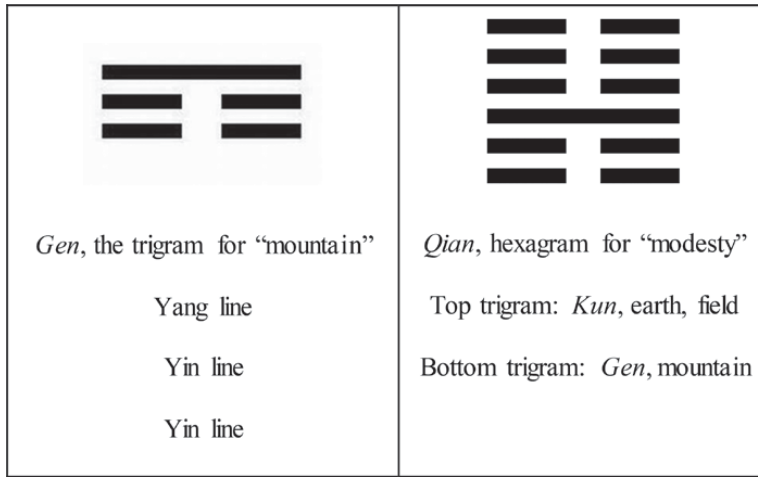

Figure 1 *Classic of Changes* trigram and hexagram.

There are various traditions about how the hexagrams emerged. One is that when it came to applying the Eight Trigrams to human experiences and decisions, practitioners ran into the problem that they could not distinguish the inner and outer aspects of changing human events or what we might think of as the subjective inner feeling and the objective outer act with respect to persons' activities in history and the purpose and event in nature (Cheng 2009b: 76). In order to talk about these aspects of change, the practitioners who were the source of the *Zhouyi* stacked the Eight Trigrams, typically using the lower trigram to stand for the inner aspects of the process that is occurring and the upper to represent the outer aspects. When this procedure was followed, the total number of possible configurations of the Eight Trigrams became the sixty-four hexagrams of the current *Zhouyi* text.[2] In the *Zhouyi* divination manual, two hexagrams are of special ontological significance for expressing the patterns of reality: Qian and Kun. The "Great Commentary" offers this observation on these two hexagrams:

> The *dao* of Qian [i.e., heaven] forms maleness [i.e., *yang*].
> The *dao* of Kun [i.e., earth] forms femaleness [i.e., *yin*].
> Qian [heaven] conceives the Great Beginning, Kun [earth] brings things to completion.
> Qian [heaven] conceives with spontaneity, Kun [earth] is empowered with simplicity. ("Great Commentary," Part One, I, Rutt 2002: 409)