

Philosophical Methodology in Classical Chinese and German Philosophy

**WELTPHILOSOPHIEN IM GESPRÄCH
BAND 16**

WELTPHILOSOPHIEN IM GESPRÄCH

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In memoriam

Prof. Dr. Claudia Bickmann

(22nd August 1952; † 30th April 2017)*

Preface

The last decade or so has seen the emergence of a fruitful cooperation between German and Chinese scholars. The relationships between classical Chinese philosophy and classical German philosophy are being scrutinized during conferences which have taken place both in Germany and China. Initially, the issues under discussion were of a doctrinal nature. A conference in Cologne in 2011 dealt with the foundations of knowledge and ethics in Chinese and European philosophy (published as *Metaphysical Foundations of Knowledge and Ethics in Chinese and European Philosophy*, eds. Yi Guo, Sasa Josifovic, and Asuman Lätzer-Lasar, Paderborn 2013). In 2012, *Foundations of Reason and Morality in Confucianism and German Idealism* were discussed at a conference in Tutzing (published as volume no. 15 in the book series *World Philosophies in Dialogue*, eds. Claudia Bickmann † and Michael Spieker, Nordhausen 2020). In the course of these explorations, it turned out that Chinese and German philosophy have a surprising amount of fundamental philosophical *themes* in common. However, the philosophical dialogue between the two traditions of philosophy also made clear that it could be prosperous for further elaborations to focus not so much on the philosophical themes that metaphysics and ethics are

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concerned with but more on the *method* leading to philosophical knowledge about such themes.

In order to initiate and facilitate this dialogue, in June 2014 a conference on *Philosophical Methods in Chinese and German Philosophy* took place in Tutzing, bringing together leading scholars from both philosophical traditions. The aim of the conference was to explore the types of philosophical concept or theory formation, i.e. the philosophical method, in Chinese and German traditions of philosophy. In Chinese philosophy and its contemporary revitalization, notions like 'feelings', 'beliefs', 'value-intuitions', 'comprehensive viewing', and other forms of immediate knowledge are not only very important but also valued very positively. Here, the principle of immediate knowledge is a principle of methodology which has an important significance for ontology and human cultivation too. In the German tradition, the issue of immediacy is also very important. However, in this tradition there is an ongoing and, since Kant, even intensified debate about the importance of thought and concepts for our philosophical understanding and justification of being, truth, morality, justice and the like. Indeed, in this respect German philosophy itself offers a multiplicity of views reaching from Kant to Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and beyond to the Romantics, neo-Kantianism and the phenomenology of e.g. Husserl, Scheler, and Heidegger. Many different concepts of the relationship between immediacy and conceptual determination and its relevance for philosophical method are developed and confronted with each other.

Going into the problem of philosophical method not only shows important and much-debated differences within the Ger-

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man tradition, differences which of course have to be evaluated, but also enables more precise historical and systematical discussions between Chinese philosophical approaches and German ones. Hence, by discussing philosophical methods in their determinacy and validity, the conference aimed to contribute to a shared philosophical future.

The present volume presents a selection of the results of the conference, including papers by Roger T. Ames, Christian Krijnen, Guo Yi, Michael Spieker, Claudia Bickmann, Chung-ying Cheng, Huang Yong, Paul Cobben, and Nam-In Lee. On behalf of the editors, I would like to thank all of them for their fine cooperation. In particular I would like to express my gratitude to Chung-ying Cheng for the intensive and inspiring discussions we had during an early phase of preparation, on the relevance of a methodological reflection for the cooperation. I would also like to thank very much Guo Yi for his great talent in organizing a team of Chinese scholars who are experts on the subject matter at hand, Michael Spieker for his willingness and competence in arranging the infrastructure needed for having such a prestigious philosophical conference, the *Sihai Confucius Academy* for generously sponsoring the journey of the Chinese participants, the *Akademie für Politische Bildung Tutzing* (*Tutzing Academy for Civic Education*) for hosting the conference in the stimulating environment of Lake Starnberg at their expense, and finally Markus Wirtz and his team under the chair of Claudia Bickmann for preparing the typescript and taking care of the contractual arrangements with the publishing house *Traugott Bautz*. Our special thanks go to Florian Haase for producing the printable file.

PREFACE

Unfortunately, the publication of the papers was delayed due to the depressing fact that my intended co-editor Claudia Bickmann fell victim to an aggressive disease and unexpectedly passed away during the editing process. Her contributions not only to the conference on philosophical method and this volume but moreover to the whole cooperation in the field of classical Chinese philosophy and classical German philosophy cannot be overestimated. Among others, she was the president of the *Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Philosophie (GIP)* / *Society of Intercultural Philosophy* and the editor of the series *Weltphilosophien im Gespräch*. Some weeks before her death, we had a long telephone conversation as she informed me that due to the 'consequences of a minor medical treatment' she would not be able to participate in an upcoming conference on Kant. How mentally strong this delicate person was! Although she had already suffered for a long period from her illness, she mentioned not a word about it to her colleagues. On the contrary, every meeting with her was a festival of contagious optimism and dynamism. It is an honor for me to have cooperated with her for so many years in numerous research projects and educational issues.

Christian Krijnen

Amsterdam, January 2021

Roger T. Ames

**Correlative Thinking:
From Abduction to *Ars Contextualis* in Early Chinese
Philosophy**

Marcel Granet makes the claim that early Chinese cosmology offers us a distinctive way of thinking — what some sinologists and comparative philosophers have come to call “correlative,” “analogical,” “associative,” or “coordinative” thinking. I cite Joseph Needham here at some length to provide a starting point for our reflection on what this notion of “correlative thinking” might entail:

A number of modern students — H. Wilhelm, Eberhard, Jablonski, and above all, Granet — have named the kind of thinking with which we have here to do, “coordinative thinking” or “associative thinking.” This intuitive-associative system has its own causality and its own logic. It is not either superstition or primitive superstition, but a characteristic thought-form of its own. H. Wilhelm contrasts it with the “subordinative” thinking characteristic of European science, which laid such emphasis on external causation. In coordinative thinking, conceptions are not subsumed under one another, but placed side by side in a pattern, and things influence one another not by acts of mechanical causation, but by a kind of “inductance.” [...] The key-word in Chinese thought is *Order* and above all *Pattern* (and if I may whisper it for the first time, *Organism*). The symbolic correlations or correspondences all formed part of one colossal pattern.

Things behaved in particular ways not necessarily because of prior actions or impulses of other things, but because their position in the ever-moving cyclical universe was such that they were endowed with intrinsic natures which made their behaviour inevitable for them. If they did not behave in those particular ways they would lose their relational position in the whole (which made them what they were), and turn into something other than themselves. They were thus parts in existential dependence upon the whole world-organism. And they reacted upon one another not so much by mechanical impulse or causation as by a kind of mysterious resonance.¹

Needham describes this correlative thinking as “a characteristic thought-form of its own,” and invites us like Alice down a portal that would take us to the other side of the looking glass to share with us his encounter with a wonky, wobbly world that has “its own causality and its own logic.”

In this essay, I want on the one hand to try to temper Granet and Needham’s claim and to demystify this putatively other world by building on the notion of “abductive reasoning” as a more familiar form of correlative thinking that was developed by C.S. Peirce, the putative founder of American pragmatism. On the other hand, I also want to explain why David Hall and I in our interpretive studies of Chinese philosophy needed to introduce the neologism, *ars contextualis*, to give a sufficiently capacious account of the ontological force of “correlative thinking” as it functions in early Chinese cosmology. Indeed, I will argue that it is our human capacity for *ars contextualis* — for engaging in “the art of contextualizing” — that gives consummate persons the important generative and normative role they have in early Chinese cosmology. As my source of textual corroboration, I will

¹ See his Needham, Joseph. *History of Scientific Thought*. In: *Science and Civilisation in China*. Vol. II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956, pp. 280–281.

rely primarily on the cosmology as it is expressed in the *Daodejing* — indeed, a process cosmology that, while certainly changing in time, is both antique and persistent.²

I use the term Daoist “cosmology,” but in classical Greek philosophy, *kosmos* is associated with a cluster of terms, including *arche* (origin, source, principle), *logos* (account, structure), *theoria* (contemplation), *nomos* (law), *nous* (mind, rational agency), and *theos* (divinity), and references a single-ordered, divinely sanctioned “uni”-verse that has little relevance for Daoist philosophy. Indeed, arguing that the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物) in Daoism constitute a *kosmoi* rather than a *kosmos* — a “pluri-verse” rather than a single-ordered world — we opted to describe Daoism rather awkwardly as an “acosmotic” cosmology. I have also in the past resisted using the term Daoist “metaphysics” because, if metaphysics is to be understood in the classical Greek sense as knowledge of the ultimate, self-sufficient, and unchanging character of “being” *per se*, then given the primacy of vital relationality and the absence of anything that could be construed as either independent or unchanging in a Daoist cosmos, Daoist philosophy is resolutely ametaphysical (dare we say “ametaphysic”).

² Although Needham takes Marcel Granet’s *La pensée chinoise* to be “a work of genius,” he criticizes Granet along with other major commentators on Chinese cosmology such as Alfred Forke and H.G. Creel for having “the serious defect of assuming that the cosmism and phenomenalism of the Han was ancient.” The scientist Needham chooses instead to attribute the emergence of this correlative worldview to the School of Naturalists — Zou Yan 鄒衍 (305–240 BCE) and the Yinyangjia 陰陽家 — thinkers who had the marked advantage of having “a mind trained in the natural sciences.” See his *History of Scientific Thought*, pp. 216–217. On this matter, I side with David Keightley in his many publications where he ascribes correlative thinking to intellectuals as far back as the Shang dynasty. I make this argument most recently in *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary*. Hong Kong and Honolulu: Chinese University Press and University of Hawai’i Press, 2011.

Perhaps an acceptable alternative and more inclusive understanding of cosmology or metaphysics consistent with our own present philosophical temperament might be something both as simple and as complex as “experience in its broadest perspective.” As Wilfrid Sellars has observed about the function of philosophy in general:

The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term. Under “things in the broadest possible sense” I include such radically different items as not only “cabbages and kings,” but numbers and duties, possibilities and finger snaps, aesthetic experience and death. To achieve success in Philosophy would be, to use a contemporary turn of phrase, to “know one’s way around” with respect to all these things, not in that unreflective way in which the centipede of the story knew its way around before it faced the question, “how do I walk?,” but in that reflective way which means that no intellectual holds are barred.³

As we will see below, for Chinese “cosmology” the goal of our philosophical inquiry like Sellars will be to come to know our “way” around (*zhidao* 知道) “the myriad of things” (*wanwu* 萬物) in the broadest possible sense of the term “things.” But given that Daoist cosmology begins from the primacy of vital relationality and the doctrine of internal, constitutive relations that follows from it, the real challenge for us lies in understanding that in Daoist cosmology, “knowing” is not limited to a cognitive and theoretical grasp of the real world; it is to acquire the wisdom to fund the practical activity of realizing a world in the sense of making a optimally desirable world real. And “the myriad things”

³ Sellars, Wilfrid. “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man”. In: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963, pp. 1–40, p. 1.

are not discrete “things,” but in fact reference the interdependent, dynamic events that constitute our shared experience, including the narratives of sagacious human beings who, as active collaborators with the heavens and the earth, occupy a prominent role in the realizing of this meaningful world.

Corollary to this primacy of vital relationality is that Daoist cosmology is an aestheticism in which the quality achieved in always *sui generis* relations (*de* 德) that constitute the contents of experience is registered in the totality of the effect, or *dao* 道. As Needham has tried to say above, the unique identity and insistence of any particular thing is a function of what it means for the full complement of other things.

As we can see, what makes Daoist cosmology an aesthetic order in this Whiteheadian sense is that it is holistic rather than reductionistic. All things without exception not only collaborate in the production of the dynamic, patterned order of the cosmos in which no single privileged order predominates among things, but also collaborate in the production of any particular thing. *Dao* as an “appellative” or “courtesy” name (*zi* 字) for this complex, anarchic order — a “style” name that reflects its provisional, contingent, and speculative nature — is emergent, and accrues enhanced resolution from the narratives of those persons whose realization is such that they are able to bring a peculiarly intense foci of meaning and value to a particular time and place. Such consummate persons have a determining influence on the direction that *dao* takes as an aggregating and unfolding way forward in the human experience.

Needham again draws on Granet to provide what is a vivid description of the unfamiliar cosmological vision we will need as our interpretive context for reading the *Daodejing* — that is,

a vision of not only what this cosmology is, but perhaps more importantly, of what it is not:

Social and world order rested, not on an ideal of authority, but on a conception of rotational responsibility. The Tao [*dao*] was the all-inclusive name for this order, an efficacious sum-total, a reactive neural medium; it was not a creator, for nothing is created in the world, and the world was not created. The sum of wisdom consisted in adding to the number of intuited analogical correspondences in the repertory of correlations. Chinese ideals involved neither God nor Law. The uncreated universal organism, whose every part, by a compulsion internal to itself and arising out of its own nature, willingly performed its functions in the cyclical recurrences of the whole, was mirrored in human society by a universal ideal of mutual good understanding, a supple regime of interdependences and solidarities which could never be based on unconditional ordinances, in other words, on laws. [...] Thus the mechanical and the quantitative, the forced and the externally imposed, were all absent. The notion of Order excluded the notion of Law.⁴

To clarify what Needham means here by “rotational responsibility” with each thing having “a compulsion internal to itself” and with the efficacious sum-total being “a reactive neural medium” we will have to first explore Daoism’s doctrine of internal relations and its alternative holistic “causality” that brings with it an understanding of creativity as a continuing *in situ* or “situated” increase in meaning that would defy any separation between creator and creature. Marcel Granet uses the language of aspect to express the way in which erstwhile things are in fact dynamic matrices of relations that constitute continuous, extended events:

Instead of observing successions of phenomena, the Chinese registered alternations of aspects. If two aspects seemed to them to be connected, it was not by means of a cause and effect relationship, but rather “paired” like the obverse and

⁴ Needham (1956), p. 290.