

Paul R. Goldin. *Confucianism*. Ancient Philosophies, 9. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011. viii, 168 pp. Hardcover \$65.00, ISBN 978-0-520-26969-9. Paperback \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-520-26970-5.

Paul R. Goldin's new introductory textbook is part of a series on Ancient Philosophies, and therefore focuses almost entirely on classical Confucianism, as the author explains in the Introduction. The entire history of the tradition from the Han through the Qing dynasties occupies six pages in the final chapter. One wonders why the book was not more accurately entitled *Classical Confucian Philosophy*, especially as a forthcoming book in the series is said to be entitled *Classical Islamic Philosophy*. Aside from that quibble, this is a very solid introduction that goes well beyond the standard fare by offering original interpretations of several topics.

The Introduction is called "What Confucianism is and what Confucianism is not." The latter category distinguishes Confucianism from things like footbinding, the basic structure of the family (although not the relationships within the family), and Chinese society as a whole. Since this is a book about Confucian *philosophy*, Goldin correctly focuses on the *beliefs* of Confucius and his followers, leaving aside rituals and other activities that could be included under the Confucian umbrella, such as life in Confucian academies. He summarizes the central core of beliefs as follows:

(i) [H]uman beings are born with the capacity to develop morally; (ii) moral development begins with moral self-cultivation...; (iii) by perfecting oneself in this manner, one also contributes to the project of perfecting the world; (iv) there were people in the past who perfected themselves, and then presided over an unsurpassably harmonious society -- these people are called "sages" (*sheng* 聖 or *shengren* 聖人). Not all Confucians agreed about what moral self-cultivation entails, but all accepted that we can and must do it, and that it is a task of utmost urgency (5-6).

The five chapters of the book are on (1) Confucius and his disciples, (2) the *Great Learning* and *Canon of Filial Piety*, (3) Mencius, (4) Xunzi, and (5) everything after Xunzi. There is also a six-page appendix on "Manhood in the *Analects*," which basically makes the point that the fundamental virtues espoused by Confucius are not gendered, even though Confucians for over two thousand years assumed that they mainly applied to men. The notes and

bibliography are quite extensive, and there is a useful Guide to Further Reading. The only non-Western-language items in these sections are primary texts. Chinese characters are included in the text throughout the book.

Goldin considers the first fifteen of the *Analects'* twenty chapters to reflect more or less accurately a coherent philosophy traceable to Confucius (11). He rejects the premise of E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks that differences in theme and style of the *Analects'* passages necessarily imply chronological differences (124, n. 11). He uses the famous "one thread" passage as an entry point into the system, but in an original way. In this passage (4:15) Confucius says, "In my Way, there is one thing with which to string [everything] together," but he doesn't say what that thread is. His senior disciple, Zeng Can, explains to the others, "The Way of the Master is nothing other than *zhong* 忠 [conventionally translated 'loyalty'] and *shu* 恕 [reciprocity]." Goldin nicely cuts through the centuries of difficulty scholars have had explaining this by asking, essentially, Why should we take Zeng Can's word for it? In another passage, in fact, Confucius himself says that the "one word" that can guide one's practice is *shu*, and in fact it is clear that reciprocity is more fundamental to his philosophy than *zhong*. Goldin also deals with another problematic passage (13:18, on "Upright Gong") in which Confucius says that fathers and sons should not report each other to the authorities for theft. The point here is that filiality (*xiao* 孝) is the "root of the Way" (1:2) or the basis for public morality, and to undermine it threatens the whole edifice. There are remaining questions to be asked, and recent philosophers have discussed this problem extensively, but the decision to address such problematic issues in a short introduction is a good one.

The chapter on the *Daxue* 大學 (Great Learning) and *Xiaojing* 孝經 (translated here as "Canon of Filial Piety") mostly addresses the latter, especially the chapter on "remonstrance" (*zheng* 爭, translated here as "expostulating"). This is an important corrective to the nearly universal view that Confucian filiality means absolute obedience to parents. In fact, the chapter clearly states that social subordinates at all levels have the responsibility to point out the errors of their superiors, and to argue forcefully (*zheng* means to dispute, fight, contend, strive). True filiality, in other words, implies wanting and helping one's parent to follow the Way. My only question regarding this chapter is, why was the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Centrality and Commonality,

or The Mean in Practice) not discussed? It is philosophically richer than the *Daxue* and just as important to the later tradition.

The discussion of Mencius includes substantial quotations and generally incisive analyses of key passages (the flood-like *qi* 氣, Mo Di and Yang Zhu, the child and the well, King Xuan of Qi and the ox, one exchange with Gaozi, Ox Mountain, and several others). Goldin defines Mencius' concept *xing* 性 (the nature of a thing) as "the ideal state that an organism should attain in a conducive environment" (51). But then he defines Mencius' concept of *ming* 命 ("destiny") as "the exalted state that we are expected to attain through our own diligent labour" (55). These definitions seem to describe a distinction without a difference. The problem, I think, lies in thinking of *ming* as anything like "destiny" or "fate." Goldin acknowledges that "destiny is not the fate that has been predetermined for us" (55), but in my opinion both words should be abandoned altogether in this context. *Ming* in Mencius is something more like "givenness," the brute realities of life that we have no choice about, such as where and to whom we are born and the fact that we will die. This interpretation is consistent with its usage in *tianming* 天命, the "mandate" or "decree" of Heaven, and with the first line of the *Zhongyong*: "What is given by Heaven is called the nature" (*tianming zhi wei xing* 天命之謂性). It also works with Mencius' complex argument in 7B.24, where he says, basically, that there is *xing* in *ming* and *ming* in *xing*.

The chapter on Xunzi, perhaps surprisingly, is longer than the one on Mencius (31 vs. 27 pages). But Goldin argues cogently that Xunzi was unjustly shunted aside in the later Confucian tradition, and that he is perhaps "the most complex philosopher that China has ever produced" (68), justifying the revival of interest in him in recent decades. Goldin himself published a book on Xunzi in 1999, so he has much to say on the topic. Here we have ample and incisive discussions of Xunzi on human nature, ritual, Heaven, warfare, rectifying names, and the mind/heart. On Xunzi's well-known criticism of Mencius' claim that human nature is good, Goldin correctly points out that the dispute is not really about the inherent goodness or badness of human beings, but rather about the meaning of the word *xing*. On the substance of the matter they are in substantial agreement: both agree that all humans have the potential to become sages, and that education and other means of "external" nurturance are necessary in order to fulfill that potential. For Mencius that additional nurturance normally requires a benevolent government

that provides the basic necessities of life; for Xunzi it requires the rituals devised by the sages of the past. (How they became sages is not addressed by Xunzi -- a potentially fatal flaw in his argument.) The reason Xunzi claims that despite this universal potential, human nature is bad, is that he defines *xing* as that which develops spontaneously, *without* education or external nurturance. For Mencius, on the other hand, the nature of a thing is that which distinguishes it from other classes of things (he implies this in saying that a person without the "four beginnings" of goodness would not be human). Goldin doesn't mention this point in Mencius' argument, but I think it is crucial.

I would differ with Goldin on the meaning of *tian* 天 (heaven) for Xunzi. He says, "Heaven plays a sure but indirect role in determining our fortune or misfortune. Heaven never intercedes directly in human affairs, but human affairs are certain to succeed or fail according to a timeless pattern that Heaven determined before human beings existed" (82). To me it is abundantly clear in Xunzi's *tianlun* 天論 (Discussion of Heaven) that the "constant Way of Heaven" has no relevance to the success or failure of human affairs, except insofar as it establishes the limits of human life and activity. Here again the idea of "givenness" (*ming*) is implied, while Goldin seems to have in mind an idea of predetermined "destiny."

The final chapter, as mentioned above, rushes through over two thousand years of Confucianism in six pages, before settling on a brief but excellent discussion of Confucianism in the twentieth century and beyond. The discussion of modernity touches on Max Weber, Liang Qichao, Liang Shuming, the 1958 "Manifesto" by five leading "New Confucians," and Confucius Institutes. But Han Confucianism is discussed with no mention of Dong Zhongshu or *yin-yang* 陰陽 theory; the major Cheng-Zhu figures of the Song are mentioned but there is nothing on Wang Yangming (1472–1529) or the *kaozheng* 考證 (evidential research) movement.

Nevertheless, this book's basic fairness is demonstrated by one of Goldin's concluding points:

Paternalistic governments throughout China's history have been attracted to Confucius because they have regarded inculcating deference among the populace as a Confucian ideal. Were Confucius himself to have discovered how his teaching would be appropriated, he might not have been pleased (112).

In addition to the quibble about the title mentioned above, I found Goldin's use of

exceedingly rare words a bit off-putting. He apparently prefers "meiosis" to understatement (11), "pleonastic" to redundant (23), "mactated" to sacrificed (61), and "flabellum" to fan (76). I'm all for expanding one's vocabulary, but ... mactated?

Nevertheless, *Confucianism* is an engaging and philosophically incisive introduction by a scholar who is extraordinarily well-read in the secondary literature, as evidenced by the extensive endnotes. For these reasons even specialists who may or may not agree with all his interpretations should benefit by reading it. With the proviso that the book be understood as an introduction to classical Confucianism and not the entire tradition, it is most highly recommended.

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