

YONG HUANG, *Confucius: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. xiii, 175 pp. £16.99 (pb). ISBN 978-1-4411-9653-8

Yong Huang's *Confucius: A Guide for the Perplexed* is a unique introduction to early Confucian thought from the perspective of comparative analytic philosophy. Instead of attempting a broad summary of the main themes and ideas attributed to Confucius, Huang focuses on four philosophical issues summarized in the titles of chapters 2–5: (2) “Morality: Why you should not turn the other cheek;” (3) “Virtue: How to love virtue as you love sex;” (4) “Moral education: How to teach what can only be learned by oneself;” and (5) “Filial piety: Why an upright son does not disclose his father stealing a sheep.” The first chapter is a historical introduction: “The life of Confucius: A ‘homeless dog.’”

Throughout the book Huang draws freely not just from the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語) of Confucius but from nearly the entire body of texts containing statements attributed to Confucius and details of his life. These include the *Shiji* 史記 [Historical records] of Sima Qian 司馬遷, the *Guoyu* 國語 [Sayings of the states], the *Liji* 禮記 [Record of ritual], the *Da Dai Liji* 大戴禮記 [The elder Dai's *Liji*], the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 [Mr. Lü's Spring and Autumn (annals)], the *Xiaojing* 孝經 [Scripture of filiality], the *Kongzi jiyu* 孔子家語 [Statements of Confucius' family], and the other three of the “Four Books” (*Mengzi* 孟子, *Daxue* 大學, and *Zhongyong* 中庸). This method has both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, it enables Huang to flesh out with much greater clarity many of the fragmentary and obscure ideas in the *Analects*. But since the historical accuracy of these later texts is highly contested, it should be incumbent upon the author to justify their usage. One way to do this would be to distinguish explicitly between the “historical Confucius”<sup>1</sup> and the figure of Confucius accepted by the later tradition—what some have called the “canonical Confucius.” Yet the only mention of the problem is in the publisher's blurb:

[T]his book also brings into discussion those sayings of Confucius that are recorded in other texts, greatly expanding our perspective of the original Confucius. Scholars in the past, unsure about the authenticity of such sayings, have been reluctant to use them in discussing Confucius' view. However, recent archaeological findings have shown that at least some of them are reliable.

Some, to be sure, but certainly not all. For example, in chapter 1 Huang summarizes at face value Sima Qian's story about Confucius meeting Laozi 老子. There is no hint whatsoever that the scholarly world for nearly a century has acknowledged that “Laozi” is a purely mythic figure personifying the multiple authors of the *Daodejing* 道德經, or that “Laozi” is not even a name: it means

<sup>1</sup> This is not to imply that the *Analects* is entirely trustworthy; it was compiled over a period of more than one-hundred years after Confucius' death. But, especially in its earlier chapters, it is much closer to the historical Confucius than texts like the *Kongzi jiyu*, which many scholars believe to be a third-century CE forgery. See, for example, Paul R. Goldin, *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 135, n. 53.

“Old Master(s),” not “Master Lao.” This is the most egregious example of what could be considered an ahistorical perspective. The rest of this biographical chapter is highly entertaining, as it contains much more detail about Confucius’ comings and goings than we usually encounter in studies of the historical Confucius. But it is marred by the absence of authorial assistance in sorting out what might and might not be historical. The chapter also contains an inordinate number of errors in English usage; it appears not to have been copy-edited at all.

Once the caveat is borne in mind that we are really discussing Confucius as represented in the later tradition, not necessarily the historical Confucius, and also that we are focusing strictly on moral philosophy, this book is definitely worth reading. Chapter 2 focuses on two quite different answers to the question: “What is the appropriate attitude towards wrongdoers?” (p. 37). According to the Gospel of Matthew (5:39–41), Jesus rejected the old “eye for an eye” approach and famously recommended “turning the other cheek.” Rejecting that advice, which had also been given in *Laozi* (chapters 49 and 63), Confucius said: “If so what do you repay a good turn with? You repay an injury with uprightness, but you repay a good turn with a good turn” (*Analects* 14.34). Huang argues convincingly that Confucius’ approach is better than Jesus’ because it aims at reforming the wrongdoer; it is other-oriented, not self-oriented. This further addresses the criticism of some Kantian philosophers that virtue ethics, at least in the Western philosophical context, is self-centered (p. 54). Confucius’ virtue ethics, says Huang, “clearly avoids the self-centeredness objection, as he makes it clear that a virtuous person ought to be concerned with the virtue of others” (p. 55), most notably in *Analects* 6.30 (helping others in order to help oneself). Huang follows the contemporary scholar Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 here in suggesting that *Analects* 6.30 is a positive version of the Golden Rule, and corresponds to the Confucian virtue *zhong* 忠 (usually translated as “loyalty”). The better-known negative version of the Confucian Golden Rule (“Do not do to others [. . .]”) is defined explicitly in the *Analects* as *shu* 恕 (“reciprocity”). The suggestion that *zhong* is a positive version of the Golden Rule, although not defended here, therefore makes sense of the disciple Zengzi’s 曾子 statement in *Analects* 4.15 that *zhong* and *shu* are the “one thread” tying together Confucius’ teachings (p. 55). In this chapter and the rest of the book Huang makes liberal use of both Confucian commentators and modern philosophers—Chinese and Western. It is really a *tour de force* of comparative philosophy.

Chapter 3 explores the Confucian view that “it is not enough to do virtuous things; one also needs to love doing them” (p. 65). The author argues further that this principle answers the question: “Why be moral?” Drawing heavily on Mencius (as would be expected), the conclusion is that being moral is the fulfillment of a basic human urge (like sex), and so we should be moral because we are human. To answer the objection that this is an egoistic motive for being moral, Huang claims that the Confucian concept of self is the “great ego or self,” which includes others, not the individualistic “small ego or self” (p. 83). I would suggest that a more satisfying explanation would broaden the perspective to include the characteristically Chinese *relational* view of *things*, including persons. In this view, things are defined by their relations, as Joseph Needham argued in 1956: “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 that behaviour inevitable for them.”<sup>2</sup> This can be considered a general principle, of which the Confucian view that people are defined by their family and social relations is a specific case. It also may have contributed to the broad acceptance in Chinese Buddhism of the principle of the radical interdependence of all things.

Chapter 4 focuses on the Confucian theories of moral education and government by moral example. The section on moral education is structured according to two classifications from the *Analects*: the “Four Subjects” (*Analects* 11.3) and the “Four Teachings” (*Analects* 7.25). The four subjects are virtuous conduct, speech, governmental affairs, and literature (p. 96). The four teachings are literature, action, loyalty, and trustworthiness (p. 97). The category of literature, which is in both groups, refers to the “Six Classics.” Huang’s analysis, drawing extensively on later Confucian commentators, substantiates the well-known view that “the primary goal of Confucius as an educator is not to transmit intellectual knowledge or technical skills to his students but to teach them how to be virtuous, authentic human beings” (p. 102), and the best way to do that is by moral example (p. 107).

The section on the role of government in moral education contrasts the Confucian theory with what Huang calls “liberalism,” although what he means is classical, eighteenth-century liberalism, not what is classed as “liberal” today. (Classical liberal theory actually informs the conservative end of the political spectrum in the West today.) Classical liberalism posits a sharp distinction between “the personal and the political” (p. 111), while Confucian theory (as in “Great Learning”) sees them as inherently related points on a spectrum. Drawing in part on critics of John Rawls, Huang argues that classical liberalism “encourages people to be selfish,” and that “[classical] liberals are simply wrong to think that the political is not personal” (p. 112). Concluding this section, Huang offers a Confucian perspective on crime and punishment: “the punishment should not primarily be retributive, returning to the criminal the harm the criminal inflicted upon others, but a measure to transform the criminal” (p. 116).

The final chapter addresses the difficult questions raised by *Analects* 13.18, in which Confucius says that an “upright” (*zhi* 直) person would “conceal” (*yin* 隱) the fact that his father had stolen a sheep, rather than turn in his father to the authorities. This issue has been discussed extensively in recent philosophical literature, both in Chinese and English, and Huang himself has been in the thick of the debate (p. 157, n. 1). He prefaces his discussion of the issue with a thorough, twenty-page analysis of “filial piety” (*xiao* 孝), drawing particularly on the various statements in the early Confucian literature to the effect that blind obedience to parents is *not* what filiality means. In fact, being filial requires the son or daughter to “remonstrate” or “argue” (*zheng* 爭) with the parent when the parent has done or is thinking of doing something wrong. This is found in the *Analects* (4.18),<sup>3</sup> the *Xiaojing* (Scripture of Filiality, 15), the *Xunzi* (29.2), and

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 2: *History of Scientific Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 281.

<sup>3</sup> Here, though, a different word is used for “remonstrate, admonish”: *jian* 諫.

the *Kongzi jiayu* (9.9, 15.2). While it may appear in *Analects* 13.18 that Confucius places family feeling above social justice, Huang argues that in fact there is no dilemma here: the son should conceal the father's wrongdoing *in order* to be able to "gently admonish" the father in an atmosphere of family intimacy that will allow the father to take seriously the admonishment and change his ways. Thus the purpose of Confucius' advice is to preserve both the family relationship *and* social justice in the long run, by increasing the probability that the father will not commit such crimes in the future. This, in my view, is an excellent solution to the problem, a solution that goes beyond the troubling statement in the *Analects* and takes into account the broader meanings of filiality.

*Confucius: A Guide for the Perplexed* is true to its title in that it addresses some of the points from classical Confucian thought which can be philosophically troubling. The argumentation not only refers to but engages with an enormous body of literature, ranging from Confucius and Aristotle to Chinese commentators over a span of 2,000 years, and extending to modern and contemporary Chinese and Western philosophers. While it will not take the place of a historical survey of Confucius or Confucianism, I would highly recommend it for any college or university-level class in early Chinese philosophy.

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MICHAEL DAVID KAULANA ING, *The Dysfunction of Ritual in Early Confucianism*.  
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In this work, Michael Ing shows how the *Liji* 禮記 [Book of Rites] recognizes and explains the fact that rituals sometimes fail to achieve their intended aims (the "dysfunction of ritual"). He argues that both preventable and unpreventable failures in rituals are a central concern throughout the *Liji* and applies ritual theory's focus on failures of rituals to the cases one finds in early Confucianism, arguing that these Confucian examples can augment our understanding of both Confucian ritual and the nature of ritual generally. Ing carefully specifies his audience: the fields of ritual studies and Confucian ethics (p. 16). He does not offer a comprehensive study of this text nor does he aim to offer an ethnographic account of early Chinese ritual performance (p. 8); rather, he offers a stimulating interpretation of what the *Liji* and other early Confucian texts say about the issue of ritual failure.

In the first of eight chapters, Ing presents the view that, in the *Liji*, rituals are "scripted performances enacted by human beings for the purposes of ordering the world" (p. 18). He examines different conceptions of ritual in the *Liji* and introduces his terminology for the different functions of ritual. Interestingly, Ing refers to ritual participants as ritual "agents," which for most ethicists connotes a more individualistic, autonomous understanding of ritual participants. In chapter 2 he describes "ritual dysfunction," offering a typology of the different ways in which a ritual can fail to achieve the desired outcome and different