

'Zoetology': A New Name for an Old Way of Thinking¹

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Abstract

The classical Greeks give us a substance ontology grounded in 'being *qua* being' or 'being *per se*' (*to on he on*) that guarantees a permanent and unchanging subject as the substratum for the human experience. With the combination of *eidos* and *telos* as the formal and final cause of independent things such as persons, this 'substance' necessarily persists through change. This substratum or essence includes its purpose for being, and is defining of the 'what-it-means-to-be-a-thing-of-this-kind' of any particular thing in setting a closed, exclusive boundary and the strict identity necessary for it to be this, and not that.

In the *Yijing* 易經 or *Book of Changes* we find a vocabulary that makes explicit cosmological assumptions that are a stark alternative to this substance ontology, and provides the interpretive context for the Confucian canons by locating them within a holistic, organic, and ecological worldview. To provide a meaningful contrast with this fundamental assumption of *on* or 'being' we might borrow the Greek notion of *zoe* or 'life' and create the neologism '*zoe*-tology' as 'the art of living'. This cosmology begins from 'living' (*sheng* 生) itself as the motive force behind change, and gives us a world of boundless 'becomings': not 'things' that *are*, but 'events' that are *happening*, a contrast between an ontological conception of the human 'being' and a process conception of what I will call human 'becomings'.

1. Taking Advantage of our Gadamerian Prejudices

A familiar way of thinking about 'methodologies' that we associate with rational, systematic philosophies are the formal principles or theoretical procedures of inquiry employed in a particular field or discipline. For example, in philosophy, we might speak of Socratic dialectics or Cartesian rational skepticism as methodologies, and of analytic, logical, and phenomenological methodologies among many others. The term 'methodology' itself suggests the familiar theory and practice dichotomy by

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formalizing the method and making the principles of explanation prior to their application.

In looking for a starting point in formulating my own method (rather than methodology) for doing comparative philosophy, I appeal to John Dewey's postulate of 'immediate empiricism' (the notion that our immediate experience is our reality) and the primacy he gives to practice. As a philosophical method, Dewey's radical empiricism requires that since all human problems arise within the 'hadness' of immediate experience as it is had by specific persons in the world, the resolution to these problems must be sought through theorizing this same experience in our best efforts to make its outcomes more productive and intelligent. 'Hadness' for Dewey is not some claim to 'pure' or 'primordial' experience, but simply what experience *is* as it is *had* by those persons experiencing it. In formulating this method, Dewey begins by asserting that

Immediate empiricism postulates that things – anything, everything, in the ordinary or non-technical use of the term 'thing' – are what they are experienced as. [...] If you wish to find out what subjective, objective, physical, mental, cosmic, psychic, cause, substance, purpose, activity, evil, being, quality – any philosophic term, in short – means, go to experience and see what the thing is experienced *as*. (Dewey, 1977, Vol. 3, pp. 158, 165)

As Dewey's alternative to starting from abstract philosophical concepts and theories, he is arguing that all such terms of art must be understood as the 'thats' of specifically experienced meanings. Dewey's method provides us with a way of ascertaining what the language we use actually means, and precludes the dualisms that usually follow in the wake of deploying abstract and thus decontextualizing terms such as reality, rationality, objectivity, justice, and indeed, methodology itself.

Corollary to Dewey's immediate empiricism is recognition of the fact that experience itself is always a continuous, a collaborative, and an unbounded affair. Thus, his 'hadness', far from precluding a robust subjective aspect, insists upon it. Before Dewey formulated his postulate of immediate empiricism, William James had earlier offered his own version of a similar idea that probably inspired Dewey, referring to it as a 'radical empiricism':

To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, *the relations that connect experiences*

must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system. (James, 1976, p. 22, italics in original)

And more recently, yet another advocate of a pragmatic approach to philosophy, Hilary Putnam, brings additional clarity to this postulate of immediate empiricism by not only rejecting ‘view-from-nowhere’ objectivism, but by further insisting that the subjective dimension of experience is always integral to what the world really is. Putnam insists that

[...] elements of what we call “language” or “mind” *penetrate so deeply into what we call “reality” that the very project of representing ourselves as being “mapper’s” of something “language-independent” is fatally compromised from the start.* Like Relativism, but in a different way, Realism is an impossible attempt to view the world from Nowhere. (Putnam, 1990, p. 28, italics in original)

Putnam will not admit of any understanding of the real world that cleaves it off from its human participation and that does not accept our experience of it as what the world *really* is. He is making this same point regarding the holistic and inclusive nature of experience when he insists that

[...] the heart of pragmatism, it seems to me – of James’s and Dewey’s pragmatism if not of Peirce’s – was the supremacy of the agent point of view. If we find that we must take a certain point of view, use a certain ‘conceptual system’, when engaged in a practical activity, in the widest sense of practical activity, then we must not simultaneously advance the claim that it is not really ‘the way things are in themselves’. (Putnam, 1987, p. 83)

When we carry Dewey’s postulate of immediate empiricism over to the task of interpreting another philosophical tradition, if we are to resist cultural reductionism and to allow the other culture to speak on its own terms, we do best to employ a comparative cultural hermeneutics as our method of inquiry. The starting point of hermeneutics, the branch of philosophy that has to do with the theory and practice of interpretation, is an acknowledgment of the interpretive interdependence of the structures of meaning within the experience from which understanding is to be gained. Hans-Georg Gadamer insists that

[...] understanding is not a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object it chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge; rather, being situated within an

event of tradition, a process of handing down, is a prior condition of understanding. *Understanding proves to be an event.* (Gadamer, 1997, p. 309, italics in original)

It is in this spirit of understanding as an event that Gadamer uses the term ‘prejudices’ (*Vorurteil*) not as blind biases, but on the contrary, as acknowledging that a deliberate cognizance of our own prejudices facilitates rather than obstructs our access and insight into something we do not know. These prejudices are not only our presuppositions, but also our projective interests and concerns. For Gadamer, the hermeneutical circle (that is, locating a text within its interpretive context) within which understanding is always situated requires of us that we continually strive to be aware of what we carry over into our new experience, since critical attention to our own assumptions and purposes can serve to positively condition the depth and quality of our interpretation of what we encounter.² To be clear, the claim is that a comparative cultural hermeneutics has the potential to inspire a greater degree of insight than simply working within either tradition separately, because the analogical associations and contrasts that emerge in the process are productive of additional meaning. Even fundamental differences when used properly can be activated to serve the interests of clearer understanding. J.L. Austin remarks that

[...] the world must exhibit (we must observe) similarities and dissimilarities (there could not be one without the other): if everything were either absolutely indistinguishable from anything else or completely unlike anything else, there would be nothing to say. (Austin, 1961, pp. 89–90)

Such analogical correlations that appeal to either similarities or differences between cultural traditions can be productive or otherwise to the extent that they are a source of increased meaning; that is, to the extent that they provide us with something to say.

2. Comparative Cultural Hermeneutics as Analogical Thinking

It can be argued that all meaningful interpretation of experience, with ‘interpretation’ itself literally meaning ‘a go-between negotiation’, emerges analogically through establishing and aggregating a pattern of truly productive correlations between what we already know and what we would know. Of course, since analogize we must, at the

² See Malpas (2018).

same time we might also want to allow that not all analogies are equally apposite. As has become apparent in the troubled history of having translated and thus ‘carried over’ Chinese philosophy into the Western academy, poorly chosen comparisons can be a persisting source of distortion and of cultural condescension. A heavy-handed and impositional ‘Christian’, ‘Heideggerian’, and yes, a ‘Pragmatic’ or ‘Whiteheadian’ reading of Chinese philosophy as well, betrays the reader by distorting both the Chinese tradition and the Western analogue in the comparison. As inescapably correlative thinkers, we need to be analogically retail and piecemeal rather than working in whole cloth.

Again, analogies can be productive of both associations and contrasts, and we can learn much from both. To take one example, the *Focusing the Familiar* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) has been hugely influential as one of the Confucian *Four Books*. In this canonical text, it argues that the best of human beings have both the capacity and the responsibility to be co-creators with the heavens and the earth. In seeking to interpret this text, we might find an associative analogy with the process philosophy of A.N. Whitehead in his attempt to reinstate ‘creativity’ within the evolving life process as an important human value. For Whitehead, claims about the ‘aseity’ – that is, the self-sufficiency and perfection – of God in traditional theology precludes any interesting or coherent sense of human creativity. Following the sustained challenge Whitehead directs at conventional ways of thinking about creativity, the word ‘creativity’ itself becomes an individual entry in a 1971 supplement to the *Oxford English Dictionary* with two of the three references being made to Whitehead’s own *Religion in the Making*. At the same time, however, we might be keenly aware that when the same Whitehead invokes the primordial nature of God and the Eternal Objects that are sustained in His thinking, the long shadow of Aristotelian metaphysics and the Unmoved Mover sets a real limit on the relevance for classical Chinese process cosmology of these aspects of Whitehead’s philosophy.

Aristotle’s teleology (his doctrine of design and purpose), his substance ontology (his doctrine that all things are defined by an unchanging essence), and his reliance upon logic as *the* demonstrable method that will secure us truth, might serve as contrastive analogies with a Chinese process cosmology that abjures fixed beginnings and ends, that precludes any strict formal identity, and that will not yield up the principle of non-contradiction as enabling of erstwhile apodictic or unconditional knowledge. On the other hand, Aristotle’s resistance to Platonic abstraction in promoting an aggregating practical wisdom correlates rather productively with one of the central issues

in classical Confucian moral philosophy. That is, Aristotelian *phronesis* (practical wisdom) with its commitment to the cultivation of excellent habits (*hexis*) in the practical affairs of everyday living has some immediate resonance with the ubiquitous Confucian assumption that knowing and doing are inseparable and mutually entailing (*zhixingheyi* 知行合一).

In our project of cultural interpretation, whether they be associative or contrastive analogies, we have no choice but to identify productive correlations that, with effort and imagination, can be qualified and refined in such a way as to introduce culturally novel ideas into our own world as a source of enrichment for our own ways of thinking and living. In this cultural translation, we certainly must be deliberate in the picking and choosing of our analogies – but at the end of the day, pick and choose we must.

3. Classical Greek Ontology and Chinese Zoetology: ‘A Small Stock of Ideas’³

As a self-confessed philosopher of culture, I take it as my task to identify, excavate, and articulate generalizations that distinguish different cultural narratives. It is only in being cognizant of these uncommon cultural assumptions that, in some degree at least, we are able to respect fundamental differences and locate the philosophical discussion somewhere between the alternative worldviews. Just as with the watershed of the Western cultural narrative we would identify with Plato and Aristotle and Hellenistic culture, certain enduring commitments were made explicit in the formative period of Chinese philosophy that are more persistent than others, and that allow us to make useful generalizations about the evolution of this continuing tradition. In the language of the *Yijing* 易經 or *Book of Changes*, we must anticipate ‘continuities in change’ (*biantong* 變通).

Again if we, as what Charles Taylor has called ‘language animals’, acknowledge the power that entrenched linguistic propensities might have in shaping the philosophy of grammar of a given population, it might occasion a reconsideration of our usual way of thinking about

³ Ontology too is ‘a new term for an old way of thinking’ that can be traced back to the classical Greek sources and their philosophical problematics. The oldest extant record of the term ‘ontology’ as Gk. *onto-* ‘being’ or ‘that which is’, and *-logia* discourse’, is in its Latin form *ontologia* and appears in the writings of two German philosophers, Jacob Lorhard’s *Ogdoas Scholastica* (1606) and Rudolf Gockel’s *Lexicon Philosophicum* (1613).

the originality of our own great philosophers. Without slighting their defining influence on their respective traditions, we might ask to what extent in the 'history of thought' are a Plato and an Aristotle and indeed a Confucius constructing their philosophical oeuvres out of whole cloth, and to what extent are they – with penetrating insight, certainly – making explicit what is already implicated in the structure and function of the languages they have inherited from their predecessors? In what degree are they cultural archaeologists in the business of 'recovering' and laying bare the legacy of 'common sense' bequeathed to them by their progenitors?

While the meticulous scholar Nathan Sivin is adamant in exhorting us to resist 'either-or' simplicity in our cultural comparisons, at the same time he has also observed that 'man's prodigious creativity seems to be based on the permutations and recastings of a rather small stock of ideas' (Sivin, 1974, p. xi). If such is the case, how do we then get to this 'rather small stock of ideas' that might allow for the mapping out of their subsequent permutations and recastings? What in our ways of thinking grounded in the classical Greek and Chinese worldviews are the underlying similarities and dissimilarities; what are their respective prejudices? Where in their deepest cultural strata are the uncommon assumptions, the prejudgments that have their beginnings in the self-understanding of the always situated human experience as these cultural habits have been sedimented into their persistent yet ever evolving common sense?

One prejudice of the first order that emerges early in the Western philosophical narrative is the commitment to substance ontology with all of its far-reaching implications. Ontology is the branch of metaphysics that seeks to classify and explain the things that exist, and its underlying assumption is that there are substances or essences internal to things that are available to us to classify them as this and not that. Ontology privileges 'being *per se*' and a categorical language with its 'essence' and 'attribute' dualism, giving us substances as property-bearers, and properties that are borne, respectively. Such ontological thinking animates Plato's pursuit of formal, 'real' definitions in his quest for certainty (that is, definitions not of words but of what really *is*), and underlies Aristotle's taxonomical science of knowing 'what *is* what'. For these classical Greek philosophers, only what is real and thus true can be the proper object of knowledge, giving us a logic of the changeless. Indeed, such ontological assumptions produce a decidedly categorical way of thinking captured in the principle of non-contradiction that claims something cannot be 'A' and 'not-A' at the same time.

G.W.F. Hegel in his Introduction to the *Encyclopaedia Logic* reflects at great length upon the question: where does philosophy begin and the inquiry start? And in this reverie, he concludes that because philosophy 'does not have a beginning in the sense of the other sciences', it must be the case that 'the beginning only has a relation to the subject who takes the decision to philosophise' (Hegel, 1991, p. 41).⁴ I want to embrace Hegel's concern about the importance of understanding the starting point of our philosophical inquiry, and I also want to heed his injunction to begin from the subjects who take the decision to philosophize. As my starting point, I will posit a contrast between a classical Greek ontological conception of human 'beings' and a classical *Book of Changes* process conception of what I will call human 'becomings', a contrast between a discrete human being as a noun and interdependent human becomings as gerunds.

The ontological intuition that 'only Being is' is at the core of Parmenides' treatise *The Way of Truth* and is the basis of the ontology that follows from it. The classical Greeks give us a substance ontology grounded in 'being *qua* (or 'as') being' or 'being *per se*' (that is, the self-sufficiency of being in itself as it defines any particular thing) that guarantees a permanent and unchanging subject as the substratum for the human experience. With the combination of *eidōs* (the essential characteristic that makes something this and not that) and *telos* (the design and purpose of a thing) as the formal and final causes of independent things such as persons, this 'sub-stance' necessarily persists through change. In this ontology, 'to exist' and 'to be' are implicated in one term. The same copula verb 'is' (or L. *esse*) answers the two-fold questions of first *why* something exists, that is, its origins and its goal, and then *what* it is, its substance. This substratum or essence includes its purpose for being, and is defining of the 'what-it-means-to-be-a-thing-of-this-kind' of any particular thing in setting a closed, exclusive boundary and the strict identity necessary for it to be this, and not that.

⁴ For Hegel himself, it is the ultimate project of such philosophizing to bring this person – the finite spirit, the single intellect, the philosopher – into identity with God as the object of pure thinking. And for Hegel like Confucianism and unlike the Greeks, persons are not facts (like legs) but achievements (like walking) that could not do what they do and become what they are without the structures of the human community. For Hegel, the person as an abstract fact does not do justice to the process of becoming a person. Personhood is an irreducibly social achievement in the sense that identities emerge in and through difference, being at once affirmed by oneself and conferred on one by others.

The question of *why* something exists is answered by an appeal to determinative, originative, and indemonstrable first principles (Gk. *arche*, L. *principium*), and provides the metaphysical separation between creator and creature. The question of *what* something is, is answered by its limitation and definition, and provides the ontological distinction between substance and incidental qualities, between real essence and its contingent attributes. In expressing the necessity, self-sufficiency, and independence of things, this substance or essence as the subject of predication is the object of knowledge. It tells us, as a matter of logical necessity, what is what, and is the source of truth in revealing to us with certainty, what is real and what is not. As the contemporary philosopher Zhao Tingyang 趙汀陽 avers, this kind of substance ontology defining the real things that constitute the content of an orderly and structured cosmos

[...] provides a ‘dictionary’ kind of explanation of the world, seeking to set up an accurate understanding of the limits of all things. In simple terms, it determines ‘what is what’ and all concepts are footnotes to ‘being’ or ‘is’.⁵ (Zhao, 2016, p. 147)

This kind of causal thinking is precisely what John Dewey is referencing in his concern about what he calls *the* philosophical fallacy. Dewey alerts us to our inveterate habit of decontextualizing and essentializing one element within the continuity of experience, and then in our best efforts to overcome this post hoc distinction, of then construing this same element as foundational and causal. As a concrete example of this habit, in achieving our personal identities in the process of our ongoing narratives, we abstract something called ‘being’ or ‘human nature’ out of the complexity of this continuing experience, and then make this abstraction antecedent to and causal of the process itself. For Dewey,

[...] the reality is the growth-process itself. [...] The real existence is the history in its entirety, the history just as what it is. The operations of splitting it up into two parts and then having to unite them again by appeal to causative power are equally arbitrary and gratuitous. (Dewey, 1985, Vol. 1, p. 210)

⁵ [...] 是对世界的“字典式”解释，试图建立界定万物的决定理解，简单的说，就是断定“什么是什么，”一切观念皆为“在 / 是”(being/is) 的注脚。I am using with minor changes the translation of this book by Edmund Ryden that is forthcoming from the University of California Press.

In the *Book of Changes*, we find a vocabulary that makes explicit cosmological assumptions that stand in stark alternative to this substance ontology, and provides the interpretive context for the Confucian canons by locating them within a holistic, organic, and ecological worldview. In this essay, I have taken it upon myself to create the neologism ‘zoetology’ with Gk. *zoe-* ‘life’ and *-logia* ‘discourse’ as a new term for an old way of thinking that has deep roots in classical Chinese cosmology. It gives us a contrast between ‘*on*-tology’ as ‘the science of being *per se*’ and ‘*zoe*-tology’ that we might translate as *shengsheng lun* 生生論: ‘the art of living’. This cosmology begins from ‘living’ (*sheng* 生) itself as the motive force behind change, and gives us a world of boundless ‘becomings’; it gives us not ‘things’ that *are*, but ‘events’ that are *happening*. And it is the nature of life itself that it seeks to optimize the available conditions for its continuing growth.

The starting point in this zoetological cosmology then is that nothing does anything by itself; association is a fact. Since the very nature of life is associative and transactional, the vocabulary appealed to in defining Confucian cosmology is irreducibly collateral: always multiple, never one. Everything is at once what it is for itself, for its specific context, and for the unsummed totality. Thus there are always correlative *yinyang* 陰陽 aspects within any process of change, describing the focal identity that makes something uniquely what it is, and by virtue of its vital relations, what it is becoming. Important to an understanding of this vocabulary is the gestalt shift (that is, a paradigm shift in one’s perception of something) from the Greek noun-dominated thinking with its world of human ‘beings’ and essential ‘things’, to the Confucian gerundive assumptions about the always eventful nature of human ‘becomings’ living their lives within their unbounded natural, social, and cultural ecologies. It is the difference between a leg and walking, between a lung and breathing.

Turning to the human experience specifically, persons are not defined in terms of limitation, self-sufficiency, and independence, but ecologically by the growth they experience in their intercourse with other persons and their worlds. Given the primacy of vital relations that give persons their focal identities, any particular person is holographic in existing at the pleasure of everything else. Holography – literally, the whole as it is implicated in each thing – is that way of understanding things that begins from the notion that everything is constituted by its particular relations with everything else. The question of why such persons exist is explained by how they exist and what they mean for each other. And the necessity in

ontology of defining what is what is replaced by the zoetological possibilities each thing affords everything else for growth, revision, and redefinition. Zhao Tingyang suggests that in contrast to the ‘dictionary’ definition afforded by Greek ontology, the Confucian cosmology provides

[...] an explanation of the ‘grammar’ of the world, striving for a coordinated understanding of the relationships – between heaven and humankind, humankind and things, and humans and humans – by which all doings are generated, with a special emphasis on the mutuality of relationships, and the compatibility of all things.⁶ (Zhao, 2016, pp. 147–148)

‘Things’ as constituted by their relations are continually being redefined by the growth they experience in their intercourse with other things. Like words in a sentence, relational meaning begins from the conventional grammar that provides the basic ordering of these words necessary for them to be intelligible. And in the composition, it is the productive association the words come to have with each other that is the basic source of their meanings. The rhetorical effectiveness of a sentence is achieved as the relations among the words are cultivated and are thus grown to become increasingly eloquent in their expression. And the sentence rises to the level of poetry through the artistry of optimizing the contribution each inimitable word makes to its specific others as it draws upon its own history of associations.

4. Zoetology and its Far-Reaching Implications

In contrast with Greek ‘ontology’, there is an alternative, equally engrained prejudice in classical Chinese cosmology made explicit in the *Book of Changes* that we might call ‘zoetology’ (*shengshenglun* 生生論). The *Changes* is the first among the Chinese classics, and as a text is itself an object lesson in the ecological worldview it attempts to present. That is, when we reflect on the nature of ‘events’ rather than ‘things’ within this process worldview, the relationship of these particular foci to their fields lends itself to a holographic understanding of world systems. The totality or field is both implicated in and construed from the unique perspective of each particular focus; in this case, the *Book of Changes* itself. The ‘Great Commentary’

⁶ [...] 是对世界的“语法式”解释，力求对万事所生成的关系（天与人，人与物，人与人）的协理解，尤其重视关系的互相性或万事的合宜性。

(*Dazhuan* 大傳) on the *Changes* makes just such a claim in announcing the importance of this canonical text:

《易》之為書也，廣大悉備。有天道焉，有人道焉，有地道焉。

As a document, the *Changes* is vast and far ranging, and has everything complete within it. It contains the way of the heavens, the way of human beings, and the way of the earth.

Indeed, it is this open-ended *Book of Changes* with its centuries of accruing commentaries that has set the terms of art for a persistent yet evolving cosmology and for its cultural common sense. As such, it provides a shared interpretive context for the evolving Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions, and most recently, for their engagement with the Western philosophical narrative.

The *Changes*, taking ‘change’ (*yi* 易) as its title, defines the motive force within way-making or world-making (*dao* 道) itself specifically and denotatively as ‘ceaseless procreating’:

富有之謂大業，日新之謂盛德。生生之謂易 . . . 通變之謂事，陰陽不測之謂神。

It is because of its sheer abundance we call it ‘the grand workings’; it is because of its daily renewal we call it ‘copious virtuosity’; it is because of its ceaseless procreating we call it ‘the changes’ (*yi*). [...] The continuity in flux we call events. And what cannot be fathomed by appeal to *yinyang* thinking is what we call the truly mysterious (*shen*).⁷

Each phrase in this passage isolates one specific way of looking at our continuing life experience, and then gives it a denotative name.⁸ In the language of the text, each name references one aspect of *dao* ‘way-making’, or perhaps less metaphorically, the unfolding of the cosmic order. The last phrase in this passage then takes us back to where we began, reminding us of the open-endedness of those processes of change expressed through *yinyang* 陰陽 correlations. Whatever ‘things’ in this cosmos might be, their ever-changing identities must ultimately be understood as uniquely centered foci constituted by a manifold of vital relations within a boundless ecological field. It recalls a related description in this same text

⁷ All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

⁸ There is an important grammatical distinction we find throughout the text. Sometimes the text uses the denotative ‘is what is meant by’ (*zhiwei* 之謂) and sometimes the conative ‘is called or termed’ (*weizhi* 謂之). The former expression defines its antecedent explicitly, while the latter connotes or references what is only one ‘aspect’ of some greater whole.

wherein the sages, like the heavens and the earth, 神无方而易无體 ‘in their mystery [...] remain undefined, and in their changes have no set structure’.

Sheng 生 as ‘life, growth, and the kind of birthing that occurs within this vital process’ is real and will not be denied. This *Book of Changes* cosmology gives privilege to events as irreducibly relational ‘becomings’, and provides the correlative *yinyang* categories needed to ‘speak’ process and its eventful content. A popular mantra often invoked to capture the spirit of the *Changes* is 生生不已, 創造不息 ‘procreative living is without end; creativity never ceases’. In this processual cosmology, the growth that attends such generative living is not only ceaseless and boundless, but is further elevated to be celebrated as the most vigorous potency and highest value of the cosmos itself:

天地之大德曰生, 聖人之大寶曰位。何以守位曰仁, 何以聚人曰財, 理財正辭、禁民為非曰義。

The greatest capacity (*dade* 大德) of the cosmos is life itself. The greatest treasure of the sages is the attainment of standing (*wei* 位). The means of maintaining standing is aspiring to become consummate in one’s conduct (*ren* 仁). The means of attracting and mobilizing others is the use of all available resources. Regulating these resources effectively, insuring that language is used properly, and preventing the common people from doing what is undesirable is what is optimally appropriate and most meaningful (*yi* 義).

Life as growth in relations is the magic of a fundamentally moral cosmos. A full complement of the Confucian values is expressed here as nothing more than assiduous cultivation of growth in the various dimensions of the human experience, from the achieved stature of the sages to best practices in the use of resources and in the effecting of social and political order. In this human world, such effective living is the substance of morality and education, and as the continuing source of meaning, is expressed through the boundless creativity and beauty that is its greatest treasure. Meaning is not available to us from putative metaphysical foundations – what David Keightley has described as ‘a Platonic metaphysics of certainties, ideal forms, and right answers’ (Keightley, 1988, p. 376). Instead, guidance for leading the most meaningful lives must be formulated and passed on within the historical narrative by the most sagacious of our progenitors as they have coordinated the human experience with the changing cosmic processes. Confucian morality itself is a cosmic phenomenon emerging out of the symbiotic and synergistic

transactions that take place between the operations of nature and our concerted human efforts.

The *Book of Changes* has been compiled from a sagacious awareness of the nature of the world around us, and thus provides access to the mysteries and wonders of the human experience in all of its parts:

《易》與天地準，故能彌綸天地之道。仰以觀於天文，俯以察於地理，是故知幽明之故。原始反終，故知死生之說。精氣為物，遊魂為變，是故知鬼神之情狀。

It is because the *Changes* is modelled on the heavens and earth that it is able to cover the full complement of their operations (*dao*). Looking upward, we avail ourselves of the *Changes* to observe the constellations in the heavens, and looking downward, we avail of it to discern the topography of the earth. It is thus that we come to understand the source of both what is apparent and what is obscure. In tracing things back to their origins and then following them to their end, we come to understand what can be said about living and dying. Things are formed through the condensing of *qi*, and change occurs in them through the wanderings of their life-force. It is thus that we come to understand the actual circumstances of the gods and spirits.

There is a cluster of key philosophical terms around which this 'Great Commentary' on the *Changes* is constructed that reveals the world as it is immediately experienced, providing us with a proliferation of correlated dyadic or 'paired' terms: the high and the low, the moving and the still, the hard and the soft, the full and the empty, the large and the small, the bright and the dark, the hot and the cold, and so on. Rather than appealing to an Unmoved Mover or some other external source of change, it is the correlative, bipolar, and dynamic tensions inherent in a *yinyang* life-world so defined, that produce the energy of transformation. These same tensions between the determinate and the indeterminate are the source from which the novelty that always attends these processes continually emerges. Important here is a description of how things and events, from the most ordinary and everyday to the noncorporeal world of gods and spirits, are formed and eventually dissipate, animated by motive life-forces and taking shape through perturbations in the psycho-physical *qi*. The correlative relationship of the dyadic pairs such as 'living and dying' (*sisheng* 死生) and 'gods and spirits' (*guishen* 鬼神) in which each is implicated in the other, reflects the porousness of such classifications and the absence of the categorical thinking that would set any final and exclusive limits on them.

The way in which this canonical text has been compiled by the sages and how it appeals to imagistic thinking in the production of meaning is described specifically in terms of change and transformation:

聖人設卦觀象，繫辭焉而明吉凶。剛柔相推而生變化。是故吉凶者、失得之象也，悔吝者、憂虞之象也，變化者、進退之象也，剛柔者、晝夜之象也。六爻之動、三極之道也。

The sages set out the hexagrams and observed the images. Attaching their commentaries to them, they made clear what is auspicious and inauspicious. The firm and the yielding lines displacing each other produces the changes and transformations. It is thus that auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are the image of gaining and losing, that regret and care are the image of anxiety and concern, that change and transformation are the image of advancing and withdrawing, that firm and yielding are the image of day and night. The movement of the six lines is progress along the way-making (*dao*) of the three ultimates: the heavens, the earth, and humankind.

The sages have created a dynamic, imagistic discourse drawn from their understanding of the generative procreativity of the cosmos to communicate their insights into how we might guide the human experience deliberately, enabling it to unfold within the context of the heavens and the earth in the most auspicious way.

5. Zoetology, Imagistic Thinking, and Identity Construction

Contemporary philosophers such as Mark Johnson and John Dewey before him are making an argument that resonates with the one we find here in the *Changes*. The imagistic discourse of the sages is not only descriptive of the physical operations of the cosmos, but through promoting benign growth it also provides a resource for the human being to create the higher-order values and concepts that make the human experience increasingly moral and intelligent. The subtitle of Johnson's *The Body in the Mind* is *The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*.⁹ In this work, Johnson has done much to argue for the bodily basis of human meaning-formation, and also for what is ultimately the aesthetic ground of human flourishing. He maps the way in which the barest of physical

⁹ In many ways Johnson is following John Dewey's pioneering work *Experience and Nature*.

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images such as ‘balanced’ or ‘centre and periphery’ are extended through the metaphorical projections and elaborations of our imagination to generate complex cognitive and affective patterns of meaning:

Our world radiates out from our bodies as perceptual centers from which we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell our world. (Johnson, 1987, p. 124)

For Johnson, the formal, logical structures of human understanding are a direct extension of the activities of our lived bodies with such higher-order intelligence emerging through the exercise of our seemingly boundless imagination. Such is the human capacity to produce complex culture. Johnson identifies his own basic image-schemata as ‘containment’, ‘force’, ‘balance’, ‘cycles’, ‘scales’, ‘links’, and ‘center-periphery’. In his reflection on what is ‘learning to become human’, Johnson has urged the view

[...] that understanding is never merely a matter of holding beliefs, either consciously or unconsciously. More basically, one’s understanding is one’s way of being in, or having, a world. This is very much a matter of one’s embodiment, that is, of perceptual mechanisms, patterns of discrimination, motor programs, and various bodily skills. And it is equally a matter of our embeddedness within culture, language, institutions, and historical traditions. (Johnson, 1987, p. 137)

In appreciating this emergent process of the structures of human understanding, we have to be wary of simple epiphenomenal language that would separate root from tree as cause and effect, making the tree a secondary by-product of the root with itself having no causal effect. Rather, root and tree are a holistic, symbiotic process where they grow together or not at all. Similarly, lived bodies and our embodied living are two aspectual ways of looking at the same process of growth.

The image-schemata we find in the *Changes* is captured in the correlative images as the early sages have described them, and are reflective of the primacy given to vital relationality in the classical Chinese process cosmology. That is, these always situated images are understood in fundamentally and irreducibly relational terms with agency being a second-order consideration. Such images describe the transactional relationships that locate the activities of organisms within their human and natural ecologies. To give just one example of how higher-order thinking might be the extension of bodily actions, it is not difficult to conceive of how recurrent, habituated physical patterns such as giving and getting, rising and falling,

agitation and equilibrium could be transformed and metaphorically extended to produce higher-order economic and political concepts defining of a mature culture such as ‘relational equity’ and ‘social justice’. Again, such higher-order but still zoetological ‘forms of life’ in turn are internalized to become integral to our body consciousness.

Turning to the human experience specifically, zoetological persons are not defined in terms of limitation, self-sufficiency, and independence, but ecologically by the growth they experience in their intercourse with other persons and their worlds. Since any one thing exists at the pleasure of everything else, the question of why things exist is explained by how they exist and what they mean for each other. And the cognitive necessity that emerges in defining what is what is superseded by the possibilities each thing affords everything else for growth, revision, and redefinition. Just as human flourishing arises from positive growth in the relations of family and community, the symbiotic, co-terminous, and mutually entailing cosmic flourishing is an extension of this same kind of transactional growth but on a more expansive scale. Indeed, human values and a moral cosmic order are both grounded in life and its productive growth, and are thus continuous with each other as interpenetrating complementarities. In canonical texts such as *Focusing the Familiar* (*Zhongyong* 中庸) and the *Classic of Family Reverence* (*Xiaojing* 孝經), human moral imperatives such as ‘sincerity, resolution’ (*cheng* 誠) and ‘family reverence’ (*xiao* 孝) respectively, are discerned in the natural order of things and thus elevated beyond the human experience as cosmic values, giving the best among human beings the stature of co-creators with the heavens and the earth. At the same time the terms that describes erstwhile cosmic forces such as ‘way-making’ (*dao* 道), ‘imaging’ (*xiang* 象), and ‘patterning’ (*li* 理) are also used to express the human capacity to be meaning-makers.

Appealing to this concrete example of identity formation, a person’s own potentialities, far from being front-loaded by locating their latent qualities or abilities as some inherent nature that is then available to them for actualization, is inclusive of and a collaboration with their evolving processual contexts. It is thus that such persons, rather than being self-standing human ‘beings’, can best be characterized in the language of human ‘becomings’ who are constantly internalizing their enviroing conditions as their identities emerge in the world. Such human ‘becomings’ are vital, interpenetrating, and irreducibly social ‘events’ that create meaning through the continuing cultivation of their relations with others, and transform ordinary experience into poetry through the elevation and refinement of the hours shared together as their lives become increasingly significant.

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