Philosophies of Happiness

Chapter 3 Confucian Happiness: Supplementary Notes

4. Slingerland, in accord with Pang Pu, suggests that the term *wu-wei* “describes a state of personal harmony in which actions flow freely and instantly from one’s spontaneous inclinations—without the need for extended deliberation or inner struggle—and yet nonetheless accord perfectly with the dictates of the situation at hand, display an almost supernatural efficacy and (in the Confucian context at least) harmonize with the demands of conventional morality . . . It represents not a transitory state but rather a set of dispositions that has been so thoroughly transformed as to conform with the normative order.”

Ivanhoe objects that, as Slingerland’s translation “effortless action” suggests, *wu-wei* is properly a quality of actions and not agents, since nature is said to act in *wu-wei* fashion without being an agent. Ivanhoe, “The Paradox of *Wu-wei*?” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, Volume 34, Issue 2: 277-287, at 284.

Chris Fraser points out that the question of agency is at the heart of many of these descriptions of action. Thus nature may be a paradigm precisely because it acts without conscious agency. Fraser, “On *Wu-wei* as a Unifying Metaphor: Effortless Action: *Wu-wei* as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China,” *Philosophy East and West*: 97-106, at 99-100.

55. The Master fell ill. Zilu had the disciples act towards him as though they were retainers. When the illness eased, the Master said, “Long has Yóu practiced this deception! To have no retainers and pretend to have them, whom do I deceive? Do I deceive Tian? And moreover, rather than die in the hands of retainers, would I not prefer to die in your hands, my friends? Even though I may receive no great funeral, would I be dying by the side of the road?”


The Zhuangzi passage reads: “When Zhuangzi was dying, his disciples wanted to give him a lavish funeral. Said Zhuangzi, I have Heaven and earth for my outer and inner coffins, the sun and moon for my pair of jade discs, the stars for my pearls, the myriad creatures for my farewell gifts. Is anything missing from my funeral paraphernalia? What would you add to these?”

"Master! We are afraid the crows and kites will eat you!" said one of his disciples.

ground I'll be eaten by the crows and kites; below ground I'll be eaten by the ants and mole-crickettes. You rob from one to give to the other. How come you like them so much better?" Chapter 22, “Lie Yukkou,” Translated by Ivanhoe, “Death and Dying in the Analects,” 144. See also Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 361.

59 Enos translates, “Master You said:

*In the practice of li,*

*Harmony is the key.*

*In the Dao of the kings of old,*

*This was the beauty.*

In all affairs, great and small, follow this. Yet there is one respect in which one does not. To act in harmony simply because one understands what is harmonious, but not to regulate one’s conduct according to *li*, indeed, one cannot act in that way.”
Ming was originally a command, which came to be given to the ruler; it was early associated with Tian in the phrase the “Mandate of Heaven.” The root meaning of ming is an order, to order (someone). The original graph shows an open mouth directed over a kneeling figure. From the founding of the Zhou dynasty, the theory that the political ruler was given the mandate of Heaven extended the meaning of ming to destiny. In the political context, this was a positive charge; the mandate suggested “not limitations but obligations and opportunities.” (Robert Eno, on-line translation to Analects, appendix on terms, 118.) Later on the notion of “what is ordained” was extended to what is ordained for an individual, one’s own personal fate or lifespan, which was unavoidable. Thus ming had both positive and limiting connotations.

When the Zhou dynasty overtook the Shang, Zhou leaders argued that their ascendancy to power was due to the heavenly mandate. But the idea took hold that one could lose that mandate, and that to retain it required that the ruler cultivate both perfect ritual form and virtue, commitment to the Way. Edward Slingerland, Confucius, The Analects (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), xviii-xvix. Hence we see the focus here on becoming attuned to the heavenly mandate so that one’s actions flow with what propriety would dictate.

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“Will such be the fast I will choose, a day of man's afflicting his soul? Is it to bend his head like a fishhook and spread out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is this not the fast I will choose? To undo the fetters of wickedness, to untie the bands of perverseness, and to let out the oppressed free, and all perverseness you shall eliminate. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and moaning poor you shall bring home; when you see a naked one, you shall clothe him, and from your flesh you shall not hide…

If you restrain your foot because of the Sabbath, from performing your affairs on My holy day, and you call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honored, and you honor it by not doing your wonted ways, by not pursuing your affairs and speaking words. Then, you shall delight with the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the land, and I will give you to eat the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”
(Isaiah 58:5-6, 13-14).

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The classical commentator Wang Bi explains that jade and silk are merely means for expressing respect; bells and drums are merely tools for making music. To emphasize gifts and offerings and forget respect is to focus on the instrument and forget its true purpose. Likewise, bells and drums must produce true harmony. Wang Bi thus suggests that we see here the principle of the rectification of names. Wang Bi, cited by Slingerland, Confucius Analects on 17:11, p. 205. On the rectification or correcting of names, see Analects 12.11, 6.25, 13.3; Van Norden, Virtue Ethics, 82-96.

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What is the connotation of the term good here? Slingerland comments on 3:25: “good at something (shan), elsewhere translated as excellent, here meaning something like “good for people to listen to”—i.e. having a good effect on them, to be distinguished from Good (ren), in the sense of “morally good, good as a person, highest moral virtue, 18, note 17. Ames and Rosemont comment that shan in 3.25 means “productive of good relationships.” The character is first a relational term and only derivatively an essential attribute. It means “good at, good to, good with, good for, good in,” and hence “adeptness efficaciousness, competency.” In 2.20 those who are adept (shan) are contrasted to those who are not. Although music is not ren, the highest moral good, both interpreters note that music is morally efficacious. See Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation (New York: Ballantine, 1998), 234 note 39; 326 note 61. Waley translates the passage as having to do with dance rather than with music: “The Master spoke of the Succession Dance as being
perfect beauty and at the same time perfect goodness; but of the War Dance as being perfect beauty, but not perfect goodness.” Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 101. Robert Eno explains: “The Shao music was an orchestral ballet said to have been composed by the legendary Emperor Shun, who was raised to the throne because of his virtue. The Wu music was a dance of the conquest in war of the evil last king of the Shang by the Zhou founder, King Wu. (‘Wu’ means ‘martial’).”

84 Slingerland’s translation of the first phrase follows Jiang Xi's interpretation of *xing* as "to inspire, stimulate": "Gazing upon the intentions of the ancients can give inspiration to one's own intention." Bao Xian takes *xing* as signifying simply "to begin": "The point is that the cultivation of the self should start with study of the *Odes.*" Slingerland comments further: "Taking one's place" through ritual involves, as discussed in 2.4, taking up one's role as an adult among other adults in society, something that requires a mastery of the rituals governing social interactions. Steps one and two thus represent, respectively, cognitive shaping through learning and behavioral shaping through ritual training. Finally, the joy inspired by the powerfully moving music of the ancients brings the cognitive and behavioral together into the unselfconscious, effortless perfection that is wu-wei.”