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of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*

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EDITOR's Words 1

ARTICLES

- FRAMARIN, Christopher / *Ātman*, Identity, and Emanation: 3
Arguments for a Hindu Environmental Ethic
- LOTT, Tommy / Comparative Aspects of Africana Philosophy and 25
the Continental-Analytic Divide
- MCLEOD, Alexis / Pluralism About Truth in Early Chinese Philosophy: 38
A Reflection on Wang Chong's Approach
-

EDITOR'S WORDS

Comparative Philosophy has moved toward its first anniversary since the journal made its debut one year ago and now at the moment of starting its second volume after successfully completing the open-access publication of the first volume. The journal was established around the end of the first decade of the 21st century during which comparative philosophy, as understood and practiced in a philosophically interesting way, underwent significant development in its identity, coverage and mission. Comparative philosophy is no more limited to the East-West comparative dialogue only; it is neither restricted to the comparative examination of culture/region-associated traditions nor stops at the purely historical description of apparent similarities and differences, but penetrates deeper and wider philosophically. Comparative philosophy, instead of being a local subfield of philosophy, has become one exciting general front of philosophical exploration that is primarily concerned with how distinct approaches from different philosophical traditions (generally covering both culture/region-associated and style/orientation-associated philosophical traditions) can learn from each other and constructively engage each other to jointly contribute to the development of contemporary philosophy on a series of issues or topics of philosophical significance, which can be jointly concerned through appropriate philosophical interpretation and/or from a broader philosophical vantage point. This journal is to provide a forum for such thoroughly open-minded while constructive-engaging exploration.

The contents of the past volume and the current issue of the journal have illustrated well the foregoing features of comparative philosophy and can serve as a good showcase of its width and depth. The reader can see such cross-tradition philosophical exploration effectively and engagingly resorts to various philosophically interesting and relevant resources and approaches from different traditions (involving not merely Chinese, Indian and Western traditions but also Africana, Islamic and Latin American traditions, and also addressing different styles/orientations of doing philosophy such as what is shown in the analytic-'Continental' divide); the addressed issues extensively include those in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language and mind, logic as well as ethics and social-political philosophy; they all are constructive-engagement oriented in view of the contribution to the development of contemporary philosophy. Indeed, this *philosophical*-relevance emphasis has rendered them intrinsically relevant to the philosophical interest and inquiry of philosophy scholars and students, no matter which specific traditions they study and no matter which style of philosophy they instantiate, given that they work on issues and topics under examination in the journal

articles. In this connection, the constructive-engagement emphasis of this journal serves as, or constitutes, one pivot at which the reader can see how these explorations on distinct resources from different traditions can be intrinsically and effectively unified through comparative philosophy, which otherwise could be easily dismissed as irrelevant to each other.

It is also worth mentioning that the open-access character of this journal has effectively enhanced the availability and impact of the published articles in the journal. According to the journal website statistics, although the journal as a new one has yet to be widely known, there have been about 25,000 on-line page views of the two issues and related contents during the past year at the journal website, and the actual page views (including both on-line and off-line views) should substantially exceed the above number as the journal sets up both single-article download and whole-issue download functions for the reader's off-line reading convenience. It is also noted that, besides those from countries in North America and Europe, the readers also include those from many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America where public and university libraries have little resources to subscribe to paid academic journals (especially philosophy journals). The open-access strategy of this journal has thus contributed to maximizing the impact of those published results in comparative philosophy; this is especially relevant and significant in view of the nature and mission of comparative philosophy.

Bo Mou
January 2011

ĀTMAN, IDENTITY, AND EMANATION: ARGUMENTS FOR A HINDU ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

CHRISTOPHER FRAMARIN

ABSTRACT: *Many contemporary authors argue that since certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that all living beings are fundamentally the same as Brahman (God), these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic. I outline three common versions of this argument, and argue that each fails to meet at least one criterion for an environmental ethic. This doesn't mean, however, that certain Hindu texts and traditions do not provide the basis for an environmental ethic. In the last section of the paper I briefly outline and defend an alternative, according to which all plants and animals have intrinsic value and direct moral standing in virtue of having a good.*

Keywords: *Hinduism, environmental ethics, intrinsic value, direct moral standing, Brahman, ātman, sentience*

1. INTRODUCTION

Many contemporary authors argue that since certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that all living beings are fundamentally the same as *Brahman* (God), these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.¹ I outline three common versions of this argument, and argue that each fails to meet at least one criterion for an environmental ethic.

This doesn't mean, however, that certain Hindu texts and traditions do not provide the basis for an environmental ethic. In the last section of the paper I briefly outline and defend an alternative, according to which all plants and animals have intrinsic value and direct moral standing in virtue of having a good.

FRAMARIN, CHRISTOPHER: Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Calgary, Canada. Email: chris.framarin@ucalgary.ca

¹ The authors whose views I consider in sections 2 through 5 are often unclear about which Hindu texts and traditions they have in mind. Where they are explicit, they refer to Advaita Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, and the *Upaniṣads*. In section 6, I focus primarily on the *Manusmṛti*, with the thought that its authority on matters of *dharma* is broadly accepted.

2. THREE ARGUMENTS FOR A HINDU ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

Most authors who write on Hindu environmental ethics offer a version of the following argument. Certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that all living beings are fundamentally the same as *Brahman*. Therefore these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic. The basic argument can be schematized in the following way:

(SA – 1)

Premise: Certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that all living beings are fundamentally the same as *Brahman*.

Conclusion: Hence these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

In order for a theory to count as an environmental ethic, it must ascribe both intrinsic value and direct moral standing to non-sentient entities in nature (Regan 1981, 19-20, Thompson 1990, 148). To say that something has intrinsic value is to say that it has value independent of further ends towards which it is a means, and independent of the evaluations of valuers. To say that an entity has direct moral standing is to say that there are possible circumstances in which an agent morally ought to consider the entity for its own sake in deciding what to do (Regan 1981, 19-20, Timmons 2007, 511).² Hence the basic argument can be elaborated to read:

(SA – 2)

Premise One: Certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that all living beings are fundamentally the same as *Brahman*.

Conclusion One/Premise Two: Hence these texts and traditions claim that non-sentient entities have intrinsic value and direct moral standing.

Conclusion Two: Hence these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

Implicit in this argument are the claims that (1) *Brahman* has intrinsic value and direct moral standing and (2) if all living beings are fundamentally the same as *Brahman*, then all living beings are intrinsically valuable and have direct moral standing. So the full argument reads:

² One justification for these criteria is that if non-sentient entities in nature do not have intrinsic value and/or direct moral standing, then environmental ethics is not really a distinct subdiscipline. It is simply one of many areas within the field of ethics (and/or animal ethics), much like medical ethics or business ethics, that deal fundamentally with the ways that human beings should treat one another (and perhaps other sentient entities) (Norton 1984, 131-2). This is why many of those who deny the plausibility of an environmental ethic still define an environmental ethic in this way (such as Thompson [1990]). So 'environmental ethic' should not be understood here as a success term, equivalent to 'plausible ethic of the environment' or 'adequate ethic of the environment', since authors disagree widely on what constitutes a plausible ethic of the environment.

(SA – 3)

Premise One: Certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that all living beings are fundamentally the same as *Brahman*.

Premise Two: *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Premise Three: If all living beings are fundamentally the same as *Brahman*, and if *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, then all living beings are intrinsically valuable and have direct moral standing.

Conclusion One/Premise Four: So certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that each living being is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Conclusion Two: Hence these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

In what follows, I will refer to this as the ‘Sameness Argument’ (SA). It is advanced in some form or another by Eliot Deutsch (1970 and 1986), Rajagopal Ryali (1973), S. Cromwell Crawford (1982), David Kinsley (1991), Klaus K. Klostermaier (1991), Lina Gupta (1993), Harold Coward (1998), O. P. Dwivedi (2000), and others.

These authors offer at least three versions of SA, depending in part on which text or tradition they emphasize. According to the first version, which I will refer to as the ‘*Ātman* Argument’ (AA), certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that each living being is an embodied *ātman* (eternal self). Each *ātman* is identical with *Brahman*³ – in some sense.⁴ Since each *ātman* is identical with *Brahman*, each *ātman* has intrinsic value and direct moral standing. And since each living being is an embodied *ātman*, each living being is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing. Hence certain Hindu texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

Crawford advances this version of the argument when he claims that “[t]he general idea behind [relevant passages in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*] is that the individual *ātman* is one with the universal *Brahman*... This *Brahman* force is manifest uniformly in the divinities of heaven, and in human and animal and plant life on earth” (Crawford 1982, 150). Hence “Hindu philosophy can provide the basis for an environmental ethic” (Ibid., 149). Anantanand Rambachan, arguing that Advaita affirms the “[world’s] value and the value of life in it” (Rambachan 1989, 289), advances the *Ātman* Argument as well. “As the all-pervasive reality, and as the axis of the universe which intersects all things, God, in *Advaita*, exists at the deepest levels... as the Self (*ātman*)” (Rambachan 1989, 294).⁵

The *Ātman* Argument can be schematized in the following way:

³ *Bhagavadgītā* 10.20, for example, reads, “I am the *ātman*, O Arjuna, that resides in the heart of all beings (*aham ātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthiḥ!*)” (Sadhale 2000b, 234).

⁴ I say “in some sense” in order to make the argument consistent with a variety of metaphysical pictures, including Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. See below.

⁵ Ryali also mentions the correlation between *ātman* and *Brahman* in his analysis of Hinduism’s conception of “man’s relationship with nature” (Ryali 1973: 48). He says, “*Brahman* resides in *atman* and indeed *Brahman* is *atman*” (Ryali 1973, 49). His view, like Rambachan’s, is ambiguous – it is not clear if he takes the *ātman* to be identical with *Brahman*, or simply part of *Brahman*.

(AA)

Premise One: Certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that the *ātman* is identical with *Brahman* in some sense.

Premise Two: *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Premise Three: If each *ātman* is identical with *Brahman*, and if *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, then each *ātman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Premise Four: If each *ātman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, and if each living being is an embodied *ātman*, then each living being is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Conclusion One/Premise Five: So according to certain Hindu texts and traditions, each living being is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Conclusion Two: Hence these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

According to the second version of SA, certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that the distinctions between people, animals, plants, and *Brahman* are finally unreal. Hence everything is ultimately numerically and qualitatively identical with *Brahman*.⁶ Since everything is identical with *Brahman* in this sense, and since *Brahman* has intrinsic value and direct moral standing, everything has intrinsic value and direct moral standing. Hence these Hindu texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

This seems to be the sense of at least one of Deutsch's arguments for a Hindu environmental ethic. He says, "Vedānta would maintain that... fundamentally all life is one... and that this oneness finds its natural expression in a *reverence* for all living things" (Deutsch 1970, 82).⁷ In defense of the claim that Hinduism endorses "treating the creation with respect without harming and exploiting others," Dwivedi claims that "for the Hindus of the ancient period, God and nature were one and the same" (Dwivedi 2000, 5-6).⁸

This second version of the argument can be schematized as follows:

(IA)

Premise One: Certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that the distinction between living beings and *Brahman* is unreal.

⁶ *Gītā* 11.20, for example, reads, "All space between heaven and earth is occupied by you [Kṛṣṇa] alone (*dyāvapṛthivyor idam antaraṃ hi vyāptaṃ tvayaikena diśaś ca sarvāḥ*)" (Sadhale 2000, 293). 18.20 states, "Know that knowledge to be sattvic by which [a person] sees the one eternal being in all beings, the undivided in the divided (*sarvabhūteṣu yenaikaṃ bhāvam avyayam īkṣate / avibhaktaṃ vibhakteṣu taj jñānaṃ viddhi sāttvikam //*)" (Sadhale 2000c, 330).

⁷ Vasudha Narayanan ascribes this view to Deutsch (Narayanan 1997, 298).

⁸ A number of authors outline the implications of Vedāntin "monism," such as Ryali (1973, 49), Kinsley (1991, 239), and Christopher Key Chapple (1993, 75). Presumably they have some version of IA in mind as well.

Premise Two: *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Premise Three: If the distinction between living beings and *Brahman* is unreal, and if *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, then all living beings are intrinsically valuable and have direct moral standing.

Conclusion One/Premise Four: So according to certain Hindu texts and traditions, each living being is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Conclusion Two: Hence these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

In what follows, I will refer to this argument as the ‘Identity Argument’ (IA).

According to the third version of SA, certain Hindu texts claim that all of nature is a manifestation of *Brahman*.⁹ ‘Manifestation of *Brahman*’ in this context means that *Brahman* produces or creates nature from its own form, so that the substance of nature is the same as that of *Brahman*.¹⁰ Hence nature is identical with *Brahman* in this sense.¹¹ Since all of nature is a manifestation of *Brahman*, all of nature is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing. Hence these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

This version of SA is the most popular. Coward, for example, claims that

Hindus speak of the cosmos (including the stars, the atmosphere, the earth, plants, animals, and humans) as God’s body. Since everything is divine, an ethic of reverence and respect is demanded from humans toward all other manifestations of God’s body (Coward 1998, 40).

Gupta argues that since “Hinduism speaks of... the essence called ‘*Brahman*’ that manifests itself in manifolds of this universe... all parts of this Nature have an intrinsic value” (Gupta 1993, 113). Dwivedi argues for an Indian environmental ethic by citing the claim from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (2.2.41) that “ether, air, fire, water, earth, planets, all creatures, directions, trees and plants, rivers, and seas, they are all organs of God’s body” (Dwivedi 2000, 5). Klostermaier and Patricia Y. Mumme defend this kind of view as well. They explicitly associate it with Rāmānuja and Viśiṣṭādvaita (qualified non-dualism), but point out that it has its origins in earlier texts, such as the *Puruṣa Sukta*, *Śatapaṭha Brāhmaṇa*, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, *Bhagavadgītā*, and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (Klostermaier 1991, 250-1 and Mumme 1998, 139).¹²

⁹ *Gītā* 10.8, for example, reads: “I am the source of all. From me all arises (*ahaṃ sarvasya prabhavo mattaḥ sarvaṃ pravartate* /)” (Sadhale 2000b, 218).

¹⁰ *Brahman*, on this view, is the material, or what Julius Lipner calls the “substantial cause” (*upādānakāraṇa*) of the world (Lipner 1986, 82).

¹¹ Note that this sense of identity is different from the sense of identity in IA. One might say that a certain person, plant, or animal is God in the sense that they in part constitute God, without claiming that a certain person, plant, or animal is qualitatively and numerically identical with God.

¹² David Kinsley also claims that everything is a manifestation of *Brahman* as part of an argument for a Hindu environmental ethic (Kinsley 1991, 239). Also see Deutsch (Deutsch 1970, 83).

This third version of the argument, which I will call the ‘Emanation Argument’ (EA), reads:

(EA)

Premise One: Certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that all living beings are a manifestation of *Brahman*.

Premise Two: *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Premise Three: If each living being is a manifestation of *Brahman*, and if *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, then all living beings are intrinsically valuable and have direct moral standing.

Conclusion One/Premise Four: So according to certain Hindu texts and traditions, each living being is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing.

Conclusion Two: Hence these texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

As Klostermaier and Mumme point out, the Emanation Argument is most naturally associated with Viśiṣṭādvaita. The Identity Argument, in contrast, is most naturally associated with Advaita. These associations are helpful as a rule of thumb, but I want to avoid identifying these arguments with these traditions too strongly. Again, as is clear in Klostermaier and Mumme’s accounts, these philosophical themes have their origin in texts that precede the distinction between Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. Both Śāṅkara and Rāmānuja defend these systems with extensive references to texts that precede them.¹³

3. OBJECTIONS TO THE *ĀTMAN* ARGUMENT

The third premise of the *Ātman* Argument states that if each *ātman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, then each living being is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing. At first this inference might seem puzzling. It’s not clear how the intrinsic value of one item – in this case, the *ātman* – can transfer to another item – in this case, the living body. Indeed, many contemporary philosophers define intrinsic value in terms of the value an item or state of affairs has independent of its relations with other objects or states of affairs.

G. E. Moore’s influential position is that a state of affairs has intrinsic value just in case it has value in complete isolation. Its value must persist even in the absence of everything else (Moore 1903, 187).¹⁴ The body component in the *ātman*/body

¹³ It should be no surprise that many of these authors advance more than one version of SA. The *Ātman* Argument, after all, is entailed by IA and EA (so long as the identity cited in AA is qualified appropriately), but does not entail either.

¹⁴ I take Moore’s formulation to be equivalent to the formulation of intrinsic value that I offer above, according to which intrinsic value is value independent of both means-end relations and what might be called ‘valued-valuer relations’. John O’Neill offers what he takes to be examples of other types of relations that are excluded by Moore’s formulation, but which do not reduce to either the means-end or valuer-valued relation. He offers the example of wilderness, and argues that it has value “because it is

composite does not have value in the absence of everything else, however, because it is valuable only in virtue of being inhabited by, or in some way connected with, an *ātman*. The claim that the living body is entirely without value, even though the *ātman* with which it is connected has great intrinsic value, seems consistent.

Indeed, the primary objection to a Hindu environmental ethic advanced by contemporary authors has been just this. Lance E. Nelson, for example, claims that according to the *Bhagavadgītā*, “*ātman* is what is important. The physical, on the other hand, is expendable, and certainly not worth any emotional distress” (Nelson 2000, 141). J. Baird Callicott (Callicott 1987, 124) and Arvind Sharma (1998, 57-8), among others,¹⁵ make the same claim.

Consider the following analogy. Assume that human beings are intrinsically valuable. A certain human being must spend the rest of her life in an Iron Lung. (Suppose it’s 1930.) In this situation, it’s clear that the Iron Lung has instrumental value, as a means of keeping the person alive. It does not come to have intrinsic value, however, merely because an intrinsically valuable person inhabits it for her entire life. Likewise, it seems, the material body does not come to have intrinsic value merely because an intrinsically valuable *ātman* inhabits it for a lifetime.

One might reply that the intrinsic value of the *ātman* need not establish the intrinsic value of the isolated body. All it must do is establish the intrinsic value of the *ātman*/body composite, and this it does. In the Iron Lung case, when an intrinsically valuable person occupies the Iron Lung, the person/Iron Lung composite is intrinsically valuable, even if the Iron Lung by itself is not, simply because the person is. This is all that is required for AA to succeed. The *ātman*/body composite is intrinsically valuable, even if the body is not, simply because the *ātman* is.

This kind of view, even if it technically succeeds at establishing the intrinsic value of the living being, seems at least to miss some of the spirit of the demands of an environmental ethic. Holmes Rolston III objects to a related argument by saying, “animals need to be valued... as biological agents...” (Rolston III 1987, 175). The word ‘agents’ here is somewhat misleading in the present context, since an environmental ethic must attribute intrinsic value and direct moral standing to non-sentient entities in nature whether they are agents – that is, whether they are capable of intentional action – or not. So the objection can be revised to read: animals and plants need to be valued as biological entities – and not simply as biological containers for something else that has intrinsic value and direct moral standing. The most plausible version of AA, however, does not value animals or plants as biological entities, but as embodied *ātmans*.

The problem becomes more apparent if we consider the issue of moral standing. Even if living beings are intrinsically valuable, as a consequence of being constituted

untouched by humans” (O’Neill: 1992, 125). Yet the relation of being untouched by humans does not reduce to the means-end or valuer-valued relation. The problem with the example is that it is not obvious that the value that wilderness has in virtue of being wilderness is intrinsic. If it is not, then the example does not demonstrate that intrinsic value excludes relations other than the means-end and valuer-valued relations. The same is true of O’Neil’s example of rarity (O’Neill 1992, 124).

¹⁵ See also Basant K. Lal (1986, 200-1) and Rita DasGupta Sherma (1998, 95).

in part by the *ātman*, it is not clear that the direct moral standing of the *ātman* transfers to the living being that it inhabits.

In the most famous discussion of the topic within the Indian philosophical tradition, the *Bhagavadgītā* states that the *ātman* is not harmed by the destruction of the body. “Weapons do not cut [the *ātman*], fire does not burn it, waters do not wet it, the wind does not dessicate it... The body being killed, [The *ātman*] is not killed” (2.23, 2.20).¹⁶ That we must, in deliberating over whether to perform a certain action, consider how the *ātman* will be affected does not entail that we must, in deliberating over whether to perform a certain action, consider how the body that is inhabited by the *ātman* will be affected, because the *ātman* is not affected by what happens to the body. As Nelson says with regard to the *Bhagavadgītā*, “physical harm – whether the destruction of war or, presumably, ecological devastation – however regrettable on the empirical level, does not affect what ultimately matters, namely spirit” (Nelson 2000, 142).¹⁷

So the first two objections to AA might be understood as two different versions of a similar transfer problem. The first objection is that the intrinsic value of the *ātman* does not transfer to the biological being. The second objection is that the direct moral standing of the *ātman* cannot transfer to the biological being.¹⁸

This second objection can be strengthened. It is not clear that *ātman* or *Brahman* has direct moral standing in the first place. In many classical texts, such as the *Yogasūtra*, the *Sāṃkhyakārika*, the *Gītā*, and various *Upaniṣads*, the *ātman* (or *puruṣa*) is typically characterized as an uninvolved and unaffected witness to the events of the world. In other texts, including some *Upaniṣads*, the *ātman* is described as the agent within the living being.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the *ātman* is unchanging, and untouched by pain and pleasure. The same is true of *Brahman*.²⁰ In other words, neither *Brahman* nor *ātman* could be affected by any event whatsoever.²¹

¹⁶ *nainam chindanti śastrāṇi nainam dahati pāvakaḥ / na cainam kledayanty āpo na śoṣayati mārutaḥ / ... na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre //* (Sadhale 2000a, 136 and 119). Both Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja interpret the verses straightforwardly.

¹⁷ See footnote 21 below for an objection and reply.

¹⁸ Each version of the transfer problem is unique to the present context. Intrinsic value cannot be transferred in the above way because intrinsic value is the value that an entity has independent of its relations to other things, and direct moral standing cannot be transferred in the above way because the initial entity from which direct moral standing is supposed to transfer (the *ātman*) does not have direct moral standing in the first place. I don’t mean to say that there is a problem in transferring qualities from one entity to another more generally.

¹⁹ Neither Hindu traditions in general nor Vedāntin traditions are uniform in their characterization of the relations between *Brahman*, *ātman*, and the body, but these are the most dominant conceptions.

²⁰ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* identifies both *Brahman* and *ātman* as the inner controller (*antaryāmiṇa*) of the body (BU 3.7.1), but also describes the *ātman* as free of hunger, thirst, pain, and delusion (BU 3.5.1).

²¹ This is surely the Sāṃkhyan and Yogic view, which the *Gītā*, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and others generally adopt. There are some passages, however, such as *Gītā* 17.6, that suggest that both *ātman* and *Brahman* are indeed affected by the events of the body. The verse reads: “the mindless, causing harm to the body, [which is] the aggregate of physical elements, also [cause harm to] me within the body. Know them as demonic [in their] intentions (*karśayantaḥ śarīrasthaṃ bhūtagrāmam acetasaḥ /*

If neither *Brahman* nor *ātman* could be affected by any event, then there is no possible set of circumstances in which a being must consider how *Brahman* or *ātman* will be affected by an action. If there is no possible set of circumstances in which a being must consider how *Brahman* or *ātman* will be affected by an action, then neither *Brahman* nor *ātman* has direct moral standing, since to say that a being has direct moral standing is to say that there are possible circumstances in which an agent morally ought to consider the entity for its own sake in deciding what to do. And if neither *Brahman* nor *ātman* has direct moral standing, the direct moral standing of the *ātman* cannot transfer to the body or the *ātman*/body composite.

The cogency of AA, however, depends on the truth of the claim that the *ātman* has direct moral standing. Since the *ātman* does not have direct moral standing, the argument is unconvincing. If the argument fails, then AA does not prove that certain Indian texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

4. OBJECTIONS TO THE IDENTITY ARGUMENT

Both the Identity Argument and the Emanation Argument might be thought of as more robust versions of the *Ātman* Argument. AA states that every *ātman* is in some sense identical with *Brahman*. IA and EA state that everything – including every *ātman* – is in some sense identical with *Brahman*. Hence the failure of AA to establish a Hindu environmental ethic need not mean that IA and/or EA fail as well.

The Identity Argument certainly avoids the first objection to AA – the objection that the intrinsic value of the *ātman* does not transfer to the biological organism per se – because according to IA, the biological organism is identical with both *ātman* and *Brahman*. Hence the intrinsic value of the biological organism is not a result of the problematic transfer of intrinsic value from the *ātman* or *Brahman*. The biological organism's value just is the value of *Brahman*.

IA is equally vulnerable, however, to the second objection to AA. The cogency of IA depends essentially on the plausibility of the claim that *Brahman* has direct moral standing (Premise Two). If *Brahman* does not have direct moral standing – as I argue above – then the direct moral standing of *Brahman* cannot establish the direct moral standing of living beings, sentient or non-sentient. Hence IA fails to show that certain Indian texts and traditions (namely those that claim that all distinctions are illusory) provide the basis for an environmental ethic, because IA fails to show that living beings have direct moral standing.

My point here is not that since, according to IA, the living being is identical with *Brahman*, and since *Brahman* lacks direct moral standing, so does the living being. If this were the point, long digressions about the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality would be unavoidable. (See below.) My point is more modest. Since

mām caivāntas śarīrasthaṃ tām viddhy āsuranīscayān //” (Sadhale 2000c, 248). These kinds of passages are overshadowed by the more common and extensive claims to the contrary, which emphasize a radical dualism between *ātman*/*Brahman* and the body. The former are, however, quite promising as bases for the development of a Hindu environmental ethic. (My thanks to an anonymous referee at *Comparative Philosophy* for this point.)

Brahman does not have direct moral standing to begin with, IA is unconvincing, because IA claims that the direct moral standing of *Brahman* is the basis for the direct moral standing of the living being. This is consistent, however, with the establishment of the direct moral standing of living beings by some other means. (See below.)

IA also faces an objection that AA avoids. Thus far, I have focused on two criteria for an environmental ethic. An environmental ethic must (1) attribute intrinsic value to non-sentient entities in nature, and (2) attribute direct moral standing to non-sentient entities in nature. These criteria are not exhaustive, however. Additionally, an environmental ethic must satisfy what Janna Thompson calls the “non-vacuity requirement” (Thompson 1990, 149). Thompson argues that

[t]he criteria for determining what things or states of affairs are intrinsically valuable must not be such so that it turns out that every thing and every state of affairs counts as equally valuable. The reason why this requirement must be satisfied should be clear. An ethic is supposed to tell us what we ought or ought not to do; however, it cannot do so if it turns out that all things and states of affairs are equally valuable, for if they are, then there is no reason to do one thing rather than another, to bring about one state of affairs rather than another (Ibid.).

An ethic of any sort is supposed to be action-guiding. It is supposed to tell us what to do under certain circumstances. In order for an ethic to tell us what to do, it must be able to discriminate between what is good and bad. If a theory attributes equal value to everything,²² however, then it cannot discriminate between good and bad, because everything is equally good or bad. Nothing is any better than anything else.²³

Consider the example of murder. It might be thought that since a living person is intrinsically valuable, the person should not be harmed (all other things being equal). Hence killing is worse than avoiding killing. If, however, the value of the dead body is equal to the value of the living body, it is not clear why refraining from murder is preferable to murder. In both cases the outcome is equally valuable – a dead body is no less valuable than a living body. Even the sorrow of the friends and family of the murdered is equally valuable to the joy they might have felt if the murder had not occurred. Hence on this view, the distinctions between right and wrong, and good and bad, disappear.

IA, however, entails that everything has equal value. Notice first that Premise One of IA is unnecessarily narrow. If all distinctions are illusory, then the distinctions between *Brahman* and inanimate objects are illusory along with the distinctions between living beings and *Brahman*. Instead, Premise One should read: “Certain Indian texts and traditions claim that the distinctions between all things and *Brahman*

²² By ‘equal value’ I mean value that is both of the same kind and of the same quantity.

²³ An objection might go as follows. An ethic is action guiding if it draws the distinction between right and wrong. The distinction between right and wrong, however, might not depend on the distinction between good and bad. This is what Kant, among others, asserts. Yet Kant’s view also depends on ascribing intrinsic value to human beings (and denying it to other entities and things).

are unreal.” Premise Two states that *Brahman* has intrinsic value. When these premises are combined with Premise Three, which says that if the distinction between *Brahman* and X is illusory and *Brahman* has intrinsic value, then X has intrinsic value, they entail the conclusion “all things are intrinsically valuable.” If their value derives exclusively from their identity with *Brahman* – and IA says nothing to suggest that this is not the case – then all things are equally intrinsically valuable. If all things are equally intrinsically valuable, then the distinctions between good and bad and/or right and wrong are lost. Hence IA cannot establish an environmental ethic.

Again, some distinction might be drawn here between ultimate and conventional reality. One might admit that Advaita (as an example) attributes equal value to all things at the ultimate level, but insist that at the conventional level Advaita accepts evaluative distinctions. At the conventional level, a living person, animal, or plant is more valuable than a dead one, and the act of protecting life is better (more right) than the act of killing. Since most human beings live life at the conventional level, it is this level that is relevant to environmental ethics.

The problem with this response is that the proponent of IA argues that the conventional conception of the value of things – according to which there are differences in the value of things, and so on – should be replaced by the ultimate conception of the value of things – according to which all things are identical, and therefore have equal value. The proponent cannot, then, cite aspects of the conventional conception as a means of avoiding the further implications of attributing equal value to all things. The proponent of IA says that we should see all things as identical with *Brahman*. The proponent cannot then reply to the vacuity objection by pointing out that ordinarily we do not see all things as *Brahman*.²⁴

5. OBJECTIONS TO THE EMANATION ARGUMENT

Like the Identity Argument, the Emanation Argument entails that the biological entity has intrinsic value, since the biological entity, like the *ātman*, emanates from, and is constituted by *Brahman*. So EA avoids the first objection to the *Ātman* Argument.

EA is just as vulnerable, however, to the second objection to AA. Like IA, EA states that *Brahman* has direct moral standing (Premise Two of both arguments), and this premise is crucial to deriving the conclusion that each living being has direct moral standing. If *Brahman* does not have direct moral standing – as I argue above – then even if Premise Three is true – “If each living being is a manifestation of *Brahman*, and if *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, then all living beings are intrinsically valuable and have direct moral standing” – it does not follow that all living beings have direct moral standing. Hence EA does not provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

²⁴ Nelson argues that Advaita and the *Bhagavadgītā* deny that the material world has intrinsic value (Nelson 1998, 2000). I don’t think his argument succeeds, but the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality cannot refute it, for the same reasons I outline here.

Additionally, EA seems to face the vacuity objection. Again, Premise One is too narrow. Not only living beings, but non-living things are a manifestation of *Brahman*. Rāmānuja, for example, elaborates *Gītā* 10.8, which reads: “I am the creator of all”²⁵ as “I am the creator, the cause and origin, of the manifestation of all manifold [things], sentient and non-sentient.”²⁶ Throughout his commentaries on the *Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtra*, Rāmānuja simply says that *Brahman* is the creator of all things, and that both eternal selves and matter constitute God’s body (Carman 1974, 115). Likewise, none of the creation stories that Mumme or Klostermaier cite specify that *Brahman* only creates living beings. Mumme says, citing the best-known analogies for the emanationist perspective,

[a]s a spider emits a thread (*Brhadāranyaka Up.* 2.1.20 and *Muṇḍaka Up.* 1.1.7) or as grass arises from the earth, or as hairs arise from the body, so too, from the Imperishable Lord, arises *all of creation* (*Muṇḍaka Up.* 1.1.7) (Mumme 1998, 139, emphasis added).

Hence Premise One of EA should instead read: “Certain Hindu texts and traditions claim that all things are a manifestation of *Brahman*.”

Premise Two states that *Brahman* has intrinsic value. When these premises are combined with Premise Three – which says that if X is a manifestation of *Brahman*, and if *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable, then X is intrinsically valuable – they entail that all things are intrinsically valuable. If their value derives exclusively from being a manifestation of *Brahman* – and the argument says nothing to suggest otherwise – then EA entails that all things have equal intrinsic value. If a theory attributes equal intrinsic value to all things, however, it cannot discriminate between good and bad and/or right and wrong. It cannot be action-guiding, and therefore cannot be an ethic.²⁷

²⁵ *ahaṃ sarvasya prabhavaḥ...* (Sadhale 2000b, 218).

²⁶ *ahaṃ sarvasya vicitracidacitprapañcasya prabhava utpattikāraṇam...* (Sadhale 2000b, 219, lines 27-28).

²⁷ It might be objected that according to some of the texts and systems that imply the Emanation Argument, different things instantiate *Brahman* to different degrees, and hence that different things have varying levels of intrinsic value and/or direct moral standing. Rāmānuja, for example, explains *Gītā* 2.16, which states, “Existence is not found among the unreal. Non-existence is not found among the real (*nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ /*)” (Sadhale 2000a, 102), by quoting *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*: “Consciousness (*jñāna*) is real, whereas all else is unreal (*jñānaṃ yathā satyam asatyam anyat*)” (Sadhale 2000a, 104, line 35). If consciousness is more real than non-consciousness, then perhaps conscious entities are more valuable, or have greater direct moral standing, than non-conscious entities. If this is right, then the vacuity objection might be avoided – a living body is more valuable than a dead body because the living body is conscious.

If this is the argument, however, then proponents of the Emanation Argument must make this case explicitly, and presumably concede that it is not simply the fact that an entity emanates from *Brahman* that makes it valuable/worthy of consideration, but something more. Additionally, even if this case is made, the account faces some of the other problems I have raised above. In the same passage in which Rāmānuja states that consciousness is more real than non-consciousness, he says that “the real has the nature of indestructibility (*vināśasvabhāvo hy asattvam avināśasvabhāvaś ca sattvam*)” (Sadhale 2000a, 104, line 33). If consciousness is indestructible, then it is not clear that it can be harmed, and hence unclear how it can have direct moral standing. (This is not to say that it cannot be. But some

Finally, EA faces an objection that IA does not. Premise Three of IA states, “If the distinction between living beings and *Brahman* is unreal, and if *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, then all living beings are intrinsically valuable and have direct moral standing.” The premise seems plausible in part because if two items are identical, it is hard to see how one could have qualities that the other lacks. If the capital of Canada is Ottawa, then if Ottawa has over one million people, so does the capital of Canada. Likewise, if a living being is identical with *Brahman*, then if *Brahman* has intrinsic value and direct moral standing, then so does the living being.

Premise Three of EA, in contrast, states, “If each living being is a manifestation of *Brahman*, and if *Brahman* is intrinsically valuable and has direct moral standing, then all living beings are intrinsically valuable and have direct moral standing.” There is no corresponding platitude, however, to the effect that if one item is a manifestation of another, the former has all of the qualities that the latter possesses. Consider one of the analogies just mentioned. Assume that a human being is intrinsically valuable. The hair of a human being emanates from the human being. It might even be said to be of the same substance as a human being. From this it does not follow that the hair is also intrinsically valuable. Similarly, the fact that living beings emanate from *Brahman* does not obviously entail that they share in *Brahman*’s intrinsic value.

Indeed, there is a precedent in Rāmānuja’s work for denying that living beings possess the qualities of *Brahman*. *Brahman* is, among other things, infinite and eternal, unlike any of the entities he creates.²⁸ *Brahman* is often described as omniscient and perfectly blissful. Rocks, however, are incapable of knowledge or bliss, and even human beings are rarely perfectly knowledgeable or blissful. If a number of *Brahman*’s qualities do not inhere in elements of his creation, despite these elements emanating from *Brahman*, then at the very least the proponent of EA must offer an argument for why the intrinsic value of *Brahman* does inhere in the elements of his creation, even though other qualities of *Brahman* do not. Yet proponents of EA do not make this case. And even if there are arguments for the claim that certain qualities inhere in the elements of creation, there must be additional arguments for the claim that the qualities inhere only in certain entities. Again, proponents of EA do not make this case.

6. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE *ĀTMAN*, IDENTITY, AND EMANATION ARGUMENTS

Arguments for an Indian environmental ethic that rely on some kind of identity between nature and God are unconvincing. It isn’t clear, however, that this kind of argument is needed. R. W. Perrett argues that certain Indian texts and traditions

case must be made that this is so.) Additionally, it seems to be the conscious entity that resides in the material body – and not the biological entity per se – that is truly real, and hence not the material body that has greater value or moral standing.

²⁸ So long as ‘eternal’ is taken to mean always existent in both the past and present.

ascribe direct moral standing to all sentient beings in virtue of their sentience. He offers the following argument:

It is possible to construct arguments for our direct duty to animals... Thus, consider first the assumption that was erroneously supposed to support the indirect duty view: that we each ought to self-interestedly pursue our own liberation as our primary goal. But why should we pursue *mokṣa* [liberation] at all? Because, says the Indian tradition, life is essentially characterized by suffering and unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkha*). It is the elimination of this suffering that is intrinsically valuable, indeed the ultimate value... But if we admit these claims then we must also come to ask ourselves what is so special about our own suffering. What properties do I possess that make my suffering morally significant without it also being the case that others' suffering is equally morally significant? Rationally we are drawn towards a universal perspective on our own suffering (Perrett 1993, 94).

My attainment of *mokṣa* is intrinsically valuable (at least in part) because my avoidance of suffering is intrinsically valuable. There is nothing about me that distinguishes me in a relevant way from other sentient beings. Therefore the avoidance of suffering is intrinsically valuable regardless of whose suffering it is.

A parallel argument concludes that pleasure or happiness is intrinsically valuable regardless of whose it is: My attainment of *mokṣa* is intrinsically valuable (at least in part) because my happiness is intrinsically valuable. There is nothing about me that distinguishes me in a relevant way from other sentient beings. Therefore happiness is intrinsically valuable regardless of whose it is. Hence we have direct duties to sentient beings. If we have direct duties to sentient beings, then sentient beings have direct moral standing, and presumably intrinsic value.²⁹

There is still some space between the conclusion of Perrett's argument and the criteria for an environmental ethic. If Perrett is right, then we might conclude that all sentient beings have direct moral standing and intrinsic value. In order for a theory to count as an environmental ethic, however, it must ascribe intrinsic value and direct moral standing to non-sentient beings, like so-called lower animals, plants and so on.

In a number of Hindu texts, however, lower animals and plants are described as sentient as well.³⁰ *Manusmṛti* 1.49, for example, reads:

Those [beings], enveloped by the *tamas* [one of three basic elements (*guṇas*) that constitute the material universe, characterized by darkness and ignorance] with many

²⁹ If this argument succeeds, then it might be inferred from each of the classical Indian *darśanas* – including, with some modifications, Nyāya, which denies that liberation is pleasurable.

³⁰ In what follows, I focus on the *Manusmṛti* in particular, although the views of the *Manusmṛti* – along with its authority – are accepted quite broadly. Perrett's argument above, for example, seems to come from Śaṅkara's *Gītābhāṣya* 6.32, which explains that the yogin knows, by analogy with himself, that pleasure is desirable and pain undesirable, no matter whose it is.

forms caused by [past] actions, are internally conscious, and fully endowed with [the capacity for] pleasure and pain.³¹

If Perrett's argument is convincing, and if all living beings are sentient, then all living beings have direct moral standing and intrinsic value. If all living beings have direct moral standing and intrinsic value, then at least the first two criteria for an environmental ethic are satisfied.³² The non-vacuity requirement is also satisfied, since some things are non-sentient, and hence devoid of direct moral standing and intrinsic value. Hence, one might conclude, certain Indian texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

There is little doubt that the Indian Law Books are concerned with the matter of causing pain to plants and animals. One passage from the *Manusmṛti* (8.286) advises rulers to punish in proportion to the pain caused: "If a person strikes people or animals to pain [them], just as great as the pain [caused], just that great should the punishment be."³³ This suggests that the quantity of pain is the measure of the wrongness of an action, and that the capacity for pleasure and pain makes the well-being of sentient beings relevant.

In another important passage (5.49), Manu says, "having seen the origin of meat and the binding and slaughter of embodied beings (*dehinām*), [a person] turns away from eating all meat."³⁴ This might be taken to imply that to the careful observer, the value of animals is self-evident. One thing that is evident to anyone is that animals experience pain and pleasure. All of this implies that sentient beings have direct moral standing and intrinsic value because they are capable of experiencing pleasure and pain.

One obvious objection to this kind of view is that many animals, and all plants, are not in fact sentient. One way to avoid this problem is to argue that certain Indian texts and traditions attribute intrinsic value and direct moral standing to animals and plants because they are alive. Each of the passages cited above might be interpreted in accord with this claim, simply because pain is typically a consequence of harm, and harm often has the consequence of shortening life. The more severe the pain is, the more likely it is that the pain will have a negative consequence on the being's

³¹ *tamasā bahurūpeṇa veṣṭitāḥ karmahetunā / antaḥsamjñā bhavanty ete sukhaduḥkhasamanvitāḥ //* (Jhā 1999a, 29).

³² One small oddity arises here. In order for a theory to count as an environmental ethic, it must ascribe intrinsic value and direct moral standing to non-sentient entities. If the *Manusmṛti* ascribes intrinsic value and direct moral standing to entities in virtue of their sentience, however, then it technically fails to ascribe intrinsic value and direct moral standing to non-sentient entities, even though it attributes sentience to plants and so-called lower animals. In order to avoid this counter-intuitive consequence, the criteria for an environmental ethic ought to be interpreted to read: in order for a theory to count as an environmental ethic, it must ascribe intrinsic value and direct moral standing to entities normally considered non-sentient, such as plants and lower animals.

³³ *manuṣyāṇāṃ paśūnāṃ ca duḥkhāya prahr̥te sati / yathā yathā mahadduḥkham daṇḍaṃ kuryāt tathā tathā //* (Jhā 1999b, 196).

³⁴ *samutpattiṃ ca māṃsasya vādhabandhau ca dehinām / prasamīkṣya nivarteta sarvamāṃsasya bhakṣaṇāt //* (Jhā 1999a, 441).

longevity. This is why, one might argue, the severity of the punishment tends to correspond with the severity of the pain.

The passage that states “having carefully considered the origin of meat and the tying up and slaughter of living beings [that is the source of meat], a person turns away from the eating of all meat,” implies that the reason meat-eating is wrong is self-evident. Even more self-evident than the animal’s pain as a result of slaughter, however, is the animal’s death.

Elsewhere, Manu warns against hindering a calf from suckling (4.59). To merely hinder a calf’s suckling might be painful to the calf and the mother, by producing hunger pangs and anxiety, but to preclude it altogether is deadly. Hence these passages support the view that the criterion of being alive is the basis of the intrinsic value and direct moral standing of plants and animals as well.

The criterion of being alive makes better sense, however, of those passages that describe punishments for killing. If all that is wrong with killing is that it tends to produce pain, killing an animal should be no worse than actions that cause equivalent pain. Yet the Law Books typically single out killing as a special kind of trespass.

The criterion of being alive also has the advantage of explaining why the painless killing of animals and plants is wrong – even if their lives, if spared, will not be more pleasurable than painful. Medhātithi, the most important commentator on the *Manusmṛti*, says clearly that plant life, in particular, is almost exclusively painful.

Due to an abundance of *tamas*, tied to infidelity to the Vedas, pain, and so on, [plants] are experiencing the fruits of their *adharmic* [acts] for a very long time – [as if] eternally. And from the presence of *sattva* [another of the three *guṇas*, typically characterized in terms of lightness and knowledge] in them, under certain conditions, [plants] also enjoy a little pleasure as well (1.49).³⁵

An animal birth, like a plant birth, is also on balance more painful than pleasurable. What could be the fault, then, in killing a sleeping animal, if only pain has disvalue?³⁶ If being alive is intrinsically valuable, however, then killing an animal is wrong whether it is asleep or awake.

So while the *Manusmṛti* is concerned with pleasure and pain, it is also concerned with killing. The concern with pleasure and pain is better explained by the concern with killing than the concern with killing is explained by the concern with pleasure and pain. Additionally, the criterion of being alive avoids two objections to the criterion of sentience. First, it is simply false that all plants and animals are sentient. It is true, however, that all plants and animals are alive (at least for as long as we want to attribute intrinsic value and direct moral standing to them). Second, the criterion of

³⁵ *atas tamobahulyān nityaṃ nirvedaduḥkḥādiyuktā adharmaphalam anubhavantaḥ suciram āsate / sattvasyāpi tatra bhāvāt kasyāṃcid avasthāyāṃ sukhaleśam api bhuñjate* / (Jhā 1999a, 30, lines 2-3).

³⁶ I don’t mean to imply here that killing an entity allows it to avoid the suffering it would have experienced. A standard view is that this suffering is moral desert, and hence that the entity will experience it in the next life.

being alive explains the emphasis on the blameworthiness of killing, including killing that does not increase overall pain.

By itself, however, the criterion of being alive is problematic as well. One of the more obvious problems is that the reduction of the value and disvalue of pleasure and pain to the value and disvalue of life and death seems implausible. Suppose, for example, that a person has a chronic disease that causes a great deal of pain. Even if there's nothing we can do to prolong her life, we should minimize her pain. If all that matters is the avoidance of death, however, then attempts to minimize her pain should be abandoned with the attempts to prolong her life. Indeed, we should at no point bother to minimize her pain unless there is reason to think it will prolong her life.

Another way to put this point is to say that there's reason to think that pleasure and pain have value and disvalue in themselves, regardless of their contribution to the length of a person's life. This is Perrett's point in the quotation above. According to certain Indian texts and traditions, liberation is valuable in part because it is pleasurable and devoid of pain. Hence pleasure and the avoidance of pain are intrinsically valuable. The criterion of being alive, by itself, does not account for this.

So rather than choosing between the two criteria, both might be adopted. Certain Indian texts and traditions ascribe intrinsic value and direct moral standing to plants and animals both because they are sentient, and because they are alive. Hence certain Indian texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

There are still at least two problems with the combined account. The first is that since lower animals and plants are not in fact sentient, the account is implausible insofar as it attributes intrinsic value and direct moral standing to lower animals and plants because they are sentient. So on the combined account, lower animals and plants have intrinsic value and direct moral standing solely because they are alive. If this is right, then lower animals and plants can be treated in whatever way one chooses, so long as their lives are not shortened. If it turns out that fish are non-sentient, for example, then there is no reason to leave salmon runs open, rather than round them up in pools, where they are fed and allowed to mate. The combined account offers no plausible explanation for the wrongness of such actions.

Second, the combined account cannot explain the intuition that sentient beings can be harmed even if neither their longevity nor their overall happiness is diminished. Imagine that lead poisoning will not compromise a child's longevity or overall happiness. The child will have a mild learning disability, but will be no less happy overall. The combined account has no resource for explaining why the diminution in the child's mental capacities is of disvalue. Yet it is.

A final alternative – and the one I favor – is to interpret these texts as attributing intrinsic value and direct moral standing to certain beings in virtue of their having a good.³⁷ Human beings, along with animals and plants, can either flourish or languish.

³⁷ The word 'good' here is shorthand for 'good of its own'. Taylor explains that the difference between living beings and artifacts is that the artifacts' goods "ultimately refer to the goals their human producers had in mind when they made [them]." (They might also simply refer to the goals that the artifacts' users ascribe to them.) The goods of living beings, in contrast, are "inherent to them," that is, they are independent of the intentions of other entities (Taylor 1986, 124).

If something can flourish or languish, then it must have some optimum state. Movement towards the optimum state amounts to flourishing, movement away from the optimum state amounts to languishing. This optimum state is the entity's good.³⁸

The distinction between flourishing and languishing covers both the criterion of sentience and the criterion of being alive, since any plausible characterization of the distinction between flourishing and languishing will refer to longevity, and any plausible characterization of flourishing and languishing in sentient beings will refer to pleasure and pain. So the criterion of having a good exhibits the benefits of the combined account.

The criterion of having a good is also no more controversial than the combined account. While it covers both the criterion of sentience and the criterion of being alive, it leaves open the possibility that an entity's good is more complex than this, without asserting that it certainly is.

At the same time, it seems certain that the good of human beings is not reducible to being alive, avoiding pain, and experiencing pleasure. It also seems certain that the Hindu traditions acknowledge this. There is little reason to think that the *Manusmṛti*'s prescriptions of Vedic studentship, monogamous marriage, the performance of rituals, dutiful childrearing, retirement to the forest, and so on can be explained entirely in terms of the longevity and balance of pleasure over pain to which these practices lead (other than the assumption at the outset that the worldview is hedonistic). A more plausible interpretation is that these practices lead to a human life of flourishing broadly construed; in raising children, a person flourishes, but not just by increasing his or her longevity and long-term balance of pleasure over pain. If a human being's good is not reducible to being alive, avoiding pain, and experiencing pleasure, then perhaps the goods of non-human beings are not reducible either.

Another benefit of this criterion is that it leaves open the question of what, other than being alive, avoiding pain, and experiencing pleasure, constitutes a specific entity's good – if anything does. This standpoint is appropriate, given the ongoing debate among philosophers of science, environmental ethicists, ecologists, and others over how to determine an entity's good. It is also appropriate given the relative infancy of the field of Hindu environmental ethics, which has yet to consider these questions carefully.

Additionally, the final account is well-supported by the nearly pan-Indian cardinal virtue of *ahimsā*. The term is usually translated as 'non-violence' or 'non-harm'. The latter translation is often favored because of its breadth; the word 'non-violence' often suggests physical or explicit harm, whereas *ahimsā* refers to the avoidance of any harm whatever – even if that harm is neither painful, nor life-shortening. Theft, for example, constitutes a harm even if it is never discovered, and even if the stolen item would never have benefited its original owner. The same is true for harms of deception, coercion, and so on. If an entity can be harmed without causing it pain or

³⁸ This kind of argument is advanced by Taylor (1986), O'Neill (1992), Rolston (1994), Norton (1984), Lee (1996), and many others. The claim that certain living beings have a good is controversial, however. I deal with these issues in another paper in progress.

shortening its life, however, then its good is not exhausted by longevity, the avoidance of pain, and the experience of pleasure.

The criterion also avoids the objections mentioned above. Even harms that are neither painful nor life shortening have disvalue, simply in virtue of being harms that cause the being to languish rather than flourish in other ways. This is most obvious in the case of human beings.

Lastly, the criterion of having a good avoids the implication that all things are equally valuable. Anything that is not alive, and lacks a good, lacks intrinsic value and direct moral standing. Hence the account I outline avoids the vacuity objection. There might seem to be additional counter-intuitive consequences to this view, such as the equal intrinsic value and direct moral standing of all living beings (since all have a good). Nothing I have said here entails this, however. It might be, for example, that an entity has some amount of intrinsic value in virtue of having a good, but that the amount of intrinsic value nonetheless varies, as a result, for example, of varying capacities and potentials.³⁹

If all living entities have a good, and if all entities that have a good have intrinsic value and direct moral standing, (and if the vacuity objection is avoided,) then certain Hindu texts and traditions – the *Manusmṛti* and many texts and traditions that share its views – do provide the basis for an environmental ethic.

7. CONCLUSION

Arguments that cite some kind of identity between nature and God in support of the conclusion that certain Hindu texts and traditions provide the basis for an environmental ethic are not convincing. Some of these texts and traditions do provide the basis for an environmental ethic, however. They ascribe intrinsic value and direct moral standing to all living beings, in virtue of their having a good.

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³⁹ Louis G. Lombardi levels this criticism against Taylor, and offers a response like the one I have just outlined (Lombardi 1983).

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COMPARATIVE ASPECTS OF AFRICANA PHILOSOPHY AND THE CONTINENTAL-ANALYTIC DIVIDE

TOMMY L. LOTT

ABSTRACT: *Critical engagement involving philosophers trained in continental and analytic traditions often takes its purpose to be a reconciliation of tensions arising from differences in style, or method. Critical engagement in Africana philosophy, however, is rarely focused on method, style, or orientation because philosophic research in this field, regardless of orientation, has had to accommodate its empirical grounding in disciplines outside of philosophy. I focus primarily on the comparative dimensions of three important strands of this research: (1) a history of ideas, (2) a problem-orientation, and (3) a sub-area specialization, to indicate why a need to reconcile tensions between continental and analytic orientations has very little currency in Africana philosophy. Socio-economic problems faced by African-descended people require multiple perspectives to accommodate the wide variety of diasporic social contexts for a given proposal. I employ a selection of cases to illustrate how Africana philosophy benefits from an interplay of many intersecting factors and that, as an interdisciplinary area of research with a commitment to the incorporation of multiple perspectives, it fosters cross-pollination and hybridization of continental and analytic traditions.*

Keywords: *comparative philosophy, Africana, interdisciplinary*

Long before Africana Philosophy gained official recognition by the American Philosophical Association as an area of study within the discipline, Western philosophy already had jelled into a rigid divide between continental and analytic schools. (Quinton, 1995) The engagement of continental and analytic philosophers interested in Africana thought suggests a model of how multifarious differences can be negotiated to mutual benefit. Although the term “comparative philosophy” often is based on comparisons between Eastern and Western philosophy, it is also sometimes meant to refer to comparisons between different orientations within these. (Mou, 2010) I consider several dimensions of such comparisons, with special emphasis on the interplay between various modes of philosophical examination and empirical inquiry.

LOTT, TOMMY L.: Professor, Department of Philosophy, San Jose State University, USA.
Email: tommy.lott@sjsu.edu

There are many well-established applied areas in philosophy, such as philosophy of language, education, law, and science, in which philosophical thinking is brought to bear on questions that arise within one of these disciplines. Some areas in philosophy, such as epistemology and aesthetics, have generated theories that have been applied in other applied areas such as philosophy of perception and philosophy of art. I mention these applications of philosophy to other disciplines to point out that the overlap of philosophical concerns with empirical-contingent matters suggests a need to include the latter component (of many areas of philosophy) in the conceptualization of the *purpose* of a comparison between different traditions. The idea of critical engagement between continental and analytic traditions often takes, as its purpose, a reconciliation of tensions arising from differences in style, or method. In this regard it is important to consider the extent to which interdisciplinary formations such as Marxist Studies, Cultural Studies, Ethnic Studies, Peasant Studies, and Post-colonial Studies have provided a basis for the emergence of new areas in philosophy, such as Africana and Native American philosophy. Given that the need to reconcile tension between continental and analytic orientations has had very little currency in these instances, the term “critical engagement” is somewhat misleading. Critical engagement in Africana philosophy is rarely focused on method, style, or orientation because philosophic research in this field, regardless of orientation, has had to accommodate its empirical grounding in disciplines outside of philosophy. Rather than increasing tensions, this interdisciplinary feature has facilitated coalescence and hybridization of the two schools.

This coalescence is especially noticeable in the attempt, by contemporary philosophers, to articulate philosophical views found in traditional African cultures. Despite strong parallels with Native American philosophy, the suggestion that a philosophic discourse existed in ancient Africa has engendered an extensive debate within African philosophy regarding the definition of philosophy. (Brandt, 1954; Ladd, 1957; Appiah, 1992; Oruka, 1990; Hountondji, 1983) Differences in style, or method, between continental and analytic philosophy, however, have not been an issue in this debate. This is due mainly to the fact that the study of traditional African philosophy has been pursued by Western-trained philosophers, representing both orientations. (Wiredu, 1980; Hallen and Sodipo, 1986; Oruka, 1990)

The study of traditional African philosophy is one of several strands of Africana philosophy engendered by interdisciplinary research that has played an important role as a primary source for the study of Africana thought. I focus primarily on a history of ideas, a problem-orientation, and a sub-area specialization as three important strands. Many topics in Africana philosophy are related to socio-economic problems faced by African-descended people throughout the diaspora, requiring multiple perspectives to accommodate the wide variety of social contexts (that include Latin America and Europe, along with Africa, the United States and the Caribbean) in which a given proposal will have different renderings. I highlight the manner in which Africana philosophy has benefited from the interplay of many intersecting factors. In particular, I indicate how, due to its inherently interdisciplinary nature, Africana philosophy is also inherently pluralistic, and that, as an area within the

discipline, it came into being as a joint product of cross-pollination of continental and analytic traditions.

The topics I discuss below represent my focus on the three strands I have identified above. They are drawn from African, Afro-Caribbean, and African American philosophy to represent specialists from different sub-areas and to include continental and analytic traditions. In various ways, the selected topics illustrate how insights advanced by continental and analytic philosophers alike have jointly enhanced our understanding of central questions in the field. They also illustrate how the interdisciplinary nature of Africana thought provides a source for philosophical ideas. Whether they are dealing with questions pertaining to language and meaning, ontology and epistemology, or to social and political values, philosophers representing both orientations have been concerned with the formulation of problems, the clarification of key concepts, the generation of pertinent issues, and the assessment of arguments for, or against, various proposals. In the cases I consider, this rather pragmatic concern with practical matters, and the high value placed on the generation of ideas, issues, or insights, that shed light on the question at hand, overrides concerns regarding orientation, method, or style. Discussions of differences in style, method, or orientation have not gained priority over discussions of ideas that advance thinking about a given problem. At this stage of its emergence, ideas and method have pride of place in Africana philosophic research.

I first consider a selection of topics that have been addressed across differences in socio-historical contexts, sub-area specialization, and philosophical orientations to indicate how various subjects have been enhanced by multiple perspectives reflecting these differences. I next consider the role of continental and analytic philosophers in the development of a canon in the field, to show how the development of Africana philosophy has been a joint undertaking. Finally, I turn to consider a turn-of-the-century, African American philosopher, Alain Locke, to draw attention to the two versions of his dissertation as a methodological paradigm of how to navigate the continental-analytic divide by mastering both styles. The comparative aspects I discuss involve many areas where Africana philosophy overlaps and intersects with other disciplines, as well as with various areas in mainstream and non-Western philosophy. With an eye to these intersections, I indicate the extent to which, in the case of Africana philosophy, critical engagement is multi-faceted.

1. CROSS-CURRENTS WITHIN AFRICANAN PHILOSOPHY

Cultural differences associated with geographic location have fostered a discourse in Africana philosophy representing multiple perspectives that aim to shed light on problems shared throughout the African diaspora. As a common source for a history of ideas, continental and analytic philosophers alike have devoted careful scrutiny to views published by ex-slaves, by black abolitionists and emigrationists, by Pan-Africanists, and by philosophers concerned with the impact of modernization on traditional aesthetics and cultural values.

Slave narratives were written by Africans, such as Olaudah Equiano, Afro-Caribbeans, such as Mary Prince, and African Americans, such as Frederick Douglass. (Equiano, 1789; Prince, 1831; Douglass, 1848) In each case basic questions regarding human freedom, rights and dignity are raised, yet the predicament of slaves in each sociohistorical context is quite different. These basic questions are taken to be universal and to transcend the different contexts within the diaspora. For this reason, the discussion of slave narratives, and other writings by ex-slaves, in Africana philosophy has included specialists in all three sub-areas representing continental and analytic traditions.

A topic's status as universal is sometimes ambiguous, as when a proposal that has been advanced to deal with a particular problem in a specific context seems to be at odds with what is proposed in a different social context. For example, in his well-known 1897 address to the Negro Academy on the conservation of races W.E.B. Du Bois introduced the Hegelian notion of double consciousness to argue that African Americans have a duty to retain their cultural identity. (Du Bois, 1897) His view of development and social progress is thoroughly imbued with, and deeply influenced by, a wide reading in continental philosophy. In particular, he displays his background in American pragmatism and German philosophy when he deconstructs the biological notion of race and proposes a reconstruction along the lines of culture.

In his recent book, *Tradition and Modernity* (1997), Kwame Gyekye argues, in analytic fashion, that individuals in African societies have a duty to transcend their specific cultural identities in support of a national culture. When taken together, the positions advocated by Du Bois and Gyekye seem to entail mutually exclusive imperatives that are context-specific. Indeed, there seems to be a tension between Du Bois's view that, in the American context of white domination, there is an imperative for African Americans to retain their distinctive Africana culture and Gyekye's view that, in the African context, there is an imperative for members of different ethnic groups to adopt a national culture. The former promotes black pride to counter the negative effects of America's legal segregation, whereas the latter promotes national unity by permitting individuals in African societies to adopt a national identity that transcends having specific ethnic identities. A two-phase account is needed to resolve the seeming inconsistency between these two views of cultural pluralism and social progress. Du Bois and Gyekye are not in disagreement given that, for both, only with the elimination of racial, or ethnic, domination can the option to transcend one's specific ethnic identity be exercised. From the standpoint of the continental-analytic divide this seems to be a case in which the viewpoint of an African American specialist, trained in continental philosophy, is contrary to the viewpoint of an African specialist with an analytic orientation. Notice that each viewpoint is important to consider and that, by contextualizing the problem, both proposals advance our understanding of the issues.

Some apparent differences in doctrine that, perhaps, have been influenced by diaspora location and sociohistorical context, cannot be so easily resolved. These differences are reflected in some of the nineteenth-century debates regarding emigrationism. Although the idea that ex-slaves would have to leave America to gain

social equality was advocated by African Americans, such as Mary Ann Shadd-Carey and Martin Delany, their views were remarkably different from views held by Afro-Caribbean thinkers such as Edwin Blyden and Marcus Garvey. (Delany, 1849; Shadd-Carey, 1852; Garvey, 1923) These African American thinkers were less enamored with returning to Africa, often proposing Canada, Mexico and Haiti as possible sites, whereas the Afro-Caribbean thinkers I cite insisted upon a return to Africa as a necessary condition for emigration. Ideological differences of this sort, however, may not be influenced so much by diaspora-location as they are a reflection of the ambivalence prevalent throughout the diaspora towards Africa as a homeland for descendants.

For many reasons, the much-contested African-centered nationalism in Africana thought displays the influence of sociohistorical context. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, at the height of colonialism in Africa, some version of pan-Africanism was widely supported by a vast majority of black intellectuals throughout the diaspora. Despite the popularity of Marcus Garvey in the 1920s, in post-colonial Africa, with the exception of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, it was never widely embraced by African heads of state. Representing a line of thought that is specific to the African American context, Tommie Shelby has proposed to replace the notion of an African-centered cultural nationalism with a notion of black solidarity that he maintains is more pragmatic for African Americans. (Shelby, 2005) His revised notion is suited to focus strictly on ending antiblack racism in America without a commitment to maintaining Africana cultures. Although disagreement among philosophers on issues pertaining to nationalism and culture is, undoubtedly, influenced by many factors, sociohistorical context is often a determinant. While a proponent's philosophic orientation is relevant to understanding her method of arriving at a certain position, as well as her grounds for maintaining it, cross-currents involving these orientations have combined with other factors to generate new lines of thought that yield new insights, and new debates.

2. SHAPING THE CANON: CROSS-POLLINATING CONTINENTAL AND ANALYTIC TRADITIONSS

Some of the cross-currents that give rise to multiple perspectives on topics shared throughout the diaspora also have contributed to the establishment of a canon that includes classic texts commonly referenced by philosophers interested in a thinker's ideas, or in a particular subject. The examples I cite below involve the treatment of a subject from multiple perspectives by sub-area specialists and the interpretation of a thinker's ideas by philosophers representing both traditions.

Questions regarding the moral and political grounds of slavery and colonialism have been a source of philosophical reflection in Western philosophy since the time of the Greeks. (Williams, 1993) In Africana philosophy, a critical examination of these subjects has been undertaken by continental and analytic philosophers throughout the diaspora. Almost everyone versed in Africana thought is familiar with C.L.R. James's classic social and political account of the Haitian revolution in *The*

Black Jacobins (1938). Hardly anyone knows, however, that it was presaged by Anna Julia Cooper's lesser known French-language doctoral dissertation in 1925. Cooper was an ex-slave who earned her undergraduate degree at Oberlin in 1887 and her doctorate at the Sorbonne in 1925. She is better-known for her classic feminist text, *A Voice From the South* (1892). James was a Marxist historian, well-known for his theoretical writings in political theory, especially his unpublished *Notes on Dialectics* (1948) and his masterpiece in social history, *Beyond A Boundary* (1963). Cooper's analysis of the Haitian revolution relies on French Enlightenment philosophy to account for the ideological grounding of slave resistance, whereas James's Marxist analysis casts a skeptical glance at that tradition. Along with a comparison of an African-American female ex-slave viewpoint with an Afro-Caribbean Marxist male viewpoint as a complex set of factors influencing the respective accounts, in this case, multiple perspectives also include - as a factor equally influencing their views - the Anglophone context for James's book and the Francophone context for Cooper's dissertation. Whichever factors we choose to account for differences in their respective analyses notwithstanding, these two philosophers represent interdisciplinary thinkers, each with a strong background in continental philosophy, who have advanced our thinking about a central topic in Africana philosophy.

Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* is another classic text in Africana philosophy. In *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* (1995), Lewis Gordon, an Afro-Caribbean specialist, employs his training in continental philosophy, specifically Husserl's phenomenology, to interpret Fanon's thought. Analytic philosophers, such as Bernard Boxill, have also presented interpretations of Fanon's text. Boxill, a specialist in African American philosophy, extracts a line of reasoning from *Wretched of the Earth* to spell out a moral argument regarding protest and self-respect. (Boxill, 1976) A quite different reading is presented by Nigerian philosopher, Oladipo Fashina. He presents a logically rigorous version of an argument in Fanon's text that represents a non-humanistic line of thought. (Fashina, 1989) In this case, philosophers representing multiple perspectives, and trained in both traditions, have reflected upon a classic work in continental philosophy by a Francophone Afro-Caribbean philosopher, and have arrived at quite different interpretations.

3. ALAIN LOCKE'S DISSERTATION ON VALUES: MERGING CONTINENTAL AND ANALYTIC TRADITIONS

Around the turn of the century, before the rise of logical positivism and the influence of the Vienna Circle on Anglo-American philosophers, W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke were studying at European universities. (Quinton, 1995) While at Harvard both were students of the well-known American pragmatist, William James. Pragmatism, as a school of thought associated with American philosophers influenced by Charles Peirce, John Dewey, as well as James, has broadly appealed to continental and analytic philosophers alike. James stands out, with his experimental research in psychology, as an interdisciplinary thinker. In turn, James, an empirical scientist, was influenced by French philosopher, Henri Bergson. The reason for James's high

regard in both traditions, however, was not his scientific, or continental, leanings. Rather, his broad appeal is due more to his influence on two of the twentieth-century's greatest philosophers – Edmund Husserl and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Research in Africana philosophy on two of James's students, Du Bois and Locke, reflects these historical traces of American Pragmatism on continental and analytic traditions.

As a Rhodes scholar at Oxford Locke wrote a dissertation on value theory that displayed the influence of James' teachings regarding the centrality of experience. Other than James, almost all of his sources were early twentieth-century continental philosophers, including Franz Brentano and Alexius Meinong. He mailed his dissertation to Oxford from Berlin, where he actually had written it during the spring and summer of 1910. Having begun coursework toward earning a doctorate at the University of Berlin, he attended the lectures of many distinguished German philosophers, including Georg Simmel, and Ernst Cassirer. (Harris and Molesworth, 2008) Locke's thesis was not accepted for several reasons. Most notable was his misfortune of having the logician, J. Cook Wilson, assigned to read it. When financial concerns became paramount, and Locke was unable to complete his doctorate at the University of Berlin, he accepted a teaching position at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Several years later, in 1917, he wrote another version of his Oxford thesis to satisfy requirements for a doctorate at Harvard. As an undergraduate at Harvard (and later at the University of Berlin) he had studied with Hugo Meunsterber. Another of his undergraduate teachers, Ralph Barton Perry, a specialist working in value theory, was his thesis advisor. Needless to say, Perry was much more suitable to read Locke's dissertation – especially so, given Locke's psychological focus on valuation. In the Harvard dissertation, Locke transformed his original tome, "A Genetic Theory of Value", which was lucidly written in a continental style, into a somewhat less ambitious analytic project, "A Classification of Values." What is important to note here is that, he learned from his experience with Cook at Oxford how better to negotiate his decidedly continental orientation with Perry's analytic leanings. The second version of his dissertation was a hybrid of continental and analytic philosophy.

Given the hegemony of analytic philosophers in many departments, as well as throughout the professional organizations, the practice of recasting insights derived from continental philosophy into an analytic mode of discourse is a familiar means of negotiating the continental-analytic divide. While most philosophers interested in Africana thought are trained specifically in one of the two traditions, the audience for their work represents both orientations. The fact that many of the major Africana philosophers, such as Cooper, Du Bois, Locke, James, and Fanon, represent the continental tradition is an advantage for continental philosophers and indirectly fosters pluralism in the study of Africana philosophy. The merit of this inherent tendency toward pluralism cannot be overstated. For, an important lesson to be garnered from the two versions of Locke's dissertation on values is that, on this particular subject, a wholly analytic, or continental, treatment is inadequate.

Locke's project on values was directly related to his later writings on aesthetics, art and music, for which he is much better known. In his self-proclaimed role as "mid-wife" to the Harlem Renaissance writers and artists he is acknowledged by Amie Cesaire and Leopold Senghor to have inspired the Negritude movement. (Kennedy, 1972; Senghor, 1977) Although this movement originated in the American context, it gained momentum mostly in Francophone regions of the Caribbean and Africa. Many questions regarding aesthetics are culturally specific. However, in the case of Negritude, differences in cultural values, influenced by socio-historical context, did not hinder proponents from claiming a cross-cultural application of their ideas throughout the diaspora. It is noteworthy that, although topics related to Negritude also raise important issues of great interest to analytic philosophers, even in its earliest American stage during the Harlem Renaissance, the movement was an interdisciplinary project involving philosophers who were grounded mainly in continental philosophy. (Sartre, 1948; Senghor, 1977; Bernasconi, 2001)

4. CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND INTERDISCIPLINARY CONCERNS

The need for critical engagement to bridge the continental-analytic divide is fairly non-existent in the case of Africana philosophy because often the two styles are immersed in cross-dialogue with a focus on the question at hand - rendering concerns about orientation, or style, less important. In addition to this pragmatic factor, I want to suggest a more fundamental reason having to do with the interdisciplinary nature of Africana philosophy. With a focus on some of the major strands of Africana philosophy, I have already cited above examples of critical engagement involving exchanges between philosophers representing both orientations and specialization in the sub-areas. I have also cited examples of critical engagement involving exchanges between philosophers within each of the two schools regarding the interpretation of a classic text. I will conclude with a consideration of intersections with various disciplines to acknowledge comparative aspects of Africana philosophy that involve overlap with *interdisciplinary studies*, e.g., Ethnic, Post-colonial, or Women's Studies; with *other areas of Western philosophy*, e.g., Marxism, Latin American, or feminism; or with *Non-Western philosophy*, e.g., Asian, or Native American.

The relation of Africana philosophy to other disciplines indicates a structural basis for the cross-dialogue between continental and analytic philosophers. The empirical circumstances of African people throughout the diaspora accounts for the social and political focus—specifically on socioeconomic problems—in Africana philosophy. Various disciplines in the social sciences, along with history, literature, art, and music are best suited to study and establish a body of empirical knowledge regarding these contingent matters. Africana philosophy draws upon all of these disciplines, but so do other categories of interdisciplinary studies, such as Women's, Ethnic, Cultural, and Post-colonial Studies. Indeed, many subjects in Africana philosophy often have been topics of prior debates in Africana thought generally, or subjects previously discussed in related disciplines. In this important respect Africana philosophy overlaps other disciplines and is inherently interdisciplinary.

There is a great deal of research, pursued in other disciplines, that involves a critical examination of issues pertaining to racism, slavery, and colonial oppression. Just as scholars in those disciplines have not established an exclusive claim on these subjects, neither have philosophers who address issues of specific concern to philosophers, for empirical findings that have a bearing on their philosophic concerns cannot be ignored. For this reason, debates and exchanges *within* Africana philosophy are not limited to the multiple perspectives influenced by, and reflecting, socio-historical context, area of specialization and continental-analytic orientation. On many topics such as race, affirmative action, criminal justice, punishment, health care, welfare rights and reparations, Africana philosophy also critically engages many mainstream philosophic concerns related to policy.

This engagement can, in some cases, be a direct challenge to a view that is well-regarded in mainstream philosophy. An example of this would be Kwasi Wiredu's appeal to the conceptualization of truth in his native Akan language to question whether Alfred Tarski's semantic theory of truth is universal. (Wiredu, 1980) Unlike this philosophy of language case, involving a well-known philosopher's theory of truth, more often this engagement is in the manner of applied philosophy. In these latter cases some subject outside of philosophy is critically examined by philosophers. For example, social scientists, such as Orlando Patterson and historians such as Eugene Genovese have been challenged by philosophers on their views of the injustice of slavery. (Lott, 1998; Mc Gary, 1992) Relying on liberal democratic notions of paternalism and social justice, philosophers have raised questions regarding the social and political implications of empirical accounts by social scientists and historians.

In certain instances of mainstream-Africana engagement, philosophers employ the views of historical European philosophers to interpret an Africana thinker, or text. Sometimes the aim is to establish a direct parallel. This strategy is employed by Jill Gordon in her comparative analysis of Malcolm X's "Ballot or the Bullet" speech and John Locke's teachings on resistance in the *Second Treatise*. (Gordon, 1995) It is also employed by Julie Ward in her comparative analysis of arguments against slavery by Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana in which she traces many of their ideas to views expressed in the writings of specific European Enlightenment thinkers such as Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, and James Ramsay. (Ward, 1998)

Sometimes the aim of Africana-mainstream critical engagement is to appropriate and employ an argument, or line of reasoning, that can be found in a European philosopher's text. In her lecture on Douglass's slave narrative, Angela Davis employs Hegel's master-slave parable to interpret the shift in Douglass' consciousness that motivated his quest for freedom. (Harris, 1983) In a similar fashion, Bernard Boxill develops an argument for reparations based on John Locke's view in the *Second Treatise*. (Boxill, 2003) What should be noted here is that Davis's continental orientation and Boxill's analytic style are equally important modes of arriving at insights that shed light, respectively, on Douglass's text and the subject of reparations.

The comparative aspects of Africana philosophy I have cited indicate the extent to which continental and analytic traditions have been equally important to the growth and development of this emerging field. No special claim is being made for Africana philosophy in this regard, for other areas within the discipline may also represent similar contributions by representatives of both traditions. The domination of analytic philosophy by logical positivism and linguistics and continental philosophy by phenomenology and hermeneutics is reminiscent of tensions between rationalists and empiricists in modern philosophy resulting from their different views of the role of reason and sense perception in epistemology. What has gone unremarked in both cases is the extent to which the respective views bleed into each other, resulting in hybridization on both sides. Whether this bleeding process entitles us to speak of a “merging” of the two traditions is an empirical question to be decided by future developments within the field.

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**PLURALISM ABOUT TRUTH IN EARLY CHINESE PHILOSOPHY:
A REFLECTION ON WANG CHONG'S APPROACH**

ALEXUS MCLEOD

ABSTRACT: *The debate concerning truth in Classical Chinese philosophy has for the most part avoided the possibility that pluralist theories of truth were part of the classical philosophical framework. I argue that the Eastern Han philosopher Wang Chong (c. 25-100 CE) can be profitably read as endorsing a kind of pluralism about truth grounded in the concept of shi 實, or "actuality". In my exploration of this view, I explain how it offers a different account of the truth of moral and non-moral statements, while still retaining the univocality of the concept of truth (that is, that the concept amounts to more than the expression of a disjunction of various truth properties), by connecting shi with normative and descriptive facts about how humans appraise statements. In addition to providing insight into pluralist views of truth in early China, the unique pluralist view implicit in Wang's work can help solve problems with contemporary pluralist theories of truth.*

Keywords: *Wang Chong, alethic pluralism, truth, Classical Chinese Philosophy, Han dynasty, truth in early China, metaphysics, actuality, shi-fei, shi-xu*

There has been a great deal of discussion about whether early (pre-Buddhist) Chinese philosophers had a concept of truth. Much of this debate has been weighed down by the problematic assumption that the property expressed by the predicate 'is true', (or by any predicate in Chinese that roughly corresponds to the predicate in English 'is true') is something like correspondence between truth-apt propositions and "states-of-affairs", and that any candidate concept in early Chinese philosophy for "truth" thus must express such a property. Generally, when scholars have shown a particular thinker or school within the Chinese tradition to be concerned with properties of sentences, names, teachings, propositions, or whatever bit of language is being considered, or when it is conceded that a particular thinker did have a conception of truth, they have taken him as primarily concerned with *pragmatic* properties of linguistic structures, such as "assertability" or usefulness for social 'harmony, etc., rather than correspondence properties,¹ and have concluded that these thinkers were

either not interested in (or had no concept of) *truth*, or had a pragmatist conception of truth.²

This assumption is false, and misses something important about the philosophy of language and metaphysics in the work of classical Chinese thinkers. The predicate ‘is true’ does not have to be understood as expressing a correspondence property—indeed, the numerous debates within philosophy of language and metaphysics that rage today are over whether there is *any* property of truth at all, and if so what that property is. So it is far from obvious that any Chinese concept that can be understood as a concept of *truth* must be “truth as correspondence”. To hold this would simply be to deny that coherentists, pragmatists about truth, or deflationists (who reject *any* metaphysical property associated with the predicate ‘is true’) are really *talking about truth* when they theorize about truth. Even if these philosophers are ultimately wrong about truth, it is wrong to say that they’re not offering theories of truth. Likewise, in considering the early Chinese philosophers, we should be open to the possibility that they were operating with a conception of truth different from that of a correspondence theorist. Perhaps they were pragmatists, for example, and simply thought of the Chinese equivalents of ‘is true’ [such as *ran* (然), *shi* (是), *you* (有), *shi* (實), etc.] as expressing pragmatic properties.

I do not think, however, that this was the case. I believe it can be useful to see some of the early Chinese philosophers as *pluralists* about truth. That is, ‘is true,’ according to these thinkers, expresses different properties in different linguistic contexts. In some contexts the predicate ‘is true’ (然 *ran*, 實 *shi*, or whatever is playing the role of the truth predicate for the particular philosopher) might express the property of something like correspondence between sentences and states of affairs,

¹ That is, correspondence theory as an account of relations between propositions and states-of-affairs, not what we might call correspondence-truth in a *folk* theoretical sense, or what we might call the “correspondence intuition”, that what is true must mirror in some sense *the way things are*.

² This is not true across the board, however. David Hall and Roger Ames argue in the above way (see Ames and Hall, 1998, Part 2), as does Chad Hansen, while Bryan Van Norden, for example, rejects this view. Van Norden’s arguments are also problematic, however, as he seems to share the “truth as correspondence” assumption, and instead takes the tactic of denying that the early philosophers were primarily interested in pragmatic properties, but were indeed interested in something like correspondence. In specific, Van Norden claims that the early philosophers were concerned about truth because the predicate (specifically, *ran*) he identifies with ‘is true’ operates in the way dictated by Tarski’s T-schema—that *for any sentence x*, ‘*x* is true iff *x*’—where the single quoted use of *x* is an occurrence in the object language and everything else is in the metalanguage. I believe that, unless the early philosophers were something like deflationists and thought there was nothing more to truth than this rule of the operation of the predicate *ran*, this cannot have been enough to define a concept of truth. The fact that they do, and Wang Chong *certainly* does, offer a more robust conception of truth than the simple semantic rule account, shows us that they had a different conception of truth than that of contemporary deflationists. Most importantly, the T-schema does not commit one to *anything* like correspondence (although proponents of deflationism might argue that it does account for the folk correspondence intuition). A truth predicate will obey the T-schema even if the truth predicate is robustly *pragmatic*, having nothing at all to do with the “way the world is.” Thus the T-schema can’t serve as a kind of “thin” conception of correspondence, or as a way to make sense of a folk conception of correspondence between statements and reality.

and in other contexts³ ‘is true’⁴ might express the property of assertability or usefulness to advance social harmony.

Below I argue that the Eastern Han dynasty philosopher Wang Chong’s (c. 25-100 CE) conception of 實 *shi* in the *Lun-Heng* can be profitably and plausibly interpreted as a concept of truth unifying different properties in different linguistic contexts. The pluralist conception of truth arising from Wang’s work differs significantly from contemporary pluralist theories of truth on a number of issues. The points of difference between these theories can be highly instructive in helping us understand the purpose and acceptability of pluralism about truth and the concept of truth in general, and as such can contribute to the contemporary debate about truth. I begin by discussing three different contemporary pluralist views of truth. In section 1, then continue to discuss the concept of *shi* and its evolution through early Chinese history in section 2. In section 3 I demonstrate the plausibility of reading Wang’s *Lun-Heng* as offering a pluralist conception of truth which lends itself to a particular explication and development, and I show how such a pluralist theory can both inform the contemporary debate surrounding truth and pluralism and help us understand how early Chinese philosophers in general thought about truth.

1. CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF ALETHIC PLURALISM

Pluralism about truth, or *alethic pluralism*, is relatively recent to the contemporary (post 20th century) debate about truth, although it has predecessors throughout the history of western philosophy, and, I will argue below, in the history of Chinese philosophy (as well as the classical Indian tradition, where the Buddhist “two truths” view is an example⁵).

Contemporary pluralist theories of truth can generally be seen as a reaction to the perceived failure of “monist” theories of truth. Monist theories of truth generally take the concept of truth to express a particular *single* property belonging to certain linguistic entities—whether propositions, sentences, statements, or something else⁶.

³ Or “discourses”, or “domains”. Philosophers discussing pluralist theories of truth have spoken in both ways. Michael Lynch speaks of “domains” (Lynch 2009), while Crispin Wright, (Wright 1992) speaks of “practices”. Lynch says, in a statement of his functionalist pluralism: “For atomic propositions, ontologically distinct manifestations of truth are manifestations *relative to a domain*... a proposition is true because it has the further property that manifests truth for that domain.” (Lynch 2009, p. 76)

⁴ Or *shi*, *ran*, etc.—as I will argue below the variety of terms used to capture something like “truth” which are all functionally very similar are unified in Wang Chong’s use of *shi* as a catch-all and something like an explanation of a functional concept operative in all linguistic contexts in which there can be truth-apt statements, teachings, etc.

⁵ The “two truths” view is that there are two levels of truth, relative truth and ultimate truth, and that some propositions or statements might be true in one sense but not the other, but that it is justified to call a statement meeting the normative objectives of one or other of these levels “true” (*sat*). For a good philosophical exposition of the “two truths” theory see Siderits 2003, ch. 8.

⁶ There has been debate over what kinds of entities are “truth-apt”, which goes beyond the scope of this paper, and this debate connects closely to that over truth itself, as some views of truth-apt linguistic entities (such as propositions) are highly implausible as linguistic objects to certain philosophers and

Monist theories of truth differ with respect to what they identify as this truth-making property. Contemporary monist theories have generally come in three loosely defined types: *correspondence* theories, *coherence* theories, and *pragmatic* theories.⁷ All such theories are *monist* theories of truth, because they take truth to be a single property expressed by the concept of truth, such that anything which is truth-apt is so in terms of the possibility of having this single property. The only way things can be true is to have the single property the theory equates with *the* property of truth, for example, correspondence with states of affairs, coherence with beliefs or general worldview, etc.⁸

Pluralist theories of truth are not necessarily in full disagreement with monist theories of truth on specific properties. One of the main features of pluralist theories is that they hold the predicate ‘is true’ expresses different properties in different domains or discourses (or however we define the relevant context). A pluralist might hold, then, that ‘true’ in discussions of physics or metaphysics, for example, expresses a property of correspondence, while ‘true’ in discussions of ethics or aesthetics expresses a property of coherence with other beliefs and one’s general worldview.

One important feature of pluralist theories of truth is the notion of the requirements particular concepts must meet in order to be a concept of *truth*. Pluralist theories are in a difficult position in some sense. They offer ways to understand the concept of truth, and as such purport to be offering us an explanation of a *single* concept. The concept of truth itself is not plural—there is *one* concept of truth—on this much they agree with monist theories of truth. The key to pluralist theories is that the single concept of truth can *express* different *properties* in different domains or linguistic contexts, whereas monist theories hold that the single concept expresses one single property in all linguistic contexts in which there are truth-apt linguistic entities. The monist, however, has an easy way of defining the *concept* of truth—as the concept that expresses the particular property they identify with the truth property. The pluralist does not have this option. Although pluralist theories need to make sense of the univocality of truth, they cannot do so by defining the concept of truth as

may constitute reasons against holding certain theories of truth (for example correspondence theories) insofar as these theories commit one to acceptance of these linguistic entities.

⁷ These are all fairly loosely defined, of course, and theories within certain categories may radically differ from each other, while sharing some family resemblance to other theories of its kind. Perhaps the least well-defined of the categories of theory mentioned here is that of *pragmatic* theories of truth, which includes anti-realist theories of a variety of kinds.

⁸ Another kind of theory of truth which will not be explicitly discussed here (mainly because none of the early Chinese philosophers held anything like this conception of truth) is the *deflationary* (sometimes also called disquotational) theory of truth, which denies that there is a robust property of truth at all, and understands truth as simply a tool for sentence evaluation that works in the way specified by Tarski’s T-schema—*for any sentence x, ‘x’ is true iff x*—where the single quoted use of *x* is an occurrence in the object language and everything else is in the metalanguage. That is, according to the deflationist, there is nothing more to truth than the syntactic rules for its use described by the T-schema (there are a number of different approaches to deflationist uses of the T-schema—see Gupta 1993), and looking for a robust property of truth belonging to linguistic entities is fruitless.

the concept expressing *the* truth property, because there are numerous truth properties, dependent on context.⁹ And it doesn't solve the problem to think of the concept of truth as expressing a disjunction of all the various properties in different domains or contexts the truth predicate expresses (such that 'x is true' *iff* x corresponds with states of affairs when x is a statement of physics, or x coheres with a general worldview when x is a statement of ethics... or...., etc). It is not, however, the *disjunction* that makes a statement of physics true, but the *single* property of correspondence. So with the disjunctive response there has been a failure to explain what it is about correspondence and about coherence (or whatever multiple properties of truth exist in the theory) have in common which make them *truth properties*. They certainly don't share the *disjunction* in common.

There are a few different ways one might answer the objection that pluralism theories cannot express truth as univocal. The different pluralist theories will turn on these answers. One way to make sense of the univocality of truth is to offer as a description of the concept of truth a set of *platitudes* about truth that any property must meet in order to count as a property of *truth*. In this way, we are able to have a univocal concept of truth, but one that will pick out a number of different properties in different domains or contexts, as different properties in these contexts will meet the requirements of the platitudes about truth. Crispin Wright famously takes this tactic, and offers a number of features of a truth property we might take to be platitudes about truth any property must meet to count as a truth property.

Wright proposes a list of platitudes as descriptive of the concept of truth (features that any property must meet in order to be a truth property), including "transparency"- "that to assert is to present as true", "opacity- that there are some truths we may never know or are incapable of coming to know", and "correspondence"- that for a proposition to be true it has to (in some sense) correspond to reality.¹⁰ The platitudes Wright mentions are negotiable—as we learn more about truth and how it works in different domains, we may find that some of the "platitudes" are unreasonable or otherwise wrong, and we may discover that there are other things that should be added to the list of platitudes.

Another way to capture the univocality of truth has been offered by Michael Lynch, who defines truth as a functional property. There is a particular property picked out by the predicate 'is true' across contexts, but this property can be realized by different robust properties in different contexts. This move avoids commitment to

⁹ Although a number of pluralist theories will attempt to identify the concept of truth with a single truth property in order to capture univocality, this single property for the pluralist will have to be connected in some way to other "truth" properties within specific contexts. For Lynch, the connection is based on the nature of the single truth property connected with the concept of truth as a *functional* property, such that different specific properties in different contexts can play the functional role of the truth property. For Mou, the connection is based on the specification of the single truth property as the thinly specified property of non-linguistic truth, of "the way things are."

¹⁰ (Wright 2001, p. 760). Wright offers seven platitudes here, and concedes after this "the list might be enlarged, and some of these principles may anyway seem controversial." He's not committed, that is, to *exactly* this list. Also see Wright 1992.

truth as a second-order property such as “the property of having a property that meets the truth platitudes,” which Lynch sees as problematic, and I discuss in section 3.4 below.¹¹

Bo Mou has offered a different way to understand a pluralist concept of truth. According to Mou, the general thesis that truth “captures the way things are”¹² can be represented in different ways in different “perspectives”, through elaborations within given perspectives that are principles (fixed to perspective) expressing this basic thesis, such that the nature of truth itself is represented differently in different perspectives, while there is still a unified conception of truth underlying all of these perspective-based principles.¹³ In this way, Mou offers a pluralist that attempts to capture the univocality of the concept of truth through a single truth *property* whose plurality is accounted for by its different representation across perspectives.

I argue below that Wang Chong’s conception of *shi* (實) as a tool for appraisal of teachings and linguistic entities offers us a detailed and explicitly pluralist theory of truth that operates differently from the three pluralist alternatives discussed above, although in certain key ways it is closest to Crispin Wright’s view, as it does take the truth property to be a second-order property, but one based on basic facts about what humans do and should look for in statements, rather than on a list of platitudes concerning truth. While the view I will explain in the final section below may be thought of as simply a different way of specifying platitudes, it will turn out to be one that avoids some of the problems with Wright’s view.

2. *SHI* (實) IN ITS MEANING AS “REALITY” OR “ACTUALITY”

¹¹ Although in earlier work on truth as functional, Lynch accepted something like a higher order truth property, (see Lynch 2001), he has since modified his functionalist view such that it does not take truth as a higher order property. (Lynch 2009, p. 66: “truth can’t be a second-order property...that would imply that truth is the property of having some property that has certain features. But does the second-order property itself have those features?”) He describes truth as manifested in certain contexts (or domains) in the following way: “Necessarily, P has the property that manifests truth for propositions of D if, and only if, it is a priori that, when had by atomic propositions of domain D, the truth features are a *proper subset* of M’s features,” where ‘P’ is a propositional variable, ‘D’ is a domain variable, and ‘M’ is a variable ranging over possible manifesting properties, or realizers, of truth” (Lynch 2009, p. 77).

¹² (Mou 2009, p. 3). He has interestingly connected this to the concern with *dao* in early Chinese thought. In much of early Chinese philosophy, Mou claims, the basic truth thesis is understood in terms of capturing the *dao*, and different elaboration perspectives do this differently.

¹³ Mou calls this basic thesis of truth the “axiomatic thesis of the nature of truth” (ATNT), and formulates it thus: “The nature of truth (of the truth bearer) consists in (the truth bearer’s) capturing the way things are” (Mou 2009, p. 3). Interestingly, one of the things Mou attempts to capture in his truth pluralism is the connection between not only truth in different linguistic contexts but also connection between linguistic and *non-linguistic* truth. Wang Chong, like other early Chinese philosophers, had a view of truth as a property of linguistic as well as non-linguistic entities. The issue of non-linguistic truth has been neglected, I believe, in much contemporary work on truth, and one of the advantages of looking to the early Chinese philosophers, as Mou does, is to understand how we might think of different types of truth.

The term *shi* (實) is used in many different senses in both Pre-Han and Han literature. This makes it especially difficult to isolate the use connecting *shi* (實) to truth, and in particular the pluralistic conception of the concept Wang Chong held.

The Eastern Han *Shuo-Wen-Jie-Zi*, compiled by Xu Shen, offers an etymology of *shi*. According to the *Shuo-Wen*, *shi* is defined as *fu* (富), or “fortune, wealth”. It is broken into the *mian* (宀) (“roof”) radical and beneath it the character *guan* (貫), which is explained as coins (*bei* 貝) strung together on a thread.¹⁴ This shows us that *shi* is understood (according to Xu’s etymology) as the wealth contained under one’s roof—what one has stored away. We can see how this conception of *shi* leads to a conception of it as both something like “actuality” (or what is the real substance of a situation or person—we will see this conception play a large role in what is to follow), and “fullness”. It is harder to see how we get from the *Shuo-Wen*’s definition of *shi* to the sense of *shi* as “particular object” or the literal sense of “fruit” (we might wonder whether the literal sense of “fruit” could have been derived from seeing the fruit of a tree as the “fullness” or *result* of the full growth of the tree).

The specific sense of *shi* I am most interested in for purposes of this study is the sense of *shi* as something like “reality” or “actuality”. *Shi* used in this way has a history itself. It evolved from the early uses in Pre-Qin texts¹⁵ to become something new in the Eastern Han thinkers, especially in the work of Wang Chong and later Xu Gan (170-217 CE). When we consider the use of *shi* as “actual properties” to evaluate sentences, as Wang often uses the term, we find that the most plausible interpretation of his use of *shi* in various linguistic contexts is as a theoretical basis for truth claims. If we examine the connection of the linguistic evaluative terms *shi* (是) and *fei* (非), as well as *ran* (然) and *fou* (否) to Wang’s *shi* as “actual properties” (as I do in a section below), we begin to see the shape of a fairly robust theory of truth underlying his philosophical method and his discussion of language and the teachings of earlier philosophers.

This use of *shi* in the sense of “substantiality” or “actuality” is a major feature in a number of Pre-Qin and Han works on the relationship between 名 *ming*, (“name”) and *shi* (實) (“actuality” or “reality”). Consideration of this issue can be found in the later Mohist and School of Names literature (especially in the *Gongsunlongzi*). It became a major issue in Eastern Han thought.

¹⁴ It may help to mention that this is the same *guan* used in the famous (or infamous, depending on one’s view of its true importance) “one strand” passage of the *Analects*, 4.15.

¹⁵ There are uses of the term in the *Analects*, as “fullness” or “fruit” (*Analects* 8.5, 9.22), but the earliest philosophical use of the term in the Confucian texts is in the *Mencius*. *Mencius* 4B45, for example, reads 言無實不祥。不祥之實，蔽賢者當之。 (“Words without *shi* are not auspicious. Inauspicious *shi* conceal what the sages undertake.”) Other examples of this use of *shi* occur at *Mencius* 4A27 and 7A37, and there is a consideration of *ming-shi* at 6B26.

One of the features of this use of *shi* is its reference to *linguistic entities*, such as names, rather than physical objects, as in other uses of the term.¹⁶ The reason that this term becomes linked with consideration of names (*ming* 名) is that it is consideration of *shi* that is connected with the appropriateness of names. Wang, as I will show below, thinks of *shi* not as primarily connected with *names*, but rather with *sentences*. This is why the majority of his discussions of *shi* are connected with *yan* (言 “words”, or “what is said”) rather than *ming*—Wang is attempting to make clear that the contents of what is said in statements¹⁷ (or teachings) can be *shi*.¹⁸

John Makeham considers the correlative thought of the early Han (especially that of Dong Zhongshu) to be a major source of the view of *shi* as justifying the application of names to things, locating there what he calls a “correlative theory of naming.”¹⁹ For Dong, it is the intentions of *tian* (天) which justify certain names, rather than *shi* (實) (which Makeham argues is an innovation of Xu Gan’s). In Dong’s work we see a movement toward correlative theories of naming based on the connection between *tian* and names. Names, on this view, gain their applicability or acceptability based on their correlation with (or, one might say, *correspondence* with) certain features of the world—in Dong’s case, features of *tian*.²⁰

I agree with Makeham that this is a major source of the transformation of the *shi* concept from that of something similar to “essence” or “substance” to a higher-order concept expressing actual properties of discussed entities (whether linguistic or otherwise). However, I do not think that Xu Gan was the first thinker to use *shi* as justificatory for naming (or the acceptability of sentences or other linguistic entities), or the basis for names. The earlier philosopher, Wang Chong, used *shi* as a way to evaluate linguistic entities whether (sometimes) names or (more often) sentences, teachings, and beliefs²¹. One of Wang Chong’s innovations was to apply *shi* to a

¹⁶ In much of the early literature, such as the Five Classics, *shi* is used with the sense of “fruit”, as it is in the *Analects*, or as “full” or “solid particular object.”

¹⁷ *Yan* is not specific enough to allow us to consider whether by it Wang means something closer to “sentence”, “proposition”, “utterance”, etc. It is unclear whether it refers to what is said or the *content* of what is said, or whether Wang takes there to be such a distinction at all. It sometimes appears to refer to what is said, sometimes to the content of what is said, but this is consistent with a number of different possibilities, including that Wang saw no difference between the two uses, or that he intended to express different senses of *yan* in different contexts. For this reason, I don’t commit to a particular linguistic entity as expressed by *yan*, and use the term ‘statement’ which is comparatively neutral (although I realize that this term is fairly philosophically loaded as well).

¹⁸ The distinction between *yan* and *ming* in the *Lun-Heng* is clear. *Yan* refers to a linguistic string rather than to an individual word, unless the individual word serves as a statement—for example, the word *ke* 可 (“acceptable”) used as a response in the *Gong-Sun-Long-Zi*, can be an example of *yan*.

¹⁹ Makeham 1994, ch. 5.

²⁰ specifically the *tian yi*, or “notions or intentions of heaven”. Dong does use *shi* in connection with names in the *Chun-Qiu-Fan-Lu*, (in the *Chu-Zhuang-Wang* chapter, for example, he says 此聞其名而不知其實者也 [“this is to be one who hears its name but does not know its *shi*”]), but his understanding of what *shi* represents seems to be based on its mirroring of *tian*.

²¹ One feature, and some may think, weakness, of Wang’s account, is that he did not consider there to be a single underlying structure of sentences, teachings, and beliefs which make these things truth apt.

wider range of entities, including statements or teachings. It is the goal of what follows to show how Wang's *shi* operates with respect to statements, how this view of *shi* presents us with a pluralist theory of truth,²² and then consider how this kind of pluralism can both help us in the contemporary debate and in our understanding of ancient Chinese philosophy.

3. *SHI* IN THE *LUN-HENG*—A THEORY OF ALETHIC PLURALISM

3.1. *SHI* AS NORMATIVELY POSITIVE PROPERTY

Two essays in particular in the *Lun-Heng* offer us the greatest insight on Wang's view of *shi* as a pluralist concept of truth. The *Dui-Zuo* 對作 (“Defending Creations”), and the *Wen-Kong* 問孔 (“questioning Confucius”) chapters show us how Wang uses *shi* to appraise teachings and sayings (言 *yan*).

The *Dui-Zuo* chapter shows us *shi* (實) connected with the oppositions *shi* (是)/*fei* (非) and *ran* (然) (“what is the case”)/*fou* (否) (“what is not the case”). *Shi* (實) is contrasted with *xu* (虛) (“falsity”, “merely apparent properties”, “empty [talk]”).²³

The main purpose of the *Dui-Zuo* chapter is twofold: One purpose is to demonstrate that corrections *dui* 對 are needed to the classic texts (everything which has come before him) and to contemporary writings and teachings based on “unfounded or empty assertions” (虛言 *xu yan*). Wang does something similar in the beginning of the 問孔 *Wen-Kong* chapter. There he offers reasons for the “criticisms” of Confucius he goes on to deliver, along with a method for appraising teachings or

One of the features of contemporary analytic philosophy of language is that it has generally made a distinction between beliefs and teachings and what makes these things truth evaluable—most often sentences or propositions (depending on one's semantic theory). Beliefs and teachings then are truth apt insofar as they *express* propositions or sentences, which can be truth apt. My belief itself cannot be true, but the sentence or proposition I accept in the act of belief can be true or false, and it is in this sense that the *belief* is said to be true or false, connected to the contents of belief. There are a couple of reasons we generally think this needs to be done (a) teachings and beliefs, we think, are not linguistic entities, and thus cannot themselves be semantically evaluated, (b) in desiring or requiring truth to be *unitary*, insofar as we think there ought to be a *single* property of truth, we cannot make sense of two different types of entity, propositions or sentences as linguistic entities, and beliefs as mental entities or something like this, as having the same property (of truth), because we cannot explain how a single property could belong to things of seemingly vastly different types. If one is a certain kind of pluralist about truth, however (note that not *all* pluralists will find this acceptable), one can make sense of these different types of entities being *truth* evaluable.

²² I do not argue here that Wang Chong held a pluralist view very much like the worked out views of contemporary philosophers such as Lynch and Wright, but rather that his view of 實 *shi* is a kind of pluralism that gets its start from the same intuitions and is spelled out in a similar way to contemporary pluralist theories, in that multiple properties across domains or discourses can meet the concept of truth, and thus things can be true in different ways or senses.

²³ Wang's *xu* is a much more complicated concept than even this jumble of translations suggests, and is perhaps more different from our concept of “falsehood” than *shi* is from “truth”. I will discuss *xu* in more detail below.

statements in general (which he discusses and uses in the *Dui-Zuo* chapter as well). Wang's other purpose in this chapter is to defend his own work insofar as it is a "creation" (作 *zuo*) rather than a "relation" or "tradition" (*zhuan* 專 or *shu* 術), and the usefulness of "creations" in general.²⁴ The dominant view of the day, as Wang recounts in the chapter, is that only the sages were justified in creating (*zuo*) and that those who are merely worthies should concentrate on transmitting (*shu*) the creations of the sages.²⁵ Wang here attempts to defend the usefulness of innovation by less than sagely people such as himself. Wang is basically defending himself for his "innovations" here, arguing that "creations" such as the *Lun-Heng* have become necessary because corrections are needed to the traditions, which have perpetuated falsehoods and exaggerations.

In the *Dui-Zuo* chapter, because it is both a defense of Wang's work and an explanation of the efficacy of "corrections" (*dui* 對), there is some consideration of the concept of *shi* (實) and the related concepts of *shi-fei* (是非) and *ran-fou* (然否). In the early part of the chapter, Wang discusses *shi* (實) and explains how certain writings were historically necessary, due to the failure of the common people to recognize the truth:

眾事不失實，凡論不懷亂，則桓譚之論不起。If the multitude in their works had not gone astray from truth (*shi*), and some discussions had not gone bad and become disordered, then Huan Tan would not have written his works (LH 84.362.15-16).²⁶

It is for similar reasons that Wang Chong wrote the *Lun-Heng*. As he explains near the end of the chapter:

論衡九“虛”，三“增”，所以使務實誠也。In the *Lun-Heng* the nine chapters on “falsity” and three chapters on “exaggerations” are meant to create in people the impetus to strive for truth (實 *shi*) and sincerity (誠 *cheng*) (LH 84.364.22).

²⁴ There were a number of different views on the value of creation *zuo* in the Pre-Qin and Han periods. Wang here is reacting against a particularly conservative strain of Confucianism in the Han which took the claim of the *Analects* quite literally (in *Analects* 7.1 Confucius says “transmit, and don't create” 述而不作), that what scholars should be engaged in is *transmitting* (*shu* 述) rather than creating, and that even the sages did not create new things. An alternative view held by some is that *only* the sages can and are justified in creating (*zuo*), and that lesser persons, mere worthies such as Wang Chong cannot and should not attempt to create. Michael Puett explores the different attitudes on *zuo* before Wang's time in Puett 2001.

²⁵ A view advanced by a number of Pre-Qin and Han authors, according to Puett.

²⁶ All passages from the *Lun-Heng* follow the chapter, page, and line numbering in the *Lun-Heng-Zhu-Zi-Suo-Yin* 《論衡逐字索引》 [Critical Essay: Concordance], Chinese University of Hong Kong Institute of Chinese Studies, Ancient Text Concordance Series, No. 22 (Hong Kong: The Commercial Press, 1996). Citation is chapter, page, line(s). All translations from the *Lun-Heng* are my own, unless otherwise noted.

We see here that the critical problem Wang is trying to address is the ignorance of *shi* he thinks is endemic in his society and in the writings of contemporary scholars.

3.2. XU AS ATTRACTIVE AND “MERELY APPARENT” PROPERTIES

Shi is opposed with *xu* (虛), which is translated often as “emptiness” or “falsity”. The sense of *xu* as “false” grows out of its meaning as “empty”, and in Wang’s writings it is has the sense of “*merely apparent* qualities.” This way of understanding *xu* helps us to make sense of passages in which Wang talks as if *xu* words or teachings *qua xu* words and teachings are naturally attractive. Understanding *xu* as “falsity” does not give us an explanation of the attractiveness of *xu* things, according to Wang. Statements that are simply *false* do not necessarily attract us, unless they have some other attractive features—such as making us feel better about ourselves, etc. It is not the *falsity* of certain propositions that leads us to assent to, believe in, live by, or otherwise adopt them, but rather some other attractive feature. With the concept *xu*, however, there does seem to be a built in attractiveness *xu* entities possess *qua xu* entities.

Wang mentions the seemingly attractive features of *xu* entities in the *Dui-Zuo* chapter, in his discussion of *shi* (實). He says of the “common people”²⁷:

俗之性，好奇怪之語，說虛妄之文。何則？實不能快意，而華虛驚耳動心也。是故才能之士，好談論者，增益實事。 *It is the nature of common people to enjoy strange stories and sayings, to delight in empty (xu 虛) and absurd writings. Why is this? The truth (shi 實) isn't easily [or quickly] believed, but flowery and empty speech astounds the hearers and excites their minds. This is why scholars with talent, who enjoy discussion, add things to and exaggerate the truth (shi 實) about affairs* (LH 84.362.26-363.1).

Xu statements are (or at least can be) flowery, ornate, and naturally appealing to the “common people” (with the intimation that those of high talent will not find *xu* statements compelling). There seems to be a necessary link between *xu* and flowery statements, as the “floweriness” of *xu* statements serves as the reason that the common people tend to accept such statements. At first reading, it seems that Wang has failed to consider two possibilities: that there might be (1) true statements that are flowery; and (2) false or empty statements that are not flowery and appealing. But if we take Wang to be claiming that there is something inherent in *xu* statements that makes them appealing, we can show he is not making this (seemingly elementary) mistake. *Xu* statements are appealing partly because they *appear* to be true, even when “appearance” is thought of in terms of tendency to accept (something we easily accept may be thought to, in this way, *appear to us* as true). Does this mean then that Wang thinks of *shi* statements as appearing false, and thus being rejected by the “common people?” If we take “appearing” true as linked to appeal to imagination, or

²⁷ or, “simple people” (俗人 *su ren*).

being “easily (or quickly) believed” (*kuai yi* 快意), then the fact that the truth is not quickly or easily believed, or is unappealing to the “common” does show that it, in a sense, does not appear true. Of course, it will appear true to those above the common, who possess some wisdom, and it is thus the responsibility of such people to write works promoting the truth, to stir up energy in the common people to seek the truth. And it can *come to* appear true to the common people given proper instruction by more wise people (such as Wang Chong and others he praises).

Does something appear to be true simply because someone asserts it, for example? Think of a statement like “Confucius was 10 feet tall.” To assert this (in a serious way, outside contexts of joking, fiction, or semantic ascent) is to assert it *as true*, even though it is in fact false (one might be lying, ignorant, or misinformed). In most normal contexts, a sentence such as this would be uttered so as to inform or convince another person of certain features of Confucius, namely that he was 10 feet tall. Assertion of *x* is to present *x* as true. It would be naïve, we might think, to take assertion as grounds for belief, but if we consider the normal case, this is often what we in fact do. We generally take a friend’s assertion that “it is 11:30 am” or “Bill isn’t here yet” or “Bill has grey hair” as acceptable grounds for assenting to the statement asserted. At more removed levels, we accept the assertions of experts of all kinds when they say things like “smoking causes cancer,” or “Jupiter’s upper atmosphere is 90 percent hydrogen.” The mistake common people (俗人 *su ren*) often make, according to Wang, is failure to be reflective. They accept what is asserted by people around them as true, even though these people are often either ignorant, misinformed, or dishonest.

Xu statements, then, can be thought of as false statements that we are somehow inclined to believe. So *why* are we inclined to believe them? Is it due to the mere fact of their being asserted (in the right context)? Or is there some more robust explanation? The above seems to suggest that there is something extra that *xu* statements have.

Xu statements are not only ones we would be *inclined* to believe due to assertion, but they have some other compelling quality—common people delight in them and they appeal to the imagination. Thus, common people are more likely to imagine these statements as possessing the properties that would make them *shi*, based on wishful thinking. We can see how this might work. Human psychology is such that it is far easier to get someone to believe something they would like to be true than something they either have no interest in or do not want to be true. This facet of our psychology can be and has been used to great effect by those wishing to deceive in various ways.²⁸ But how about in cases of ignorance or misinformation? The

²⁸ What I mention here is similar to some forms of cognitive bias, such as wishful thinking and confirmation bias. There are many other forms of cognitive bias as well, which shows how prone humans are in general to accept false statements as true even in the face of overwhelming evidence of their falsity. This is very much Wang’s worry. In fact many of the problems with the beliefs of *su ren* he mentions in the *Lun-Heng* line up with a number of cognitive biases contemporary behavioral psychologists discuss. He most vehemently heaps scorn upon wishful thinking, which he isolates as a particularly pressing problem among common people in his time.

statement “Bill is 6 feet tall” may be false, and I may believe and thus assert this statement, to inform a friend about features of Bill. I may have been misinformed, however, having never met Bill. In fact, say, Bill is only 5 feet 7 inches tall. There is nothing intrinsically compelling, beyond my assertion, about the statement “Bill is 6 feet tall.” This is not something we would expect to “appeal to the imagination” or be believed due to a human inclination to accept the fantastic. Rather, it will generally be accepted because I assert it and the listener has no reason to doubt that what I say in such cases is true. So is this statement *xu*?

For Wang, statements of this kind *are not xu*. There are statements, like my example of “Bill is 6 feet tall,” that are *not-shi* but are also *not-xu*. The reason Wang does not speak about this kind of statement is that he is mainly concerned with *xu* statements *as compelling to su ren*. *Xu* statements are most problematic. We can and do easily correct our mistakes when they involve things that we have no general inclination to accept. My friend might believe me that Bill is 6 feet tall, but when he gets different information from someone else, he will likely come to doubt what I told him, and remain agnostic about Bill’s height until meeting him. However, *xu* statements are much trickier than this because cognitive bias is involved. We are hesitant to give up belief in statements we would like to be true, for example, and often hold to them even in the face of overwhelming evidence that they are false.

Shi 實, as the opposite of *xu*, is being used to flag *actual* properties (the actual possession of the properties we seek when appraising statements) as opposed to merely *apparent* properties (the mere apparent possession of these properties) of statements, teachings, or whatever can be *shi*-apt. To see what these properties are, we have to look to Wang’s discussion surrounding concepts related to *shi* and *xu*.

3.3. MORAL NORMATIVITY

In the *Dui-Zuo* chapter there are two dichotomies discussed in relation with *shi* and *xu*—namely *shi-fei* (是非) and *ran-fou* (然否). In the *Dui-Zuo* chapter, *shi* (是) and *fei* (非) when discussed as concepts rather than verbally used, seem to be connected to ethical or normative contexts. Alfred Forke, in his translation, noticed this and translated *shi* (是) and *fei* (非) in the *Dui-Zuo* chapter as “right” and “wrong” respectively, in all the places where they are discussed as evaluative properties. We see *shi* and *fei* mentioned along with *ran* and *fou*, “is the case” and “is not the case” in discussions of *shi* (實) in the chapter. Two passages in particular show us the two dichotomies discussed together:

明辯然否，病心傷之，安能不論？ ... [孟子] 引平直說，褒是抑非。
Those who can determine what is the case and what is not the case feel an ailment in their hearts which pain them [at the thought of truth being subverted by the “common people” and flowery scholarship] ... [Mencius’] language was straight

and to the point, according high place to the right (是 *shi*) and suppressing the wrong (非 *fei*) (LH 84.363.3-5).²⁹

One may find it curious that *shi* and *fei* are translated here as “right” and “wrong”, which suggest moral normativity, while *ran* and *fou* are translated in more clearly truth-evaluative terms as “what is the case” and “what is not the case”. What is the justification for the difference? Are we given any reason to read *shi* and *fei* as I do in the above passage? A consideration of some other instances of *shi* and *fei* in this chapter may help. The following passage is crucial for understanding the normative use, as well as for understanding how Wang may be seen as a pluralist about truth.

況論衡細說微論，解釋世俗之疑，辯照是非之理，使後進曉見然否之分。The *Lun-Heng* uses precise language and detailed discussion, to reveal and explain the doubts of this generation of common people, to bring to light through debate right and wrong principles (是非之理 *shi fei zhi li*), and to help those who come later clearly see the difference between what is the case and what is not the case (LH 84.364.10-11).³⁰

Here, we see *shi* and *fei* connected to the “principles” (*li* 理) Wang aims to uncover. His purpose in the *Lun-Heng* is to reveal *shi* and *fei* principles and to help people distinguish between what is the case and what is not the case. What is the reason for using of two different formulations here, *shi-fei* and *ran-fou*, if he means something like “truth and falsity” in both cases? It is implausible that this should be seen as simply using synonyms to mean something like “truth and falsity”, so that he is saying that he wants to (1) uncover true and false principles, and (2) help people distinguish between what is true and false. This point is strengthened by his use of *li* (理), by which Wang means something like “moral principle.” This is far from the Song Neo-Confucian use of *li* (理) to express a foundational metaphysical concept. The above mentioned is the only occurrence of *li* in the *Dui-Zuo* chapter, but if we look to the *Wen-Kong* (“Questioning Confucius”) chapter, in which consideration of argument and method is a central theme³¹, we learn more about how Wang uses *li*.

難 孔子，何傷於義？誠有傳聖業之知，伐孔子之說，何逆於理？ ... [if we] challenge Confucius, how is this injurious to moral appropriateness? If, sincerely

²⁹ It is useful here to consider Forke’s translation as well, which, like my own, uses “right” and “wrong” for 是 *shi* and 非 *fei*: “He who knows how to discriminate between truth (*ran*) and falsehood (*fou*), must feel a pang at it; why should he not speak? ... [Mencius] used plain and straightforward language to recommend what was right, and to reject what was wrong.”

³⁰ Forke reads the *shi* in the final part of this passage as causally connected to bringing light to right and wrong principle—he translates: “... intended to explain the right and wrong principles so that future generations can clearly see the difference between truth and falsehood.” (Forke 1907, p. 88)

³¹ This is somewhat contentious. Michael Nylan argues (Nylan 1996) that Wang’s purpose in the *Wen-Kong* chapter was to show Confucius an ultimately unsuccessful teacher, while I argue (McLeod 2007) that Wang’s purpose in *Wen-Kong* was primarily methodological rather than critical.

attempting to transmit the knowledge of the sages' teachings, one attacks Confucius' words, how does this oppose principle (li)? (LH 28.122.7)

This is clearly a view of *li* as either the collection of moral norms or the ground of moral norms. Wang's second sentence is explaining his first. Challenging (難 *nan*) Confucius is not injurious to moral appropriateness (義 *yi*), *because* attacking Confucius' words in order to clear things up does not violate the correct moral principles that make certain acts appropriate or inappropriate. This is also argued in another passage in the *Wen-Kong* chapter,³² in which Wang criticizes Confucius for violating *li* by picking on the weaknesses of Meng Yizi and thus acting "contrary to the will of the Duke of Zhou" (違周公之志).

If we take these uses of *li* to be the same as that in the above passage from the *Dui-Zuo* chapter, then it looks like the passage gives us two separate goals of the *Lun-Heng*—a moral goal, uncovering true moral principles, and a non-moral goal, of determining what is the case and what is not the case. Now, the question becomes, why distinguish the two? Wouldn't simply "discovering the truth" take care of both of these? Why didn't Wang simply say that the purpose of the *Lun-Heng* is to *uncover the truth*, to help us distinguish between *shi* 實 and *xu* 虛, which seems his main purpose as he describes it in other passages? If he is after *truth*, after all, then it looks like facts about moral principles and what is the case will just fall out of this pursuit. If we know what is true, then by definition we will know which moral principles, if any, are right, because we will know whether normative statements, such as "one should never pick on the weaknesses of another," are *true*.

There seems to be some connection between *fou-ran* and *shi-fei* in LH 84.363.3-5 above, where Wang talks about Mencius' ability and action. According to this passage, those who have the ability to discriminate between what is the case and what is not the case (*ran* and *fou*) are able to use language to point out what is right (是 *shi*) and what is wrong (非 *fei*). So knowledge of moral principle does seem to follow from ability to discriminate between what is and what is not the case. Does this, however, show us that there is a single property of truth, such as *ran* (what is the case) operative in all contexts? A consideration of *shi* (實) shows us that it is the wise person's grasp of *shi* (實) that enables him to both distinguish between what is and what is not the case *and* to distinguish between right and wrong moral principles. It is not, that is, ability to distinguish between *ran* and *fou* which makes one able to distinguish between *shi* and *fei*, but rather the ability to distinguish between *shi* (實) and *xu* (虛) which makes one able to make both of the other types of discrimination. The fact that Mencius had the ability to distinguish between *ran* and *fou* showed that he had the ability on which the ability to distinguish between *shi* (是) and *fei* (非) rests.

The ability to distinguish between 實 *shi* and 虛 *xu* then presumes the ability to make a number of other useful discriminations involving teachings, statements, and

³² LH 28.123.1

other entities. *Shi* and *xu*, that is, seem like *higher-order* concepts, unlike *ran* and *fou* or *shi* and *fei*. I believe the best way to make sense of this is to take 是 *shi* and 然 *ran* as ways in which something can be 實 *shi* (“actual”, “true”), while 非 *fei* and 否 *fou* are ways in which something can be 虛 *xu* (“empty”, “false”, “only apparently true”). That is, Wang is offering a view of 實 *shi* in which what makes a statement (言 *yan*) 實 *shi* is *either* being 是 *shi*, or being 然 *ran*.

A moral principle, such as mentioned in the above case: “don’t attack people’s weaknesses” can be 是 *shi* or 非 *fei*, but we can clearly see (we would share Wang’s intuition) that phrased in this way, it cannot be “the case” or “not the case”, because it is not an assertion about a state of affairs. We could reformulate this so it would look like an assertion about a state of affairs, and render it this way: “one should not attack people’s weaknesses.” This formulation seems “is the case”-apt, as it is formulated in such a way as to suggest the possibility of a state-of-affairs that makes it the case that one should (or should not) attack people’s weaknesses, whether we understand this state-of-affairs to involve moral facts (whatever these are), teleological features of humans, or anything else that could belong to a state-of-affairs of the world and also explain the normativity involved in this principle.

Wang, however, does not evaluate moral principles in this way, in terms of states-of-affairs. He considers statements like “don’t attack people’s weaknesses” and their acceptability in terms of 是 *shi* and 非 *fei*, “right” and “wrong”. If normativity in moral cases is basic on Wang’s view, and not based on facts about “what is the case”, we can explain easily why Wang distinguished 實 *shi*-making properties for moral statements from 實 *shi*-making properties for non-moral statements. There are simply *different* properties which make these different kinds of statements or teachings 實 *shi* (true, actual). And if this is the case, then Wang can be seen as a pluralist about 實 *shi*, in a way similar to contemporary alethic pluralist theorists about “truth”.³³

3.4. UNIVOCALITY AND THE USEFULNESS OF WANG’S THEORY OF TRUTH

³³ Special thanks are due to a reviewer of this article who correctly points out that the evidence I have offered here is not by itself conclusive to show that Wang held a pluralist theory of truth, especially one using the terminology and concepts of contemporary analytic philosophy. Although Wang perhaps did not explicitly have a pluralist view like the one I sketch below, I think this theory is the best way to make sense of what Wang says in the *Lun-Heng* concerning *shi*, as it makes his position strongest, even though what he says is also compatible with a number of other interpretations, including the possibility that the differences between evaluative terms in different contexts were merely stylistic. Although I import the conceptual apparatus of contemporary analytic philosophy to reconstruct Wang’s view of truth, I realize that this distorts Wang’s view to the extent that Wang did not work with such a conceptual apparatus. Much of what follows below is my attempt to reconstruct Wang’s basic view of truth and extend it using the tools available to contemporary philosophy. Thus, much of what follows is not *explicitly* held by Wang, but rather is a natural way of developing his pluralist view of truth. As such, it can be seen as continuous with Wang’s theory of truth, even if it is less useful for understanding the way early Chinese thinkers theorized about truth (although the general pluralism I attribute to Wang above can, I think, be useful for this latter project as well).

Which properties then are expressed by 實 *shi*? Moral acceptability (是 *shi*) is one property expressed by 實 *shi*, in the moral domain. This property of acceptability would *not*, however, make non-moral statements about physical objects true. This property can only be a *shi*-making property in the appropriate domain. Non-moral statements cannot be 是 *shi*, just as moral principles cannot be 然 *ran*.³⁴

At least one difficult problem remains, however. One key feature of the concept of truth, or the concept of 實 *shi*, is that it should be a *univocal* concept. Even though there might be different properties in different linguistic contexts that make a statement true, it can not be the case that “truth” (or 實 *shi*) *means* different things in different contexts. It should mean the same thing to say that a moral statement is true as it does to say that a non-moral statement is true. As I’ve shown in the previous section, one way of capturing this is to define the concept of truth by way of a number of platitudes that any property in any relevant domain must meet in order to be a truth property. Thus, the meaning of ‘truth’ can be understood in terms of the platitudes, while the properties the concept expresses are variable in different contexts. Wang Chong, however, does not seem aware of either this problem of univocality or the conception of fixing the meaning of truth via platitudes. Shouldn’t this lead us to question whether Wang actually did have a pluralist view of truth?

I think that the question of how to account for the univocality of *shi* did not arise for Wang due to his conception of what the property of 實 *shi* is, and how it relates to the “truthmaking” properties 是 *shi* and 然 *ran*. On Wang’s view of 實 *shi*, there is no difficulty in accounting for univocality, because the concept of *shi* is of a unified second-order property linked to particular truthmaking properties that differ by context.

We find passages in the *Lun-Heng* that show us that Wang did think of *shi* as univocal. The following passage from the *Dui-Zuo* chapter is informative here:

人君遭弊，改教於上；君臣（愚）惑，作論於下。〔下〕實得，則上教從矣。冀悟迷惑之心，使知虛實之分。實虛之分定，而華僞之文滅；華僞之文滅，則純誠之化日以孳矣。 *When the ruler does badly, instruction to change conduct is directed toward the person on high. When the ruler’s subjects are doltish, engaging in discussions is directed toward the people below. When the people below obtain the truth (實 shi), then instruction of the person on high follows. I hope to stir some of these minds, to help them distinguish between truth (實 shi) and falsity (虛 xu). Once the distinction between truth and falsity is established, then flowery and artificial writings can be eliminated. When flowery and artificial writings are eliminated, pure and sincere transformations will grow more abundant day by day* (LH 84.363.12-14).

³⁴ This seems to mesh with our own intuitions if we consider sentences like “don’t attack people’s weaknesses.” It seems to make no sense to say that *this* can be the case or not be the case, whether or not a reformulation as described above will give us a sentence that can be the case or not be the case.

In this passage, we see that the ability to distinguish between *shi* and *xu* leads to transformation of conduct as well as the elimination of error in writings. Since much of Wang's criticism in the *Lun-Heng* is directed at physical and metaphysical as well as moral writings, we can see this second ability as reaching both moral and non-moral domains or contexts. Wang also asserts a connection between elimination of false (虛 *xu*) writings and moral transformation (we have to assume this is what he means here by 化 *hua*, as the passage began by speaking of conduct and this should be taken to point back to that). We see again that the ability to discriminate between 實 *shi* and 虛 *xu* allows us to both distinguish between 然 *ran* and 否 *fou* and to distinguish between 是 *shi* and 非 *fei*. In order for this to be the case, there must be some univocal concept of 實 *shi* that captures the similarities between the various properties which count as *shi*-properties.

Although it is difficult to completely demonstrate the case based on what Wang says in the *Lun-Heng*, I suggest that the view I outline below on the univocality of *shi* is most like the one Wang held. It explains why he didn't see a problem with maintaining its univocality while maintaining pluralism. In addition, the view I attribute to Wang here can, I think, offer us an alternative way to solve some of the problems raised for pluralist theories.

The univocality of *shi* is based on its second-order status. *Shi*, for Wang, is the property of having properties that we actually do and should seek when we appraise statements. There are a number of parts of his analysis of *shi*. First, it is a second-order property, but a second order *pluralistic* property. It is not "the property of having some (one) property such that [the truth-making description is met]," (as both Lynch and Wright specify the second-order view³⁵), but rather it is "the property of having *properties* such that [the truth-making description is met]." This move actually has a great deal of philosophical payoff, in that it removes the force of objections to pluralism based on the problem of mixed conjunctions, as I explain below.

Shi, for Wang, can be thought of as expressing a second-order property—the property of having a property or properties that we should and do seek when appraising statements. This makes truth rest on normativity. The normativity involved here, however, is basic, in a sense that what we *should* do is linked with what we *do in fact* do, but is not explained by the fact that we do these things. That is, the descriptive element is not meant to explain the normative, but be a further basic fact beside it. Here, both concepts are in the employ of the truth function, as an explanation for what makes a particular statement *shi*. If we consider the properties of 然 *ran* and 是 *shi* that can belong to statements in the non-moral and moral domains, respectively, we can begin to see what is meant. The properties of *ran* and *shi* are properties humans naturally seek when they appraise sentences, according to Wang. No one accepts as true a statement they believe to be 不然 *bu ran* or 非 *fei*. Rather, the reason a statement is accepted by anyone is because one believes (sometimes

³⁵ Although Lynch rejects a second-order property view of truth, in part due to the difficulties discussed below.

mistakenly) that this statement is either 然 *ran*, 是 *shi*, or has some other 實 *shi*-making property. It is a brute fact about humans that we do seek properties such as 是 *shi* and 然 *ran* when we appraise sentences and accept or believe statements based on whether or not we have reason to think they are *ran* or *shi*. Thus the key question to be answered when we consider whether or not something is 實 *shi* is whether the statement *actually* has the properties we naturally seek. In addition to this description of what humans actually do, however, there is an added normative element. Not only *do* we seek properties like 然 *ran* and 是 *shi*, but we *ought* to seek such properties. Why ought we? That is, what explains the normativity? I believe (though it would take much more space than I have here to argue) that Wang takes this normativity as explanatorily *basic*. Although this certainly would strike most of us in the contemporary western-based philosophical tradition as strange or implausible, this view (if Wang's own) would not, by any means, have been unprecedented in ancient China. The Mohists give us the best example of a group of thinkers who may have had a similar view of certain normative statements as basic.

Wang's view of the univocality of *shi* has a couple of interesting features, relevant to the contemporary debate surrounding pluralism and truth in general. It is sometimes objected that pluralism cannot account for the truth of statements or propositions that are conjunctions of propositions belonging to different linguistic domains. The reason for this, in general, is that on most pluralist theories, there are particular properties in particular domains that play the truth role. For example, say that in non-moral contexts, correspondence plays the truth role, while in moral and aesthetic contexts something like coherence plays the truth role. There then becomes a problem in giving an account of what plays the truth role for propositions containing both non-moral and moral or aesthetic conjuncts.

Wang's theory of *shi* has an easy solution to this problem. In fact, we might think that one of the reasons that the problem never occurred to Wang is that it could never have gained traction given his particular view of *shi*. Because a statement is *shi* just in case it has the properties we do and should seek when appraising sentences, it is not necessary for there to be only *one* particular property playing the truth role for a given statement. The necessity of there being one truth-making property for any given statement or proposition, I contend, is what gets the pluralist into the problem. However, if 'is true' expresses a unique truth property that is linked (in virtue of being a second order property) to the lower level "truth properties", there is no need to rely on only one property to play the truth-making role. Lynch's theory *does* require a single property to play the truth role for any given proposition, because of his functionalist theory, and Wright appears to need it as well, because he specifies the higher order property as being linked to the (single) property that meets the platitudes in a given domain. The truth property can be defined differently, however, so as not to link it to a single truth-making property that must belong to a statement for it to be true. If a statement is true when it has properties we do and should seek, it is not necessary for a mixed conjunction to have a single lower-level property that

makes it true. It is enough that both conjuncts are true by virtue of having properties we do and should seek.

Consider the following mixed conjunction:

“Mars is the 4th closest planet to the sun and murder is wrong.”

Wang can account for the truth (實 *shi*) of this statement by analysis of the properties of the logical parts, here the conjuncts. If each of the conjuncts has lower-level properties we do and should seek and on the basis of which we do and should accept statements, then the conjunction is 實 *shi*. And there is no difficulty here, because the two conjuncts are true in exactly the same way—that is, they both possess properties we do and should seek, and thus the entire statement possesses these properties. Note that the entire statement does *not* possess both *ran* and *shi* (the moral conjunct does not possess the property of *ran*, for example), but the entire statement *does* possess the second-order property of 實 *shi* in virtue of the possession of each conjunct of properties we do and should seek. We can explain this ultimately in terms of the properties at the lowest level, in this case 然 *ran* and 是 *shi*, but we can construct ever higher levels in the theory of 實 *shi*. Thus, the above statement is 實 *shi* in virtue of having *shi*-making properties (然 *ran* and 是 *shi*), and the conjuncts considered separately are 實 *shi* in virtue of having 然 *ran* (in the first conjunct) and 是 *shi* (in the second). We can see here that refraining from tying the truth property to a single truth-making lower level property has enormous advantages over the properties defined by Wright and Lynch.

So what of another objection made to the view of the truth property as a second-order property, which Lynch raises against Wright’s second order view of truth? If the second-order property obtains in virtue of a proposition’s meeting the various platitudes for truth, then it looks like the truth property itself *doesn’t* meet the platitudes for truth. Thus, the second-order property does not itself qualify as a truth property under the definition of truth properties on Wright’s account.³⁶ Wang Chong’s account of *shi* does not have this problem. Although it is a second-order property, unlike Wright’s truth property it *does* itself qualify as a truth property under the conceptual description of truth (*shi*).

The property expressed by *shi* is the property of (actually) having properties that we do and should seek when appraising statements. Does this property itself meet the

³⁶ Lynch 2009, p. 64-65: “Wright is barred from identifying even this wafer-thin property—the property of having a property that satisfies the platitudes or falls under the concept of truth—with the, or even “a” property of truth. For the property of having a property that falls under the descriptive concept of truth, doesn’t itself fall under that description. Again, that description consists, essentially, in a list of the platitudes that a property must satisfy. But is the property of having a property that, e.g., is distinct from warrant, possessed by asserted propositions, is objective, and so on a property with all those features? No. It is the property of having a property with those features. Hence a view like Wright’s which identifies truth with whatever property satisfies the platitudes in a particular domain must hold that the second-order property of having a property that plays that role is *distinct* from truth: call it truth*. And this in turn makes it hard to see how reductive pluralism solves the problem of mixed inferences and associated problems. For while she can say that there is a property preserved by valid mixed inferences, that property is truth*, not truth.”

criteria for being *shi*? That is, is *this* property something that we do and should seek when appraising statements? It is. But notice that we will only be concerned about whether or not *shi* obtains when there is semantic ascent, or some question as to whether a certain statement does actually or does not have the lower-level properties we seek when appraising statements. Consider the statement:

“One should imitate the actions of the Zhou kings.”

This statement may be 實 *shi* by virtue of having the property of 是 *shi* (right). So there are two relevant properties here—實 *shi* (true) and 是 *shi* (right). 實 *shi* is the second order property. So, are we looking for *that* when we appraise this sentence? In a sense we are—we are looking for both. The second order property is especially relevant when we engage in semantic ascent. Consider the statement:

“The statement ‘you should imitate the actions of the Zhou kings’ is true (實 *shi*).”

What property or properties do we and should we seek when appraising this sentence? Now that we have semantically ascended, the lowest level properties such as 然 *ran* and 是 *shi* will be out of the immediate picture, and the sentence must be appraised to see if it has the property of 實 *shi*. What we ought to and will seek here is the *second order property* itself, because the possession of this will tell us whether the relevant statement is true. Thus, the relevant properties of this statement are the original property of 是 *shi* (right), which makes the second order property of 實 *shi* obtain, and a third-order 實 *shi* property along side of that.

So the question of whether the second (and higher) order property of *shi* can be something itself that counts as a truth property under the given definition of truth can be answered in the affirmative.³⁷ The definition of truth given here does not bar

³⁷ There may be some worry here that the property of 實 *shi* belonging to mixed conjunctions (pre-ascent) will be *third-order* properties rather than second-order properties. If we take the *shi*-ness of the full conjunction as a function of the *shi*-ness of the conjuncts, this will necessarily be the case. However, I do not believe this is the right way to see *shi* in cases of conjunctions, or any statement. What I propose here goes beyond anything Wang says, of course, and is meant as simply a way of making sense of how *shi* is a second-order property even in cases of mixed conjunctions. Since *shi* is an appraisal term—it is a property that belongs to a statement if and only if that statement has the properties we do and should seek in appraising statements—it need only apply to appraised statements. That is, *shi* might be understood as a tag telling us whether a statement has the desired properties or not. It need not be the case, if we are appraising a conjunction, that the conjunction is *shi* based on each of the conjuncts being *shi*, even if those conjuncts *would* be *shi* if appraised individually. The reason *shi* can work like this is that it is based on human goals—what we do and ought to seek. Thus, independently of our appraisal of a particular statement, there do not have to be *shi*-facts about it. Thus, a mixed conjunction can have the second-order property of *shi* based on having the property of *ran* and *shi* in its conjuncts, without being based on having the individual property *shi* of each conjunct. However, if we appraise the conjuncts separately as individual statements, we can also take them as having the property of *shi*, based on the lower-level properties each possess. As I say above, this explanation goes well beyond anything we can find in Wang Chong, but I believe this addition keeps with Wang’s general view of *shi*, and gives us a way to better understand how a *shi* property like Wang’s can work.

higher-order properties constructed in this way from serving as truth-making properties.

So we have seen that Wang can offer us a way of understanding how the predicate ‘is true’ can express a unique, second-order property, while avoiding some problems for such views. Of course, accepting something like Wang’s view depends on how far we’re willing to go with him on the explanatory basic quality of descriptive and normative facts about human behavior. We might part ways with Wang at a number of different points—whether it has to do with our objection to holding truth to be that closely linked with human behavior (is this a radical anti-realism?), whether it has to do with our resistance to accepting as basic the kinds of facts Wang does, or whether it has to do with issues of possible vicious circularity in the definition of 實 *shi*. All of these issues, of course, remain to be worked out. But if they can be satisfactorily worked out, we have a ready made way to answer objections to pluralist theories of truth as well as a way to offer better explanations for certain key features of truth that any theory, pluralist or monist, must account for.

In addition to helping in the contemporary debate surrounding truth and pluralism, Wang’s pluralist view of *shi*, focusing as it does on the distinction between moral and non-moral statements, also might help us to understand the concept of truth in early Chinese philosophy in general. Although the particular formulation of a pluralist theory of truth using *shi* as the truth concept is new to Wang, implicitly pluralist theories of truth in China in general do not begin with Wang Chong. Pluralist intuitions about truth can be found as early as the *Mo-Zi*. The best way to understand the seeming switch between pragmatic-sounding arguments and correspondence based reasoning in the *Mo-Zi* can be explained by attributing a pluralist conception of truth to the author(s) of the text. This conception is not fleshed out in early texts such as the *Mo-Zi*, however. I also suspect that this incipient pluralism about truth is at the heart of the “paradoxes” of the *Gong-Sun-Long-Zi*. Gong Sun Long is, I believe, noticing an intuitive difficulty with pluralist theories of truth that arises when we have defined no univocal concept of truth that captures the different truth-making properties. With Wang’s more worked out (although not fully worked out) conception of *shi* as truth, we can look backward to come to a better understanding of the incipient pluralism in earlier thinkers. In this sense, understanding Wang’s theory of *shi* can help us to understand truth in early China in general. Of course, the tie between Wang’s theory and those of his predecessors will have to be developed in future work.

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