

**PERSONAL IDENTITY, MORAL AGENCY AND LIANG-ZHI:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
KORSGAARD AND WANG YANGMING**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Christine Korsgaard bases her interpretation of personal identity upon the notion of moral agency and thereby refutes the Reductionist thesis of Derek Parfit. Korsgaard indicates that actions and choices, from the practical standpoint, must be viewed as having agents and choosers. This is what makes them our own actions and choices as well as contributes to the process of self-constitution. Personal identity as the chooser of our desires and author of our actions can be thought of as the common denominator between Korsgaard and Wang Yangming (王陽明); for liang-zhi (良知) is none other than the agency that acts as the capacity for moral judgment and the motivation of performing moral actions. Given liang-zhi is the authentic self that make laws for us, our true identities are exhibited in the performance of moral behaviors. Moreover, further engagement between the two sides reveals that Wang's characterizations of liang-zhi, particularly those of practical experience, law-embodying identity, and zhi-zhi (致知) can be seen as both a complement to Korsgaard's practical standpoint argument and an approach of consummating self-constitution..*

**Keywords:** *personal identity, moral agency, practical standpoint, liang-zhi, self-constitution, zhi-zhi*

1. INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the comparative study between Chinese and Western philosophies, one of the crucial issues has always been how to find an appropriate medium that serves as the common problem of the two sides. In this article, I try to argue that moral agency can be one of the intermediaries of choice.

Christine Korsgaard bases her interpretation of personal identity, for the most part, upon the notion of moral agency and thereby refutes the Reductionist thesis of Derek Parfit. I intend to begin by articulating four aspects of this debate: (1) what is personal identity, (2) division or integration of consciousness, (3) external intervention or

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internal decision, and (4) looking at people from theoretical or practical point of view. In essence, Parfit's view is that personal identity just involves physical and psychological continuity. This can be described in an impersonal way and without claiming that experiences are had by a person. Korsgaard points out that Parfit's arguments depend on viewing the person primarily as a locus of experience, whereas different conclusions will be reached if we regard persons primarily as agents. Korsgaard notes that as rational beings we might view ourselves from two different standpoints, the theoretical and the practical. From the theoretical standpoint, an action may be viewed as just another experience, but from the practical point of view, actions and choices must be viewed as having agents and choosers. And it is this important feature of our sense of our identity and the process of self-constitution that Parfit's account leaves out.

It is apparent that Personal identity as the chooser of our desires and author of our actions can be thought of as the common denominator between Korsgaard and Confucianism. Take Wang Yangming (王陽明) as an example, he asserts that a person behaves as both an agent and chooser in that human beings are endowed with *liang-zhi* (良知). Firstly, *liang-zhi* is precisely the agency that responds to moral situations by originating our moral actions. Secondly, this response concurs with the immediate judgment of the sense of right and wrong, urging moral agents to do what is right and repel what is wrong, thus a chooser. For Wang, it is precisely *liang-zhi* that acts as one's personal identity and thus one's authentic self.

Moreover, I will argue, when putting into perspective their respective discourse, we are moving toward a more productive engagement. For one thing, Wang proposes a way of practical justification that can be used to reinforce Korsgaard's argument of practical standpoint. For another, Korsgaard's withdrawal from the metaphysical dimension of Kant's ethics, to a certain extent, highlights the theoretical plausibility of *liangzhi* in virtue of its metaphysical and universal status. Finally, it is noted that Wang's thesis of *zhi-zhi* suggests an approach by which we are able to steer the process of self-constitution to the right path and make it a success.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. MORAL AGENCY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

### CONTENTION 1: WHAT IS PERSONAL IDENTITY

As an advocate of utilitarianism, Parfit tries to bolster its plausibility via the

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that Korsgaard's interpretation of Kant has been involving in the raging debate between moral realism and constructivism. As a result, there have been certain criticisms leveled against her constructivist approach. Despite that this article starts with Korsgaard's discourse of personal identity and moral agency as well as sees it as the common ground of interpreting *liang-zhi*, it is not my intention here to count Wang among the ranks of a constructivist. On the other hand, the main theme of this article is on how it is possible that we justify the existence of personal identity via the illustration of moral agency. And this can be done, as it were, without being premised on either realism or constructivism. Most importantly, as will be clarified later, at bottom Wang's thesis cannot be seen as constructivism in Korsgaard's sense.

Reductionist view of personal identity, according to which the existence of a person simply consists in the existence of his brain and body as well as a series of physical and mental events. As opposed to that, he argues, if someone claims that a person is a separately existing entity or a separate, further fact that is distinct from those events, then he is a Non-Reductionist. On the Non-Reductionist view, a person is a separately existing entity, distinct from his brain and body, and his experiences. On the best-known version of this view, a person is a Cartesian Ego. On the Reductionist view that Parfit defends, persons exist. But persons are not separately existing entities. The existence of a person, during any period, just consists in the existence of brain and body, the thinking of his thoughts, the doing of his deeds, and the occurrence of many other physical and mental events (Parfit 1984, 275).

Technically speaking, Parfit could agree that persons exist and are thinkers and agents instead of thoughts and acts, inasmuch as it is not interpreted as an entity in the Non-Reductionist sense, particularly a Cartesian Ego. A Reductionist can admit that, in this sense, a person is what has experiences, or the subject of experiences. “This is true because of the way in which we talk. What a Reductionist denies is that the subject of experiences is a separately existing entity, distinct from a brain and body, and a series of physical and mental events” (Parfit 1984, 223).

In addition to that, Parfit indicates that our identity over time just involves (a) Relation R—psychological connectedness and/or psychological continuity, either with the normal cause or with any cause, provided (b) that there is no different person who is R-related to us as we once were (Parfit 1984, 216). For Parfit, when we are talking about personal identity, we are actually referring to Relation R, which can be described in an impersonal way and without claiming that experiences are had by a person. A Reductionist also claims that personal identity is not what matters. Personal identity just involves certain kinds of connectedness and continuity, when these hold in a one-one form. These relations are what matters (Parfit 1984, 275).

Overall, Parfit’s reasoning is based on the description and explanation of our sensory impressions and psychological experiences. However, supposing we explore further the ground or foundation of such experiences, we might well have a diametrically opposed view on this issue. It is exactly the approach Korsgaard adopts and thereby comes to the conclusion that our agency can be regarded as being expressive of the characteristic of personal identity. Korsgaard argues that from a moral point of view, it is important not to reduce agency to a mere form of experience. It is important because our conception of what a person is depends in a deep way on our conception of ourselves as agents. For that matter, her argument is directed against the views about personal identity advanced by Derek Parfit. The latter’s arguments depend on viewing the person primarily as a locus of experience. As opposed to this, Korsgaard stresses, if we regard persons primarily as agents, we will reach different conclusions both about the nature of personal identity and about its moral implications (Korsgaard 1996, 364).

Contrary to Parfit’s sense experience approach, Korsgaard emphasizes the moral dimension of human actions so that we could discover our personal identity through the experience of being a moral agent. Furthermore, in response to Parfit’s critique of

metaphysics, she maintains that the justification of personal identity can be done on account of moral practice, not metaphysics. “Your conception of yourself as a unified agent is not based on a metaphysical theory, nor on a unity of which you are conscious. Its grounds are practical” (Korsgaard 1996, 369).

## CONTENTION 2: DIVISION OR INTEGRATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

As far-fetched as it may seem, Parfit comes up with a series of arguments to support his reductionism. At first, he starts with some recent medical cases, the effect of “two separate spheres of consciousness”, to prove that our psychological continuity does not have to be premised on personal identity. He indicates that many psychological tests show the same two essential features. When someone’s hemispheres of the brain have been disconnected, in seeing what is in the left half of his visual field, such a person is quite unaware of what he is now seeing in the right half of his visual field, and vice versa. And in the center of consciousness in which he sees the left half of his visual field, and is aware of what he is doing with his left hand, this person is quite unaware of what he is doing with his right hand, and vice versa. In this respect, a person can be said to have divided minds (Parfit 1984, 245-246). And given that people’s hemispheres have been disconnected in these cases of divided minds, they have two streams of consciousness, in each of which they are unaware of the other. We might claim that, in such a case, there are two different people in the same body or there is a single person with two streams of consciousness (Parfit 1984, 276).

Based on these cases, Parfit further proposes an imagined case where each half of my brain is successfully transplanted into another body. Each of the resulting people will have half of my brain, and will be fully psychologically continuous with me. And he asks a question: shall I be one of these two people, or the other, or neither? Parfit considers it an empty question and asserts that these are merely different descriptions of the same outcome (Parfit 1984, 278-279). In other words, these cases prove that the notion of “I” or “self”, according to Parfit, is simply not amenable to examination.

As to the cases of divided minds, we can always raise a question: what happens if they conflict with each other? What really matters is not how many streams of consciousness can be divided, but how they can be perceived and integrated at all. They must be, after all, perceived and unified by a capacity that effectively grasps the conscious process. When it comes to personal identity, we can always concentrate on the unifying force behind consciousness, that is, the unity of agency. Korsgaard holds that communication and functional integration do not require a common subject of conscious experience. What they do require, however, is the unity of agency. And there are two aspects of this unity. First, there is the raw practical necessity. Sharing a common body, the two hemispheres of my brain, or my various psychic functions, must work together. The “phenomenon” of the unity of consciousness is nothing more than the lack of any perceived difficulty in the coordination of psychic functions. To be sure, when I engage in psychic activities *deliberately*, I regard myself as the subject of these activities. *I think, I look, I try to remember.* And this has to do with

the second element of the unity of agency, the unity inherent in deliberative standpoint. I regard myself as the employer of my psychic capacities in much the same way that I regard myself as the arbiter among my conflicting desires (Korsgaard 1996, 377).

The unity of agency is used by Korsgaard to explain identity at any given time, which consists of two elements. For one thing, there is the raw necessity of eliminating conflicts among your various motives. Even though we accept Parfit's cases of persons with split brains, a unified agency is still needed. Imagine that the right and left halves of your brain disagree about what to do. Suppose that they do not try to resolve their differences, but each merely sends motor orders, by way of the nervous system, to your limbs. Since the orders are contradictory, the two halves of your body try to do different things. Unless they can come to an agreement, both hemispheres of your brain are ineffectual. You are a unified person at any given time because you must act, and you have only one body with which to act (Korsgaard 1996, 369-370).

The second element of this pragmatic unity is the unity implicit in the standpoint from which you deliberate and choose. When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all your desires, something that is you, and that chooses which one to act on, rather than just waiting to see which one wins. "This means that there is some principle or way of choosing that you regard as expressive of yourself, and that provides reasons that regulate your choices among your desires. This does not require that your agency be located in a separately existing entity or involve a deep metaphysical fact. Instead, it is a practical necessity imposed upon you by the nature of the deliberative standpoint" (Korsgaard 1996, 370). For Korsgaard, the unity of consciousness is simply an instance of the unity of agency. The unity of agency acts as the unifying force that enables us to regard our thoughts or actions as expressive of my intention and willingness. "That is to say: to regard some movement of my mind or my body as action, I must see it as an expression of myself as a whole, rather than as a product of some force that is at work on me or in me" (Korsgaard 2009, 18).

### CONTENTION 3: EXTERNAL INTERVENTION OR INTERNAL DECISION

Korsgaard notes that there is a common thread as to all the cases of Parfit's so-called divided minds insofar as personal identity is damaged due to the intervention of external impact like surgeries. As a matter of fact, what really counts is not whether there are drastic changes or not, but whether these changes are initiated by the person himself or not. It is significant, Korsgaard indicates, that writers on personal identity often tell stories about mad surgeons who make changes in our memories or characters by means of surgical intervention. But surely part of what creates the sense of lost identity is that the person is changed by intervention, from the outside. However, the stories might affect us differently if we imagined the changes initiated by the person himself, as a result of his own choice. "You are not a different person just because you are very different. Authorial psychological connectedness is

consistent with drastic changes, provided those changes are the results of actions by the person herself or reactions for which she is responsible” (Korsgaard 1996, 379-380). That is to say, drastic changes do not necessarily threaten to destroy personal identity. Provided a person is changed by his own choice other than intervention from the outside, he is still identified with himself despite the fact that he is very different from what he once was.

After establishing that the crux of personal identity lies in the voluntary choice of a person, Korsgaard notes that whenever we act, we are actually constituting ourselves as the author of our actions and the person who we really are. Accordingly, an action in the moral sense is one that is characteristic of self-constitution:

For an action is a movement attributable to an agent as its author, and that means that whenever you choose an action—whenever you take control of your own movements—you are constituting yourself as the author of that action, and so you are deciding who to be. Human beings therefore have a distinct form of identity, a norm-governed or practical form of identity, for which we are ourselves responsible. As a rational being, as a rational agent, you are faced with the task of making something of yourself, and you must regard yourself as a success or a failure insofar as you succeed or fail at this task. (Korsgaard 2009, Preface, xi-xii)

For Korsgaard, identity is not the kind of a prior unity in the agent, an integrity already achieved. It is precisely embodied or manifested in what you choose and do. She argues that “in the relevant sense there is no you prior to your choices and actions, because your identity is in a quite literal way constituted by your choices and actions” (Korsgaard 2009, 19). On account that “it is in choosing your actions that you create that identity. What this means is that you constitute yourself as the author of your actions in the very act of choosing them” (Korsgaard 2009, 20). It explains why the identity achieved by self-constitution is a kind of “practical identity,” which is “a description under which you value yourself and find your life worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking. Conceptions of practical identity include such things as roles and relationships, citizenships, memberships in religious or ethnic groups, causes, vocations, professions and offices” (Korsgaard 2009, 20). In other words, practical identity is fashioned by the choices and actions of a certain person that serves as the insignia expressing his profession and vocation, role and relationship in the society as well as everything that is characteristic of him.

#### CONTENTION 4: THEORETICAL OR PRACTICAL POINT OF VIEW

In essence, Parfit has been trying to focus our attention on *the content of experiences*, rather than on the person, *the subject of experience*. To debunk the myth of the subject of experience, he asserts that “we could not tell, from the content of our experiences, whether we really are aware of the continued existence of a separately existing subject of experiences” (Parfit 1984, 224). And when we have had a series of thoughts, the most that we are aware of is the psychological continuity of our stream of consciousness. Armed with this approach, he proposes that it is only the nature of

what happens which is morally important, not to whom it happens (Parfit 1995, 495). He starts off by resorting to sense perception and the surgical effect of “two separate spheres of consciousness.” According to which, he claims that what actually exists is a series of physical and psychological events in that we are not directly aware of the existence of any separate entity, the subject of experiences, a person or self. He even tries to refute “*the first-person mode of presentation*” by stressing that in a dream, I might seem to see myself running towards this point of view. Since it is *myself* that I seem to see running in this direction, this direction cannot be towards *myself*. I might say that I seem to see myself running towards *the seer’s point of view* (Parfit 1984, 221-223). At this stage of analysis, we can see that Parfit pushes it to the limit by endorsing the reduction of *myself* into a *seer* in terms of the holder of sensory perception.

Contrary to this approach, Korsgaard invokes the Kantian twofold standpoint of looking at people from both theoretic and practical dimensions. And it is only through the practical standpoint can we discover personal identity. When we look at our actions from the theoretical standpoint, our concern is with their explanation and prediction. Alternatively, when we view them from the practical standpoint, our concern is with their justification and choice. These two relations to our actions are, according to Korsgaard, equally legitimate, inescapable, and governed by reason, but they are separate. Kant does not assert that it is a matter of *theoretical fact* that we are agents, that we are free, and that we are responsible. Rather, we must view ourselves in these ways when we occupy the standpoint of practical reason— that is, when we are deciding what to do. “This follows from the fact that we must regard ourselves as the causes—the first causes—of the things that we will. And this fundamental attitude is forced upon us by the necessity of making choices, regardless of the theoretical or metaphysical facts” (Korsgaard 1996: 378).

In order to fortify her reasoning, Korsgaard differentiates between two kinds of facts, viz., theoretical and practical. From the theoretical standpoint, an action may be viewed as just another experience, and the assertion that it has a subject may be, as Parfit says, “because of the way we talk.” But from the practical point of view, actions and choices must be viewed as having agents and choosers. This is what makes them our own actions and choices rather than events that befall us. This does not mean that our existence as agents is asserted as a further fact, or requires a separately existing entity that should be discernible from the theoretical point of view. It is rather that from the practical point of view our relationship to our actions and choices is essentially authorial: from it, we view them as our own (Korsgaard 1996, 378). This is a practical fact, not a theoretical one.<sup>2</sup> And it is this important feature of our sense of our identity that Parfit’s account leaves out.

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<sup>2</sup> Korsgaard also elucidates identity over time from the practical standpoint. The identity over time refers to the fact that most of the things we do that matter to us take time. Some of the things we do are intelligible only in the context of projects that extend over long periods. This is especially true of the pursuit of our ultimate ends. In choosing our careers, and pursuing our friends and family lives, we both presuppose and construct a continuity of identity and of agency. It is also true that we think of our activities and pursuits as interconnected in various ways; we think that we are carrying out plans of life.

### 3. LIANG-ZHI, MORAL AGENCY, AND PERSONAL IDENTITY

There are already a number of contemporary literatures on Wang Yangming's doctrine that to a certain degree provide us with fruitful and insightful perspectives into his theory of *liang-zhi*. And the majority of them, as if by tacit agreement, focus on the interconnection between *liang-zhi* and knowledge, whether it be perfect or original knowledge, moral knowledge, and knowledge how.<sup>3</sup> By examining the debate between Korsgaard and Parfit, however, we are able to look at Wang's discourse of *liang-zhi* in a whole new light. If wielded properly, the issue of personal identity arguably functions as a desirable junction to the comparative study between moral agency and *liang-zhi*, which will be elaborated below.

#### 3.1 LIANG-ZHI AS AGENCY

As opposed to Parfit's concentration on sensory perception or psychological experiences and hence denial of personal identity, Korsgaard explores personal identity through looking at people from the practical standpoint and emphasizes our capacity as choosers and agents. This line of thought coincidentally echoes that of Confucianism due to the fact that personal identity as the chooser of our desires and author of our actions can also be seen as the tenor of Confucian moral philosophy. Take Wang Yangming as an example. In like manner, he indicates that we must look at people from the stance of agents and choosers. Rather than exploring personal identity through sense perception, Wang tries to explicate it via reflection upon the foundation of our activities or actions, be it physical, mental or even moral. He says:

The master of the body is *xin* (心). When *xin* acts as a motivation, it is called *yi* (意). The ontological ground of *yi* is *liang-zhi* (良知), and whatever *yi* causes one to do is *wu* (物). For example, when *yi* causes one to serve his parents, then serving his parents is *wu*. When *yi* causes one to serve his ruler, then serving his ruler is *wu*. When *yi* causes one to be humane to all people and feel love toward things, then being humane to all people and

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In order to carry out a rational plan of life, you need to be one continuing person (Korsgaard 1996, 371-372).

<sup>3</sup> Representative works of this genre include: Ching, Julia (1976), *To Acquire Wisdom: the Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming* (New York: Columbia University Press); Cua, Antonio (1982), *The Unity of Knowledge and action: A Study in Wang Yangming's Moral Psychology* (Honolulu: Hawaii University Press); Frisina, Warren (2002), *The Unity of Knowledge and Action: Toward a Nonrepresentational Theory of Knowledge* (Albany: State University of New York Press); Huang, Yong (2006), "A Neo-Confucian Conception of Wisdom: Wang Yangming on the Innate Moral Knowledge." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (33) 3: 393-408; Ivanhoe, Philip J. (2002), *Ethics in the Confucian Tradition: The Thought of Mengzi and Wang Yangming* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company); Nivison, David S. (1996), *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy* (Chicago and La Salle, Ill.: Open Court); Yang, Xiaomei (2009), "How to Make Sense of the Claim 'True Knowledge Is What Constitutes Action': A New Interpretation of Wang Yangming's Doctrine of Unity of Knowledge and Action." *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* (8) 2: 173-88, to name just a few.



feeling love toward things are *wu* and when *yi* causes one to see, hear, speak, and act, then each of these is *wu*. (Chan 1998, 37)<sup>4</sup>

In this passage, Wang sketches the interrelation of four cardinal concepts of his thesis. The general term “*xin*” (心) refers to one’s state of consciousness that can function as either “*liang-zhi*” (良知) or “*yi*” (意). What Wang means by “*wu*” (物) is our behaviors or actions. And those actions such as seeing, hearing, speaking, and acting fall respectively under the categories of sense perception and physical activities. Serving one’s parents and ruler as well as being humane to all people and feeling love toward things are moral conducts. And all these activities and conducts arise from *yi*, namely, our motivation or volition. Moreover, *liang-zhi* is the foundation of *yi* due to its status as the ontological ground of the latter. Wang’s further explanation is that:

*Xin* is the master of the body. The selfless, acute and discerning nature of *xin* is *liang-zhi* in its original status. When *liang-zhi* is influenced by things and events and responds to them by motivating us to act, it is called *yi*. With *liang-zhi*, there will be *yi*. Without *liang-zhi*, there will be no *yi*. Is *liang-zhi* not the ontological ground of *yi*? Whenever *yi* acts as the motivation, it results in *wu*. And so-called *wu* is exactly an action. When we are motivated to serve our parents, then serving our parents is called *wu*. When we are motivated to govern the people, then governing the people is called *wu*. When we are motivated to study, then studying is called *wu*. When we are motivated to hear a lawsuit, then hearing a lawsuit is called *wu*. With *yi*, there will be *wu*; without *yi*, there will be no *wu*. Is *wu* not the actualization of *yi*? (Chan 1998, 176-177)

What Wang means by calling *liang-zhi* the ontological ground of *yi* is that *liang-zhi* is the prerequisite for the existence of *yi* in that *yi* emerges as the motivation to perform a certain act when *liang-zhi* responds to various situations that befall us. Therefore he claims that with *liang-zhi*, there will be *yi*; without *liang-zhi*, there will be no *yi*. This also indicates that *wu* or an action is the actualization or objectification of *yi* and hence the statement “with *yi*, there will be *wu*; without *yi*, there will be no *wu*.” Since *yi*, qua motivation or will, can be good or evil, a moral ground is needed in order to get it right in case it goes bad. For Confucianism in general, ontological and moral ground is one and the same, so not only is *liang-zhi* the ontological ground, but also serves as the moral agency that discerns good motivations from evil ones as well as having the impact to sublimate our volition. That also speaks for itself about why *liang-zhi* is the selfless, acute and discerning nature of *xin*. On balance, we can see that the ultimate foundation of all actions or activities is exactly *liang-zhi*. Wang makes it clear that *liang-zhi* is a kind of agency capable of motivating us to act whenever we are interacting with the outside world. And the corresponding movements include moral conduct (serving our parents, and in a broader sense, governing the people) and non-moral actions (studying, hearing a lawsuit).

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<sup>4</sup> The edition of *chuan-xi-lu* (傳習錄) upon which my translation is based was compiled by Wing-tsit, Chan (陳榮捷). See Chan 1998. His English translation of *chuan-xi-lu* has been considerably referred to during the writing process as well. Also see Chan 1963.

### 3.2 LIANG-ZHI AS CHOOSER AND AUTHENTIC SELF

In response to Parfit's assertion that we are not directly aware of personal identity, Korsgaard holds that personal identity is the moral agency manifested in the action we choose, the responsibility we take and so on. With the capacity to discern good from bad, *liang-zhi* is literally a kind of moral agency that alerts us to our selfish desires as well as bad thoughts and ideas. Wang claims that "even when erroneous thoughts arise, *liang-zhi* is present. Only because man does not know how to preserve it is *xin* sometimes lost. Even when *xin* is most darkened and obstructed, *liang-zhi* is clear. Only because man intends not to heed it is *xin* sometimes obscured" (Chan 1998, 214). It is apparent that, for Wang, *liang-zhi* acts as the chooser when we are facing a moral situation. Even if we are obsessed with selfishness, desires or impulses, *liang-zhi* is still present despite of being weakened. As long as we heed its instruction, our judgment and behavior will be heading back in the right direction.

Moreover, *liang-zhi* not only identifies right and wrong, but also motivates us to do the right thing and reject the bad thing. There is a part of human nature that is susceptible to desires and selfishness and tends to be blind to our conscience. When faced with a choice between right and wrong, the role of *liang-zhi* as moral agency is spurring us to do what we consider as the right thing to do. That is why we are able to reach the unity of what we ought to do and what we actually do, which Wang calls "*zhi-xing-he-yi*" (知行合一). Wang cites instances such as filial piety and fraternal love to illustrate this unity. "Suppose we say that so-and-so realizes (*zhi*; 知) filial piety and so-and-so realizes fraternal love. They must have actually practiced (*xing*; 行) filial piety or fraternal love before they can be said to realize either one of them" (Chan 1998, 33). To accept filial piety and fraternal love as a duty is one thing, to put these duties into practice is quite another. One realizes what moral agency is all about by way of practical experience. In the process of moral practice, we are aware not only of sense perception and the lure of desires, but of an inner driving force that is immune from their impact and that tells us how to deal with them. It is this moral agency that makes us a chooser and agent. And we realize the fact via self-consciousness other than sensory experience.

Aside from that, Wang and Korsgaard read off the same sheet of music insofar as they both claim that we express a unique personal identity when acting as the author of our movements. According to Korsgaard, the task of self-constitution places us in a relationship with ourselves—it means that we interact with ourselves. We make laws for ourselves, and those laws determine whether we constitute ourselves well or badly. And the only way in which you can constitute yourself well is by governing yourself in accordance with *universal principles* which you can will as laws for every rational being (Korsgaard 2009, X II). This type of moral agency enables us to forge our own personal identity and literally constitute a sense of self that is different from various streams of consciousness. Similarly, Wang asserts that our real identities are exhibited in the performance of moral agency. As opposed to the bodily self that

refers to the physical and biological dimensions of human beings, *liang-zhi* is the authentic self that makes laws for us:

The ontological ground of *xin* is none other than *tianli* (天理) and is never out of accord of propriety. This is your authentic self. This authentic self is the master of your body. If there is no authentic self, there will be no body. It is definitely true that with the authentic self, one lives; without it, one dies. If you really want to do something for your bodily self, you must make the most of your authentic self and always remember to preserve it by being cautious over your own bad thoughts and ideas. (Chan 1998, 146)

In this passage, *tian-li*, as the ontological ground, is exactly the term denominating *liang-zhi*, which also acts as the source of universal moral principles. With *liang-zhi*, we make moral laws for ourselves. From the moral point of view, *liang-zhi*, as authentic self, must be the master of bodily self, that is, the physical as well as physiological properties of human beings. Supposing that we focus only on the bodily self, we are merely passively experiencing a series of activities consisting of sensory perception, desires, impulses, and so on. On this score, Parfit is totally right when he claims that the existence of a person simply consists in the existence of his brain and body as well as a series of physical and mental events. Nevertheless, we are not just receivers of sensory experiences, but also active choosers that are able to decide how to interpret and appropriately cope with things that befall us. This moral agency is called the authentic self in that it is the cornerstone of personal identity. If there is no authentic self, then we have no moral agency, let alone personal identity. What is left would be a series of physical and mental events. That explains why Wang stresses that with the authentic self, one lives; without it, one dies.

#### 4. PRACTICAL STANDPOINT, SELF-CONSTITUTION AND *LIANG-ZHI*

Based on the previous analysis, we can now further reflect on the discourses of both Wang and Korsgaard. I will divide my discussion into two parts. The first has to do with the comparison and contrast between their views in terms of practical standpoint. And the second deals with their divergent attitudes towards metaphysics and somewhat different construal regarding self-constitution. Along with this engagement, we can see that Wang's doctrine, to a considerable extent, has the virtue of either being a supplement to Korsgaard's thesis or keeping at bay some of the sticklers the latter has to cope with.

##### 4.1 TWO STANDPOINTS ARGUMENT, PRACTICAL JUSTIFICATION AND *LIANG-ZHI*

Korsgaard's argument of two standpoints is dubbed by Anomaly as "compatibilism", which in turn faces significant epistemological problems. At first, Anomaly claims that "if truth is merely perspectival—i.e., relative to one of two equally legitimate standpoints which we may occupy—then we can never describe either ourselves or

the world as they really are” (Anomaly 2008, 340-341). As to this critical opinion, it should be noted that Korsgaard’s two standpoints argument tackles not the issue of knowledge or truth, but that of how to look at our actions and choices. Accordingly, it is instructive to emphasize that this argument is intended to explain how we are able to justify personal identity other than epistemologically claiming that there should be a two-fold criterion regarding truth. On this score, this remark has knocked at the wrong door.

On the other hand, Anomaly also holds that if Korsgaard is to countenance her view by distinguishing the justificatory standards of practical beliefs from those of theoretical beliefs, “her conclusions are also apparently consistent with the practical consequences Parfit draws from his theory of personal identity (Anomaly 2008, 341). Provided the way Anomaly deciphers Korsgaard’s practical standpoint is pertinent, and given that Parfit also admits that in practice we can talk about person or personal identity as long as we keep in mind that these terms simply refer to Relation-R or psychological connectedness and continuity, it seems plausible to assert that Korsgaard and Parfit are actually saying the same thing. Yet this is still a misunderstanding of Korsgaard’s theorizing of the issue. As far as personal identity is concerned, Korsgaard claims that it is a practical fact, and that it does *actually* exist. For Parfit, by contrast, personal identity could not be said to actually, but *pragmatically* exist. According to Korsgaard, the point is not so much about which option, practical or theoretical beliefs, we choose to *look upon* personal identity as about which would be the appropriate approach to *justify* personal identity. Korsgaard points out that practical standpoint would be the ideal approach to delve into personal identity. As opposed to that, if you simply treat our actions and choices as the content of perception and object of cognition, it would be intelligible that you could not *find* personal identity. This does not, however, entail that you could *justify* the non-existence of it inasmuch as theoretical fact is not the only way to vindicate a philosophical point of view.

Nevertheless, characterizing Korsgaard’s practical standpoint argument as a kind of practical belief, as anomaly does, subtly pinpoints a potential problem in it. In some respects, it figures why this argument tends to strike others as resorting to unjustified beliefs and thus essentially a type of perspectivism. The dichotomy between theoretical and practical facts implies that our choices and actions are beyond the scope of theoretical inquiry, as well as succumbing to Parfit’s premise that exclusively accredits sense perception or impression as the only criterion of the plausibility of a thesis. As such, we can only *regard* or *view* ourselves as agents, authors of our choices and actions rather than *confirming* it. As a result, practical fact is at best something we *presuppose or believe* instead of *proving theoretically*. In this regard, this dichotomy threatens to undermine Korsgaard’s argument of two standpoints.

In our practical experience, we effectively confirm our actions and choices not via sense perception and impression, but via the self-consciousness of our actual performance of a particular task. One instance of which is to behave morally: you establish that you are doing a moral behavior by *actually and self-consciously doing it*

instead of simply *observing or describing it*. You realize that you are helping a drowning person by practically reaching out your hand to that person while yelling “grab my hand!” In other words, to do it self-consciously is to affirm it actually. In fact, Korsgaard seems to have noticed the self-conscious aspect of agency when asserting that rational activity “is essentially a form of self-conscious activity, and it is this that leads to the construction of personal identity” (Korsgaard 2009: 42). “To act, I have already suggested, is to determine yourself to be the cause of certain end. So to act *self-consciously* is to conceive *yourself* teleologically—as the cause—that is, the first cause—of a certain end. It is to conceive yourself as an agent, as efficacious to achieve certain subjectively held ends” (Korsgaard 2009: 41). As such, Korsgaard could have proceeded to establish such self-consciousness implicit in practical experience as a way of practical justification, defending the legitimacy of practical standpoint in its own right. Without this crucial step, the justificatory power of practical standpoint would be unable to cross the bridge at the end of the route.

As a matter of fact, to endorse practical standpoint need not be at the expense of losing its status of theoretical truth. Other than the deduction of two kinds of facts, looking at people from twofold standpoint could give rise to the taxonomy between two ways of *justifying a philosophical viewpoint theoretically: sensory and practical*, based respectively on *sensory experience* and *practical experience*. And the latter excels at confronting Parfit’s arguments in that it re-establishes practical experience as the legitimate access to theoretical truths. According to this division, practical justification is exactly what Parfit’s argumentation leaves out. Practical standpoint helps us to rethink the way we look at practical experience, viz. the kind of hands-on experience we obtain through practice. In this regard, practical experience is, so to speak, a kind of existential experience that can plausibly provide us with theoretical truth. They are true insofar as they serve as the constituent parts of our lives and thus have justificatory power theoretically.

At bottom, Wang’s explanations of *zhi-xing-he-yi* are those that exemplify practical justification. On Wang’s view, “authentic confirmation of *liang-zhi* (*zhen-zhi*; 真知) is manifested in action and unless *liang-zhi* is acted on, one fails at the task of realizing *liang-zhi*” (Chan 1998, 166). A person is filial when he is doing something characteristic of filial piety rather than just talking about it or getting someone else to do it. In the state of *zhi-xing-he-yi*, the will to do something and your actual doing it are rolled into one. In the process, practical justification means that you can be certain of having this experience inasmuch as you are conscious of it. For that matter, an action can be counted as the manifestation of *liang-zhi*, while *liang-zhi* can be viewed as the state of acting self-consciously. Hence he says that “action is the genuine embodiment of *liang-zhi*, while *liang-zhi* is the self-consciousness and self-discernment immanent in action” (Chan 1998, 166).

As was mentioned in section 3.2, *liang-zhi* is a kind of agency capable of responding to various situations by motivating us to act. And the corresponding actions include moral and non-moral actions such as studying, seeing and hearing. In this sense, *liang-zhi* is not the object of sensory experience or cognition, but what

underlies cognitive and objectifying acts such as studying, seeing and hearing. That is to say, *liang-zhi* cannot be cognitively objectified but conversely serves as the foundation of every act of objectification. Moreover, given its status as both metaphysical principle and agency, the pertinent way to have a grip of *liang-zhi* is none other than its awareness of itself. *Liang-zhi*, as the ontological ground of *xin*, is beyond any cognitive activities. “The ontological ground of *xin* is precisely *tian-li*, In light of *tian-li* is the only one metaphysical principle, it cannot be comprehended via thinking and reasoning”<sup>5</sup> (Chan 1998, 203). Therefore, Wang distinguishes between consideration based upon *liang-zhi* and selfishness. *Liang-zhi* is keenly aware of any deliberation and consideration based upon it as well as discerns those based upon selfishness (Chan 1998, 241). On this score, *liang-zhi* is able to grasp the activity of itself as well as the content of mental acts of willing (*yi*; 意). As soon as we act, we are conscious of our acting, and we can even go one step further to discern right from wrong with regard to the content of our actual acts of willing. The process of grasping is the factual event happening in tandem all the time with the functioning of *liang-zhi*, wherein a person manifests his own personal identity. We can be certain of this kind of fact, though not via sense perception, but through practical experience. This dual activity of grasping could be seen as a kind of practical justification.

From Wang’s perspective, right choices and actions are initiated by our moral agency, a peculiar type of identity, namely *liang-zhi*. This can be construed fully through our practical experience. Our self-consciousness of practical experience (other than the sense perception or impression of it) evidently tells us that it is an existential fact, something we experientially *confirm as true*, instead of a presupposition that we simply *regard as true*. This approach of practical justification can be viewed as the complementary argumentation that fills in the missing link of practical standpoint characteristic of Kantian ethics.

#### 4.2 HOW CAN SELF-CONSTITUTION BE A SUCCESS: METAPHYSICS, PERSONAL IDENTITY AND *ZHI-ZHI* (致知)

Korsgaard delineates at large the notion of self-constitution and how it will affect our appraisals of ourselves. One will regard himself as a success or a failure insofar as one succeeds or fails at this task. Now the question is: how can we make self-constitution a success? As will be clarified in this section, its answer lies in ensuring a universalizable, law-embodiment identity as well as reinforcing the impact of moral agency, both of which seem to be neglected by Korsgaard, whereas highlighting the strengths of Wang’s theory of *liang-zhi*.

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<sup>5</sup> Deliberation and consideration are premised on the dichotomy between subject and object, which is ruled out, according to Confucianism, in the process of self-consummation and realization of the ultimate ontological principle, *tian-li*. That speaks for itself why Wang notes that *liang-zhi* is beyond any deliberation and consideration.

#### 4.2.1 METAPHYSICS AND UNIVERSALITY OF IDENTITY

Korsgaard keeps reiterating that we can account for moral agency and personal identity without resort to any notions of metaphysics. The justification of either one of them is appropriately premised on practical reasons, instead of metaphysical reasons. “The need for identification with some unifying principle or way of choosing is imposed on us by the necessity of making deliberative choices, not by the metaphysical facts” (Korsgaard 1996, 371). On Korsgaard’s view, we are taking a superfluous step by invoking metaphysical concepts to bolster personal identity.

The problem is that Korsgaard’s departure from metaphysics comes at a price. In essence, the identity Korsgaard proposes is a “conception of practical identity,” which is “a description under which you value yourself and find your life worth living and your actions worth undertaking. Conceptions of practical identity include such things as roles and relationships, citizenship, membership in ethnic or religious groups, causes, vocations, professions, and offices” (Korsgaard 2009, 20). This conception of practical identity makes us laws to ourselves. Whether an impulse or a desire could be the reason we act on lies in “whether the maxim of acting on it can be willed as a law by a being with the identity in question” (Korsgaard 2010, 113). If it can be willed as a law, it is a reason. If it cannot be willed as a law, we must reject it.

What is problematic about this characterization is: it leads to the contradiction within Korsgaard’s conception of self-constitution, as well as deviates from her adoption of Kant’s self-legislation. As Cohen puts it:

If morality is to do with law, then the liaison between morality and practical identity is questionable, since the commitments that form my practical identity need not to be things that have the universality characteristic of law. Practical identity is a matter of loyalty and identification, and whereas there is indeed such a thing as loyalty to general principles, there also exists loyalty to family, to group, to another individual; and no credible characterization of what practical identity is, in general terms, would yield a general priority for principled over particularistic identifications. (Cohen 1996, 174-175)

For Korsgaard, “most of the self-conceptions which govern us are contingent” (Korsgaard 2010, 120); that is to say, practical identity is grounded in contingent conditions of a person, such as citizenship, membership in ethnic or religious groups, professions and so on. As such, this identity is not able to make us laws to ourselves; for the instructions or orders it gives are conditional. Cohen correctly indicates that what Korsgaard effectively claims “is not that I be a law to myself, but that I be in command of myself. And sometimes the commands that I issue will be singular, not universal” (Cohen 1996, 176). Therefore, this conception of practical identity is, at best, to be referred to as *command-embodying identity* other than *law-embodying identity*. On top of that, Given what practical identity offers are not so much universal principles as particularistic commands, this in turn conflicts directly with Korsgaard’s articulation of self-constitution wherein “the only way in which you can constitute yourself well is by governing yourself in accordance with *universal principles* which

you can will as laws for every rational being” (Korsgaard 2009, X II). As a result, the “conception of practical identity” inevitably makes self-constitution self-defeating on account of the contingency of its social and natural conditions.

Thus understood, we may say that for self-constitution to be a success, personal identity had better be based upon the type of moral agency that gives universal law. On Kant’s part, it refers to pure practical reason, the cornerstone of his metaphysics of morals. This *universalizable identity* distinguishes itself from the particularity and volatility of *practical identity*. Furthermore, the universality of identity is compatible with personality on grounds that moral behaviors, which can be seen as the embodiment or manifestation of universalizable identity, vary among different people. Since there are a wide range of moral behaviors conducted by people, they also exhibit various characters, virtues, and accordingly distinct personal identities. Practical identities, in Korsgaard’s sense, are in fact the upshot resulted from the interaction between this universal moral agency and our particular roles, relationships, vocations, etc., where the former guides our choices and actions by referring to the latter. In light of this, such universalizable identity is literally the moral identity that underlies our practical identities.<sup>6</sup> Given that Korsgaard adopts Kant’s autonomy and moral law while withdrawing from the metaphysical dimension of his ethics, universal moral identity is replaced by practical identity and consequently a contradiction within her argumentation of self-constitution appears to be unavoidable.

A notable difference between Wang and Korsgaard is that they hold opposite attitudes toward metaphysics. Contrary to Korsgaard, Wang explicitly builds his theory of *liang-zhi* on the Archimedean point that moral practice is the crux where ethics and metaphysics converge. On one level, *liang-zhi* is manifested as our moral agency; on another, it also acts as the metaphysical ground, according to which everything exists. Only by moral acts can we serve as the epitome of metaphysical ground. He asserts that “*liang-zhi* is the source of creation. This creative power creates heaven and earth, spiritual beings, and the Lord. They all come from it” (Chan 1998, 323). Wang makes it clear that *liang-zhi* is precisely *tian-li*, the ontological and moral ground of all existing things. When *liang-zhi* propels us to follow its instructions and orders, it is as if Heaven (*tian*; 天) is propelling us to follow Its instructions and orders. Once man acts according to *liang-zhi*, he embodies it in his

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<sup>6</sup> It behooves us to add that Korsgaard also talks about moral identity grounding our practical identities. Her characterization of moral identity, however, differs in nature from that of our above analysis. On Korsgaard’s view, moral identity is also a kind of practical identity, though at the same time sets itself apart in that it acts as the foundation of all the other practical identities. As a human being, a reflective animal who needs reasons to act and live, practical identities provide us with those reasons. “Most of the time, our reasons for action spring from our more contingent and local identities. But part of the normative force of those reasons spring from the value we place on ourselves as human beings who need such identities.” In other words, moral identity refers to our common need for having a certain practical identity to give us reasons to act and live. In this regard, moral identity is inescapable and pervasive. Consequently, “not every form of practical identity is contingent or relative after all: moral identity is necessary” (Korsgaard 1996, 120-122). It is apparent that moral identity, on Korsgaard’s account, stands for the necessity of having practical identities characteristic of human nature, rather than the moral agency that gives universal moral laws.



behaviors. In this sense, he can be considered as the manifestation of *tian-li*. That is the very significance of the oneness between Heaven and Man (*tian-ren-he-yi*; 天人合一) delineated by Confucianism.

On Wang's account, *liang-zhi* is literally capable of the task of self-legislation. As Wang puts it, "when *xin* motivates us to be filial to our parents, it gives rise to the principle of filial piety. Otherwise, there will be no principle of filial piety. When *xin* motivates us to be loyal to the ruler, it gives rise to the principle of loyalty. Otherwise, there will be no principle of loyalty" (Chan 1998: 166-167). Hence, it is appropriate to say that *liang-zhi* per se makes us laws to ourselves. In addition, Wang also emphasizes that whenever *liang-zhi* is manifested as our moral agency, it carries with it the characteristic of universality in that this manifestation is invariable anytime and anywhere (Chan 1998, 244-245). All of this suggests that what Wang endorses is not that I be in command of myself, but that I be a law to myself. As such, *liang-zhi* is markedly qualified as the law-embodiment identity.

#### 4.2.2 ZHI-ZHI: REINFORCEMENT OF THE IMPACT OF MORAL AGENCY

With regard to self-constitution, apart from illuminating a universalizable, law-embodiment identity, Wang goes one step further and proposes an account of how we can augment the impact of *liang-zhi* and in turn better fulfill the task of self-constitution, namely the approach of *zhi-zhi* (致知).

As was mentioned above, Parfit just pays attention to the passive side of human beings and consequently only sees the existence of brains, bodies as well as Relation R—psychological connectedness and/or psychological continuity. Korsgaard is squarely at odds with him and points out that we have to be as much concerned with the passive and empirical side as with the active and practical side. For Confucianism and Wang Yangming alike, in case we do not take notice of the active and practical dimension within us, the impact of our moral agency will be attenuating over time. Alone with it, our personal identity will also be obscured.

Since personal identity is reified in the active and practical character of our moral agency, it is instrumental to maintain its impact by striving to do everything in accordance with its instructions. To achieve this goal, we must start by following through with instructions or commands from *liang-zhi*, which is called by Wang the endeavor of "*zhi-zhi*" (realizing *liang-zhi*; 致知). For Wang, the ultimate goal of self-constitution is to realize through personal experience the original status of *xin* and keep it magnanimous and impartial without the slightest incorrectness. One critical *modus operandi* is: whenever a motive to love the good arises, actually put it into practice. Whenever a motive to hate the evil arises, actually put it into practice. (Chan 1998, 368) In other words, whenever *liang-zhi* judges something to be good, try to do it and vice versa. However, if *liang-zhi* judges something to be good but you end up not doing said thing, or if *liang-zhi* judges something to be bad but you end up doing said thing, your *liang-zhi* is obscured. And that means you virtually fail at pulling off the task of *zhi-zhi*. (Chan 1998, 368-369)

In the process of *zhi-zhi*, you are conscious of something over and above all your desires, something that is you, and that chooses which option to act on. Wang even metaphorizes the impact of *liang-zhi* by saying that whenever the least desire to act out of accord with the rules of propriety germinates and becomes dominant, you will feel as though cut with a knife and struck with a needle; the feeling will be unbearable, and will not stop until the knife and the needle are removed (Chan 1963, 81)<sup>7</sup>. To put it another way, it is when the moral agency characteristic of “the identity at any given time” in Korsgaard’s sense is in full force. This approach of reinforcing moral agency is what Confucianism has been practicing and improving over time in order to make self-constitution a success.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Close examination reveals that Wang and Korsgaard have one thing in common: they both endorse the idea of moral agency as the basis of personal identity. We express a unique personal identity when acting as the chooser of our desires and the author of our movements. Moral agency is precisely the unifying ground on which these roles come into play. Our true identities are, so to speak, exhibited and constituted in the process of making moral decisions and executing moral actions. On top of that, in order for the comparative study between Wang and Korsgaard to be a constructive engagement, we further go over both theses in terms of two issues: how to fortify practical standpoint and make self-constitution a success.

Korsgaard makes the case that personal identity could be established from practical standpoint. The dichotomy between practical and theoretical facts, however, leads to the conclusion that the former is at best a postulate that cannot be theoretically justified. It likewise implies that sense perception or impression is accredited as the only legitimate access to theoretical truth. The problem is that sensory experience and practical experience alike should be seen as the integral part of our existential experience, and thus equally has justificatory power with respect to philosophical argumentation. We confirm our practical experience via practical justification, that is, the self-consciousness or awareness of our hands-on experience. By ensuring the legitimacy of this kind of justification, practical standpoint literally reestablishes its status as one of the approaches to theoretical truth. From Wang’s perspective, *zhi-xing-he-yi* makes it clear that moral agency can be justified through our practical experience. Confirming the existence of *liang-zhi* (and accordingly personal identity) rests on embodying it in our moral behaviors. Practical justification refers to the capacity of *liang-zhi* to grasp the activity of itself along with the content of mental acts of willing. The self-consciousness of *liang-zhi* accompanies at all times the process of our examining thoughts and motivations, making a choice, and putting the instructions of *liang-zhi* into practice. Practical experience is an existential fact, something we experientially confirm as true, other than a presupposition we simply

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<sup>7</sup> This English translation is from *IFPL* by Wing-tsit, Chan.

regard as true. In this score, Wang's viewpoint can be regarded as a complement to Korsgaard's articulation of practical standpoint.

On the other hand, Korsgaard manages to sever the connection between moral agency and metaphysics. The consequence of this position results in the contradiction between two inextricable parts of self-constitution: self-legislation and practical identity, inasmuch as the universality of moral law required by self-legislation conflicts with the contingency characteristic of practical identity. For Wang's part, he establishes *liang-zhi* as the kind of moral agency that gives universal moral laws on grounds that it acts as both the manifestation of metaphysical principle and universal moral capacity. What Korsgaard actually asserts is a command-embodying identity, whereas Wang endorses a law-embodying identity. What is more, Wang proposes an approach by which self-constitution will be coming to a good end. We are closing in on making self-constitution a success every time we comply with the instruction of *liang-zhi* and put it into practice, which is dubbed by Wang the approach of *zhi-zhi*.

The above analysis then brings up the issue of their divergence that keeps our discussion from embroiling in the debate between moral realism and moral constructivism. First, in light of *liang-zhi*'s status as a metaphysical entity rather than a mere procedure, Wang and Korsgaard disagree over the nature of moral agency. Suffice it to say that Wang cannot be seen as a constructivist in Korsgaard's sense. Next, as was indicated by Formosa, the taxonomic structure of moral realism and constructivism is itself contested and imprecise; for constructivism can be read as rejecting realism (Habermas), bracketing realism (O'Neill), and as a specific form of realism, namely procedural (Korsgaard) or weak (Milo) realism (Formosa 2011, 171-172).<sup>8</sup> Aside from that, Korsgaard's procedural constructivism falls, as Formosa points out, under the category of 'all the way down' constructivists, who claims that the content of the moral law and its rational bindingness rest on actual act of willing on behalf of those bound by the law (Formosa 2011, 179). Given Wang sees actual act of willing as *yi*, instead of *liang-zhi*, it is even more evident that Wang does not hold a so-called constructivist view such as Korsgaard's.

In conclusion, by focusing on the notion of personal identity and moral agency, we explore the potential of accounting for Wang Yangming's theory of *liang-zhi* in

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<sup>8</sup> In more detail, if we talk about realism in the weak sense (the viewpoint that some moral judgments are true), it follows that this realism is compatible with any types of constructivists. When it comes to realism in the strong sense (the viewpoint that there exists an "independent moral order" to which our true moral judgments correctly correspond), however, the incompatibility is obvious in the case of 'all the way down' constructivists other than not 'all the way down' constructivists. It is because both not 'all the way down' constructivist and his strong realist counterpart claim, contra 'all the way down' constructivists' construal, that the content of the moral law and its rational bindingness is independent of any actual act of willing on behalf of those bound by the law. Their disagreement is, strictly speaking, about whether the value of rational agency can be given independently of the procedure of lawmaking. For not 'all the way down' constructivists, the moral law or categorical imperative is a procedure for constructing valid maxims and thereby for conferring objective goodness on self-chosen permissible ends, whereas strong realists starts with an account that the value of rational agency must be given independently of the procedure and only if this can be done will the categorical imperative be properly grounded (Formosa 2011, 172-174).

the context of contemporary debates between Korsgaard and Parfit. In this process, the consensus between Wang and Korsgaard is clear to us and the former's discourse of *liang-zhi*, in one way or another, can be viewed as a complement to Korsgaard's formulation of practical standpoint and self-constitution. In addition, one added benefit of this comparative project is that there are the similarities shared not only by Wang and Korsgaard, but also by Wang and Kant in terms of arguing for universalizable, law-embodying identity as well as the moral approach to metaphysics, among others. For that matter, now we might well be simply scratching the surface of a wealth of productive comparative studies.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> One anonymous referee of this article points out that Wang seems to have more in common with Kant than Korsgaard does. The similarities shared by Kant's Pure Practical Reason and Wang's *liang-zhi* include these. (1) Every rational agent possesses it; it is the same in everyone. It cannot change or be lost. (2) It is innate, not acquired. One need only exercise it. (3) To exercise it means one is free of control by one's selfish desires and inclinations. (4) If one is not determined to act and think by one's inclinations and desires, one is lead to be moral by it. (5) It is a source of completely reliable moral knowledge. (6) It is practical in nature, and can respond morally and correctly in any practical situation. (7) They presuppose complex metaphysics that many contemporary analytic philosophers question, Kant's presupposition of three practical postulates, for example. (8) Our true self is found in it. Given these similarities, the reviewer claims, there is significant material for a comparative project between Wang and Kant as well as between where Wang and Kant differ from contemporary Kantians. This proposition, in effect, not only sheds new light on how to look at the debate between contemporary Kantians, but echoes, for the most part, the interpretation of Kant's autonomy in the works of Mou Zong-san, one representative figure of Contemporary Neo-Confucianism (Mou 1968, 115-189). Mou has devoted himself to the comparative study of Kant's philosophy (e.g. the conception of autonomy, practical standpoint and intellectual intuition, among others) and Confucianism and thereby highlights the consensus shared particularly by Kant, Mencius, Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yangming, the so-called *xin-xue* (心學) tradition. This line of thought is likewise well elaborated and cemented by Mou's disciple, Lee Ming-huei (See Lee 1990). In light of above analysis, comparative studies of Confucian and Kantian ethics could be regarded as the resource to churn out productive academic writings.

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