

IN MEMORIAM: ADAM MORTON 1945-2020

Adam Morton, Canada Research Chair in Epistemology and Decision Theory at Department of Philosophy, University of Alberta, Canada, and a founding member of the Advisory Board of this journal *Comparative Philosophy*, passed away on 22nd October 2020 in Vancouver, Canada, after a long-term progressive multiple sclerosis. Adam has made valuable contributions to the development of this peer-reviewed open-access international journal in philosophy both as an Advisory Board member and as its peer reviewer. More generally, Adam has significantly and persistently contributed to international cooperation in philosophy and cross-tradition philosophical engagement in the past decades.

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Adam was born in London, England, on 22nd April 1945 and moved to Canada in 1954. He enrolled at McGill University in 1963 completing a joint major in mathematics and philosophy. He received his PhD in philosophy at Princeton University, USA, in 1971, under the supervision of Paul Benacerraf. Adam then taught at Princeton University and the University of Ottawa, Canada. In 1980 at the age of 35, Adam took up the Chair in Philosophy at the University of Bristol, UK, and stayed for more than two decades (1980-2000). Then, after a short teaching stint at University of Oklahoma in the USA, Adam assumed a Canada Research Chair in Epistemology and Decision Theory at University of the Alberta until his retirement in 2011. Then he followed his wife Susanna Braund, Canada Research Chair in Latin Poetry and its Reception, to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, where he held his philosophy appointment through much of the 2010s. Adam was President of the Aristotelian Society in the UK in 1998-99 and President of the Canadian Philosophical Association in 2013-14. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2006.

Adam is an internationally renowned scholar, and his work ranged widely across epistemology, ethics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, decision-making, logic, philosophy of mathematics, meta-philosophy and philosophical methodology. He was the author of the following monograph books: *Frames of Mind: Constraints on the Common-Sense Conception of the Mental* (Oxford University Press, 1980), *Disasters and Dilemmas: strategies for real-life decision-making* (Blackwell, 1990), *The Importance of Being Understood: folk psychology as ethics* (Routledge 2002), *On Evil* (Routledge 2005), *Bounded Thinking: Intellectual Virtues for Limited Agents* (Oxford University Press, 2012), *Emotion and Imagination* (Polity Press, 2013). Adam is also the author of the two textbooks, *A Guide through the Theory of Knowledge* (1st

ed. Dickenson, 1977; 2nd & 3rd eds. Blackwell, 1997 and 2002) and *Philosophy in Practice: An Introduction to the Main Problems* (Blackwell, 1996, 2004). He is contributing editor of the anthology volumes: *Benacerraf and His Critics* (co-edited with Stephen Stich) (Blackwell 1996). During the final years of his life, Adam worked on and published his last book, *Should We Colonize Other Planets?* (Polity, 2018).

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Adam has actively participated in international academic cooperation and exchange, which can be traced back to the earlier years of his educational background and career development as highlighted in the preceding section. Adam received his college and graduate education respectively in Canada and USA; he taught and did research in USA, Canada, and UK, and then back to USA and finally in Canada. In the first half of his life journey (1945-1987), the international outreach of Adam's academic education and career lies in his moving around the three major English-speaking countries in the geographic "West". In the second half starting in 1988, Adam extended his front of philosophical exploration further worldwide beyond the "West" both in the "horizontal" geographic dimension and in the "vertical" in-depth dimension of cross-tradition philosophical exploration.

In the summer of 1988, Adam made his academic visit to Beijing, China, in the "East" part of the geographical world from the "West" part. Adam then joined a group of British renowned philosophers coming to my then institution, the Institute of Philosophy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); they gave several-week-long lecture series on a range of jointly-concerned philosophical issues, including P. F. Strawson's on metaphysics and Adam's on the philosophical issue of truth. Adam's topic is one of several fascinating philosophical issues that had motivated me to change my primary reflective interest and intellectual focus to philosophy after receiving my BS in math. As one member of the coordinating team on this academic-exchange event, I was then entitled to choose which lecturer's translator I would serve as; though serving as the translator for Strawson's lecture series would mean some substantial benefits, I chose to be the translator for Adam's lecture series, purely out of my strong philosophical interest in its topic. That is the beginning point at which Adam and I became to know each other, to be further addressed at the more personal level in the next section.

Indeed, during that time, many people in the Chinese philosophical circle, especially the younger generation, were interested in looking at a range of jointly concerned philosophical issues both from the points of view of classical Chinese philosophy and Marxist philosophy (two major frameworks of doing philosophy during that time in China) and from the point of view of contemporary analytic philosophy, which was then less recognized in the Chinese philosophical circle. In my memory, in the discussion sessions of Adam's lecture series, some of the questions raised by the audience were related to how relevant resources to the philosophical issue of truth from Chinese philosophy and from contemporary analytic philosophy can talk to and learn from each other. Though I cannot remember exactly how these questions were presented and how Adam replied and discussed them after three decades (my

translation notes were unfortunately lost after several moves abroad), one thing is certain: this academic visit in China and the critical discussions on the jointly-concerned philosophical issue of truth have contributed to, and enhanced, Adam's interest in cross-tradition philosophical engagement at the "vertical" in-depth level besides the "horizontal" outreach of his research in the analytic tradition to the front of international exchange and cooperation.

To my knowledge, such cross-tradition engagement interest and research work in Adam's case has primarily manifested themselves through his further exploration of some meta-philosophical issue and meta-methodological issues in a widespread cross-tradition engagement background concerning analytic tradition and a variety of non-analytic traditions. In the two decades since 1999, I have initiated and coordinated a number of the international collective "constructive-engagement" anthology projects; the first one (1999-2001) is to look at how Chinese philosophy and Western analytic philosophy as two representative traditions (which in the literature are oft rendered remote or even opposed having merely marginal value to each other) can talk to and learn from each other, as shown in the title of its anthology volume *"Two Roads to Wisdom?—Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions"*. Adam is one contributing author to this anthology project with his essay "Philosophy as Engineering": in this essay, having re-examined the nature of philosophical inquiries, he challenges one traditional image of philosophy as math and/or science only and argues for the thesis that philosophy is like engineering, emphasizing that the "Is it true?" pursuit and the "Will it work?" pursuit can be unified, rather than separate, through various kinds of models mediating between theories and data.¹

Adam served as one founding member (2002-2020) of the Advisory Board of the International Society for Comparative Study of Chinese and Western philosophy (a non-profit, independent international philosophical society, 'ISCWP' for short) with its explicit emphasis on "the constructive engagement between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy" (cited from ISCWP Constitution), for which I served the founding president. In the past decade, Adam also served as one founding member (2010-2020) of the Advisory Board of this journal, *Comparative Philosophy*, with its emphasis as highlighted by the journal's subtitle *"An International Journal of Constructive Engagement of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy"*.

I have consulted Adam more or less for some strategic things and specific treatments concerning the foregoing association's and journal's affairs; Adam always gave his insightful advice and thoughtful suggestions timely (typically within one day, even when he was unable to type but had to rely on dictation software in the last few years of his life).

¹ Adam Morton (1999), "Philosophy as Engineering", in Bo Mou (ed.), *Two Roads to Wisdom?—Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court), 45-55. The Chinese translation of this essay (translated by 祝和軍 [ZHU Hejun] and trans. checked by 彭國華 [PENG Guohua]) is forthcoming in 牟博 [Mou, Bo] (ed.) (in Chinese), *《中國哲學研究的方法論反思: 比較哲學與哲學分析》* [*Reflections on Methodology in Studies of Chinese Philosophy: Comparative Philosophy and Philosophical Analysis*] (Beijing: 商務印書館 [The Commercial Press]; forthcoming: 2021).

At the more personal level, Adam is a long-term mentor-like figure in my own personal research and career development. For me, Adam is an exemplar both in the academic sense of being a constructively-engaging philosopher and in the moral sense of being a genuine *jun-zi* (to be explained below), whom I have admired.

Adam is among the first several critical readers of (a complete version or central chapters of) the manuscript of each of my three distinct but closely related monograph projects, i.e., *Substantive Perspectivism: An Essay on Philosophical Issue of Truth* (2009), *Semantic-Truth Approaches in Chinese Philosophy: A Unifying Pluralist Account* (2019), and *Cross-Tradition Engagement in Philosophy: A Constructive-Engagement Account* (2020); he is the only critical reader who read the key chapters of all the three manuscripts before their publications. Though the first two projects are respectively about the debate between deflationism and substantivism in contemporary philosophy and about relevant resources in classical Chinese philosophy, they are more generally about the jointly concerned philosophical issue of truth; the third one in its crucial part on theoretic foundation essentially addresses the fundamental philosophical issue concerning the relationship between language, thought and reality, which is partially based on my previous work on the issue of truth. Though, as mentioned in the preceding section, the philosophical issue of truth on which Adam focused on in his 1988 lecture series in Beijing is one of several fascinating philosophical issues that had motivated me to change my primary reflective interest and intellectual focus to philosophy after my undergraduate study in math, my serious academic work on the issue started with the two events in the late eighties: one is my translator work for Adam's lecture series on this topic in 1988, and the other my work of translating into Chinese a dozen of Donald Davidson's representative essays on truth and meaning a bit earlier on. In this sense, and to this extent, Adam witnessed the whole process of my scholarly work on the philosophical issue of truth, specifically speaking, and the fundamental issue concerning the relationship between language, thought and reality in a broad cross-tradition engaging setting, more generally speaking. My deep debt goes to Adam whose inspiration, encouragement, critical commentary, and engaging discussion endure throughout my long journey on these research projects.

Adam is not only an exemplar figure to me in philosophical pursuit but also an exemplar in moral character understood in a broad way. Insofar as I can tell it based on my first-hand experience, Adam had a broad, warm and good heart while having a strong sense of justice and uprightness. On the one hand, he loved helping people develop; he treated others nicely; he was a modest and humble scholar without pretentious arrogance; he loved life and doing physical exercises (such as cycling and hiking) with his optimistic attitude. On the other hand, he had a strong sense of justice and maintained the due principle of morality. (Early last year when I consulted him about how to look at disagreements in treating some issues involving basic moral principles, he shared a story: when he still taught in UK, there was a disagreement among the board members on some serious issue related to social justice and fair treatment; he was the only one voting to disagree to the treatment firmly in accordance with his sense of justices and fairness while the others made the compromise for this

and that considerations.) Though I am not sure if there would be one ready-made term in English to capture his moral character as whole, there is one two-character phrase in Chinese, ‘君子’ (*jun-zi*),² which can pointedly and suitably capture the unifying power that underlies these specific moral traits that are addressed above for what kind of person Adam was: Adam is a genuine *jun-zi* both inward and outward.

One example in the final months before his death can well illustrate Adam’s *jun-zi* character. In late May 2020 I received Adam’s last email in which, implicitly giving the message of his upcoming death in indefinite terms, he was explicitly concerned with how to help others: “I foresee a time when I won’t be able to write letters of recommendation. That time is not now, so this letter is not a withdrawal from writing them. Its point is to urge you to line up alternatives or replacements in case they are necessary” (an excerpt from Adam’s email of 22 May 2020). In the “definite” final months of his life, Adam still thought about, and was concerned with, how to help others, though I then didn’t realize the “definite” timeline already there, as I have learnt later that, in late April around his 75th birthday, Adam made his final decision to choose the date of 22th October 2020 (exactly the date he turned 75.5 years old) on which to end his natural life with the medical assistance.

When I am writing this memorial article, it is around 100 days since I knew of Adam’s passing away on 22th October 2020—in the old tradition at my home town, the 100-day moment is a major one for a memorial service for the dead. At this moment I have still felt deeply sad and missed Adam whenever thinking of his “*jun-zi*”-style life, his kindness, his persistent encouragement, and his sincere help in the past three decades. Indeed, such an object-of-thought bond is part of me as a whole person. Isn’t this one substantial way in which Adam still alive via such a bond? Adam died, but in the addressed way he does not really perish and thus enjoys his genuine longevity, through his philosophy publications, via his images in the thoughts of many people who know or know of him, and by way of such words as these given here.³

Bo Mou
30th January 2021

² The term ‘君子’ (*jun-zi*) in Chinese expresses the person of nobility. As suggested by the literal sense (“the son/daughter of a ruler”) of this term, historically especially before Confucius’ times, one’s nobility had been associated with one’s blood connection with the ruler; Confucius revolutionarily transformed the basic meaning of this term in moral contexts: it means a morally superior person fully with the fundamental virtue 仁 (*ren*) that has nothing to do with the blood connection with the ruler. Afterwards, as the Chinese cultural/philosophical tradition has somehow developed with the essentially complementary role jointly played by both Confucianism and (philosophical) Daoism among others, the term embodies a holistically understood moral nobility that unifies distinct but complementary virtues as primarily addressed in Confucian and Daoist resources; this bears on the folk notion of “*jun-zi*”, though it is hard to give an absolute Socrates-style general definition of it.

³ Some of the historical facts mentioned here are based on the following sources: (1) Adam’s own website <<http://www.fernieroad.ca/a/index.html>>; (2) the memorial piece of 29th October 2020 by Department of Philosophy, the University of British Columbia <<https://philosophy.ubc.ca/news/adam-morton-april-22-1945-october-22-2020/>>. I am grateful to Susanna Braun for letting me know several facts and to Joe Glover for suggesting a number of word modifications in one draft of this writing.