Order & Revolt

Debating the Principles of Eastern & Western Social Thought

Edited by Wayne Cristaudo, Heung Wah Wong, and Sun Youzhong

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Bridge21 Publications

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Distributed by Transaction Publishers
10 Corporate Place South, Suite 102
Piscataway, NJ 08854

For information contact Bridge21 Publications, LLC, 11111 Santa Monica Blvd, Suite 220, Los Angeles, CA 90025.

Published in the United States
Cover Design by Chi-Wai Li
Copyedited by Peg Goldstein
ISBN 978-1-62643-004-4 Paperback /
978-1-62643-005-1 Electronic book text

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013948949

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Preface

We Need John Dewey to Understand
Confucius and Vice Versa.
Or Philosophers Need Anthropologists and Vice Versa

Wong Heung Wah

It is my great honor to be invited to edit this book with Professor Wayne Cristaudo and Professor Sun Youzhong at the later stage of this publication project. As an anthropologist who received almost no serious training in philosophy, I am not sure whether I deserve such a great honor. Anthropologists have devoted themselves to understanding "the other," which I believe necessarily involves cross-cultural comparisons. Dialogue with other cultures is the discipline's essential skill. In other words, the general goal of this book, which is to compare the so-called holistic model of Oriental thought and the Western mode of revolutionary tradition, is anthropologists' normal practice. To understand the other, anthropologists have to take two basic steps. The first step is to involve ourselves deeply in the culture we are to understand through long-term ethnographic fieldwork. The second step is to lie back and understand other cultures *creatively* from an external vantage. That external vantage can be our own culture or another culture. Without these two steps, the task of understanding other cultures cannot really be completed. We need another culture to understand other cultures; and in the context of this book, we need Confucius's harmonious thought to understand John Dewey's pragmatism and vice versa. The same might be said of the much less known relationship between Lao Tzu and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, with each one posing a challenge to the more harmonious functionalist view of society provided by Dewey and Confucius. They need each other to achieve mutual understanding. That is to say, comparing Confucius with John Dewey, or Rosenstock-Huessy to Lao Tzu, is not just to point out their differences; through such differences we can better understand

Confucius *and* John Dewey, Lao Tzu *and* Rosenstock-Huessy, the Oriental harmonious whole *and* the Western mode of revolutionary thought. It is in this sense that this philosophy book is also an anthropological exercise, and what the philosophers are doing here is also relevant to the work of their anthropology colleagues. This may be one reason I was invited to join this publication.

Although I am not interested in commenting on the abstract relevance of Confucius in the current sociopolitical situation of China, I think that Confucius's tradition of harmony and order does serve as a mode of thought that structures contingent events in particular ways and thus results in particular historical paths of China, which further makes China historically distinct from its counterparts in the West. It is in this general sense that China's historical processes are guided by Confucius's harmonious whole. Confucius's thoughts are therefore relevant in understanding China. A book like this publication project is extremely useful to anthropologists studying China. Confucius's harmonious whole, however, cannot be deterministic because the events themselves, though contingent or even chaotic, can, as many previous ethnographic studies of China have effectively showed, very often impact and thus transform the general historical path of China. It follows that an anthropology of events is also necessary in understanding the historical courses of China. Perhaps this is another reason I was invited to participate in this book project.

Introduction

Wayne Cristaudo

To the extent that Western political philosophy can be said to begin with Plato's *Republic*, we can rightly say that it originates in the search for political and social harmony. In the East, although Confucius's reflections and instructions for political order lack the speculative dimension that enables Plato to contemplate the best political reality as a pure form or idea from which he may assess the relative disorder of existing political life, Confucius is nevertheless also driven by the question of how to achieve social and political harmony. While not denying the important differences that evolved in China and the West that may be traced back to the peculiar speculative and methodological fork that characterizes Western philosophy, Confucius and Plato and their followers do share a fundamental conviction that the preservation of social order and harmony is the central task of political wisdom or philosophy. But there is another tradition, one that is also common to both East and West. That is a tradition that emphasizes freedom over harmony—or to say it another way, a tradition that sees that the danger of harmonizing potentially conflictual relationships and forces is that it limits the creation of things ex nihilo. Such a tradition involves a certain kind of faith—a faith in the prospect that the unleashing of spontaneous energies will create a better world than one that seeks to harmonize already existing potencies. Revolutions are invariably acts of such faith. And neither China as it exists today nor the West can be understood unless one considers their respective revolutionary underpinnings. Revolutions, though, are the antithesis of harmony, at least of those harmonious orders that obstruct forces striving to shake up an old world and replace it with a new one. Eventually, though, revolutions settle down, new orders with their own dynamics are established, and new ruling elites, in their turn, seek to harmonize the forces under their control. Thus it is that the reality we are

part of is one in which such fundamental concepts as harmony and order, spontaneity and revolt are intrinsic to political philosophy.

This volume is an attempt at an East/West exploration of the significance of those concepts within their respective traditions. In this respect the volume is intended as a contribution to a much larger dialogue about values taking place between East and West. I also hope it might be a contribution to dealing with challenges and problems that are common to East and West. Certainly my own motivation, which expressed in a dialogue with coeditor Sun Youzhong helped give birth to this volume, was a problem I see as a global one, and the problem is encapsulated in a question: In spite of the downfall of state-regulated economies, in spite of the ensconcing of rights-based liberalism in much of the industrial world—which of course does not include China—are we living in an age that is becoming increasingly totalitarian? More sharply focused and more conspicuously aligned with the topic of this volume: Is the search for greater social and political harmony contributing to a more totalizing and controlling kind of world that threatens to suffocate spontaneity? Readers of Adorno or even Weber might be sympathetic to this question, for they at least are less likely to consider Soviet or Nazi totalitarianism to be exhaustive. The kind of totalitarianism incorporated in the above question is one in which human beings are increasingly cogs in a vast machine, a machine that may well be dedicated to profit and comfort and that, unlike Nazism or Soviet-styled communism, has no need or desire to monopolize the political process, conquer other lands, or simply exterminate the chosen enemy. Rather the above question is directed at the extent of enmeshment of rules and laws that are intended to produce a benign order—a great harmonious society that conforms to the ideas and plans of a group of people who ostensibly mean well for everybody but that ultimately suffocates the human creativity and expression of vital powers that surface and become active only in climates of freedom.

I do not know the answer to the question—that is, I do not know if the tendencies that to me smack of totalitarianism will be victorious, but I am deeply sympathetic to the idea that the conscious attempt to create ever more order and harmony may be contributing to a way of life where we become ever more machinelike. To an important extent, this fear was one of the most dominant fears of the twentieth century, articulated repeatedly by artists and writers such as the Dadaists, expressionists, surrealists, and situationists and expressed in popular music by such figures as Bob Dylan, Pink Floyd, Devo, and Radiohead. Just as the modernist dream first finds its full-blown modernist formulation in Descartes (and Bacon),

the pedigree of skepticism toward the neat symmetries between comfort, mechanization, and freedom that included thinkers as diverse as the Romantics, Tocqueville, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche can be traced at least as far back as Descartes's nemesis, Pascal. And even if, as seemed tenable until Islamism reminded the world otherwise, the rule of law and free enterprise emerged from the ideological wars not only as natural allies but as seemingly unassailable ingredients of the best possible future for everybody, the fear of the buttresses of modern order forming an asphyxiating totality has never been completely assuaged by economic boom times or ideological victories.

This was, as I have suggested, the opening question that lay behind the dialogue between Sun Youzhong and me, and the conversation that led us to hold a conference at the University of Hong Kong on the topic of this volume. I had just completed a large book on the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig and a relatively unknown thinker, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, who in 1946 wrote a highly provocative chapter that argued that the philosophies of John Dewey and Confucius share some deep affinities, which he saw as totalitarian in the sense alluded to above. He argued that they shared a kind of ultrafunctionalism, not very different in fact from the kind of reasoning that has become ensconced in the managerial revolution that has been sweeping part of the globe for twenty years or so now. (He was, I might add, an opponent of managerialism avant la lettre.) Against them he appealed to what was invaluable and enduring in what he saw as Lao Tzu's refusal to be caught up in the Confucian functionalist social vision. And he integrated Lao Tzu's thinking with his own emphasis on the importance of spontaneity, of things unplanned, of things coming literally out of nothing, and with his reading of the world we now inhabit together as the end result—what he called in an early book "the wedding" of war and revolution.

Sun Youzhong, on the other hand, is an admirer of John Dewey, and when we first spoke of these matters, he told me that he had recently attended a conference on Confucius and Dewey. He believed in the seriousness of the issues we were discussing, and while he was not completely dismissive of Rosenstock-Huessy's arguments, he thought that Confucius and Dewey have much to offer in creating a better world. He was also sure that Confucius and Dewey scholars would welcome such a dialogue around the concepts of spontaneity and revolution, harmony and order, thus also giving them an opportunity to present their case in light of these kinds of criticism.

Ultimately what interested me and Sun Youzhong was not so much whether Rosenstock-Huessy was or was not an adequate interpreter of Dewey and Confucius (we were not primarily interested in scholarship that simply demonstrates that Y does not understand X) but the issues that Dewey, Confucius, and Rosenstock-Huessy were addressing and how they addressed them. For my part I welcomed a forthright exchange of points of view. And the exchange at the conference was wonderfully forthright. For example, Roger Ames, the celebrated North American Confucian scholar who has a paper in this collection and who wrote a very important book with David Hall, *Democracy of the Dead: Dewey, Confucius, and the Hope for Democracy in China*,[1] arguing for the value of fusing Dewey and Confucius for China's future, said he thought Rosenstock-Huessy was wrong on Dewey, Confucius, and Christianity (the tradition Rosenstock-Huessy appeals to against Dewey and Confucius)—though I thought everything in Ames's paper, and indeed in all papers discussing Confucianism and/or Dewey at the conference, confirmed precisely what Rosenstock-Huessy was saying! Ultimately, though, I think the question of whether Rosenstock-Huessy's or Roger Ames's assessment of Dewey and Confucius is more accurate is not nearly as important as the questions and dialogue that may emerge from closer scrutiny of the concepts of order and harmony and spontaneity and revolt that form the basis of his provocation. This was really the point of the dialogue.

Anyone familiar with twentieth-century Western philosophy is aware of the antitotalizing motif shared by thinkers such as Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Levinas, and Derrida, but as Robert Allinson indicates in his "Hegel, Lao Tzu, and Bohr: The Merging of Traditions," there remains a hankering for holism and dialectical reconciliation shared by many Westerners (such as Niels Bohr), who find in both Confucius and Lao Tzu a source of inspiration for an integrated view of life in which opposites each have their part to play. On the other hand, Han Rui argues in "Justice and Confucian Harmony," in a paper that draws heavily upon John Rawls, that the complexities of modern life create rifts that simply may not be harmonized but that nevertheless may be dealt with justly. In this respect she identifies serious limits to what Confucianism has to offer the modern world. Interestingly, Han Rui too appeals to Dewey, but unlike Ames, she does so to highlight the difference between his kind of liberalism and Confucianism.

When Professor Sun and I set upon this undertaking, we also decided that the examination of concepts should be extended beyond Confucius and Dewey to include contributors who could throw more cross-cultural

light on the concepts we thought should form the basis of the discussion. Thus Donald Sturgeon, a PhD candidate at the University of Hong Kong, contributed a chapter on Mohism, a philosophy that had little traditional impact upon China but that was conceived as an alternative to Confucianism. Moreover, with the contributions of Alexander Dolin's "Japan: The Romanticist Revolt against the Empire" and Waddick Doyle's "Saintly Rebels: Gandhi, the Emir Abdel Kader, and the Philosophy of Positive Passivity," we had two excellent papers that may broadly be grouped under the East perspective and that are very pertinent to the discussion. From the Western side of things, we also were fortunate to receive Hélène Landemore's "Two Concepts of Order: An Essay on Harmony and Order versus Spontaneity and Revolt in Western Thought," which is an excellent analysis of the tensions surrounding the central concepts in Western philosophy in this volume. I think she has presented a powerful and persuasive analysis clarifying the dynamism at the heart of the Western tradition. Also extremely relevant for our purposes is Miran Bozovic's "Diderot's Energistic Philosophy and the Sublime in Evil." He goes even further than Landemore in that his analysis brings up the modern Western fascination with the demonic and how the dynamism of modernity needs to be understood as the harnessing of the energy of evil. A commonplace erroneous claim is that European culture rests upon its privileging of rational order, reason writ large. Jacques Derrida, whose position is much more nuanced than that frequently ascribed to him, is often cited for his attack upon European/Western logocentrism. Funnily enough, the one current of the West that would most *seem* to fit this picture, the Enlightenment, does not completely fit into the template of such a critique. Denis Diderot, as Bozovic's introduction to his essay correctly points out, is in a line of thinkers for whom energy rather than rational order is predominant—yet he is also a key figure in the Enlightenment. In 1797 the German critic Friedrich Schlegel noted the tendency of modern poetry to Satanism [2] —a tendency that would become fully blown with Charles Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*. Bozovic's paper focuses on Diderot rather than on that tradition as a whole, but the reasons provided by Diderot for evil's sublimity are far from idiosyncratic and provide an important cipher about what may be called the power of the negative of harmonious order. The close alliance between Enlightenment and revolution finds its point of contiguity precisely in Diderot's fathoming of the sublimity of evil and the primacy of energy over moral order.

Although, as I have suggested, we were not limiting our discussion to Chinese perspectives, I think it fair to say that what makes the discussion

particularly important now is the acceleration of China–West relations taking place over the last decade or so. And if I may, I would like to use this introduction to expand on the rationale behind my own thinking, which also makes the case for the timeliness of this topic.

How we came to have the world we have is a question with a very complicated answer, but I venture to say that had it not been for the string of revolutions in the West, culminating in the Russian Revolution, it is highly unlikely that we would have a world even remotely like this one. There is nothing triumphalist in this statement—revolutions are not only terrifying, but they occur because of what is wrong in a tradition, not what is right in it. However, revolutions invariably create hitherto unforeseen ways of *making* men and women. Revolutions inevitably smash inherited social foundations and traditional sources of appeal while establishing new pathways into the future. While those new pathways are without precedent, inevitably—as Montesquieu grasped from his observations of the English Revolution and as he explained while trying to prevent a French Revolution—the heirs of the revolution find they must restore some, and even a large part, of what the revolution hoped to consign to oblivion. Yet what is restored functions in a thoroughly new context, and thus the potencies it discharges are of a very different order and take on a different array of effects than what they had originally unleashed or been designed for. One example of this process is Confucianism. The Confucius who has been restored from the Communist Party's earlier banishment finds himself required to be a teacher to a people struggling to harmonize a market-driven economy aiming at high levels of personal wealth for all its members. That is, Confucius is being called upon to help stop the social disintegration that invariably accompanies every nation drastically and rapidly changing the nature of its social relationships. I am rather skeptical of what this restored Confucius can do, but others in this volume find there is still much to draw from his well for the future of China, and possibly even beyond. They may well be correct. In any case, restorations happen when revolutions run out of steam, when the only way forward is back. Heritages are forces that operate behind our backs—revolutions occur when heritages break backs, when they no longer provide key members of a social group (usually young, disillusioned, educated, and daring men) with a future they think is worth having. What men like Sun Yat Sen, Chiang Kai Chek, and Mao Tse Tung had in common was that in trying to save China from a heritage that they saw as no longer offering a desirable future, they all took their cues from revolutionary ideas, processes, and institutions that came from nonautochthonous heritages.