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国际价值研究学会 (ISVI)

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价值论与伦理学研究

(2017下半年卷)

AXIOLOGY AND ETHICS

(2017 Volume II)



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卷首语

从价值论与伦理学的关系来看，两者有着千丝万缕的密切关联。我们知道，自价值论的重要性在近代被凸显以来，作为一个极其重要的哲学范畴，价值论开始在世界范围内得到广泛研究。不论是关于科学真理的“智慧”，还是关于社会实践的“明智”，正如亚里士多德所说，这是值得追求的价值，也是高尚的德性。对休谟所做出的具有开创意义的“价值判断”与“事实判断”的区分而言，价值判断的重要范畴“应当”也是伦理学研究的重要范畴。就整体而言，对人类社会的可持续性发展来说，一个至关重要的价值是伦理道德规范，所谓“为万世开太平”往往意味着伦理秩序的井然有序与和谐统一。

长期以来，哲学一直被冠以高深莫测，甚至像一种不食人间烟火的存在。实际上哲学与现实息息相关，价值论与伦理学研究的领域尤其如此。那些一心专注于哲学研究的哲学家们和那些爱好智慧、追求真理的学者们一直在用自己的不懈努力诠释着这一科学之科学的深奥理论，为我们提供理性思维的反思和实践行为的引导。《价值论与伦理学研究》这一集刊正是这些“爱智慧者”辛勤付出的体现。

本期设有“英文专题”，刊载外国伦理学家的真知灼见，使我们开放性地了解在不同文化背景下的哲学问题和观点；还有“农村社区伦理研究”专栏，分析当前城乡二元化社会下存在的农村伦理道德规范问题；而“西方价值与伦理”“理论前沿”专栏能够为我们提供较为新颖的研究视角；我们还可以在“社会热点”专栏看到哲学视角下的社会热点问题，同时还可以通过“书评”专栏了解学界的最新成果。

价值论与 伦理学研究 录 2017 下半年卷

英文专题

阴阳与道德情感主义	[美] 迈克尔·斯洛特 / 003
亚当·斯密与道德事实	[美] 茱莉亚·德莱芙 / 016

农村社区伦理研究

告别“人情”，回归真情	
——谈农村社区伦理构建的情感之路	李家莲 / 037
角色与功能：乡村精英在村庄治理中的作用分析	
——以湖北省枝江市 Z 村为例	郭希同 朱必法 / 047
论传统道德在建设农村伦理型社区中的作用	徐瑾 沈子文 / 055

西方价值与伦理

罗尔斯“理性多元论”思想对西方政治哲学走向的影响	强以华 / 065
休谟论美德的价值	赵永刚 崔家友 / 078
浅析叔本华与尼采悲观主义生命价值思想的博弈 ...	陈俊 李美逸 / 091
论康德对《圣经》的道德诠释	梁卫霞 / 104
极简主义的涵义理论	王振 / 117
让-雅克·卢梭：真正共和国的	
自主公民	迈克尔·怀特 著 陶文佳 译 / 130

理论前沿

- 习近平思想政治教育价值论研究 李玉姣 宋佳丽 / 155
- 马克思主义在中国传统价值观现代转换中的价值 ... 陈翠芳 刘一恒 / 169
- 马克思资本批判视域下中国道路的优越性 李 齐 朱澳拉 / 183
- 关于美的价值描述 戴茂堂 占 妮 / 197
- “左派王学”伦理思想的特色及其影响 姚才刚 李 莉 / 209
- 日常生活对“信任”的作用研究 倪 霞 / 222
- 文化自信视域下的传统文化遴选标准与现代转换路径 郑自立 / 237

社会热点

- 协调发展理念下的文明城市创建研究 刘文祥 熊艳婷 林 博 / 253
- 公共管理的价值表达 赵红梅 叶 璐 / 262
- 家庭教育的价值观分析：基于孝感市城区 90 后
独生子女的调研 杨海军 张雅琪 / 276
- 对高中学业水平考试改革的价值论反思
——基于新考试招生制度的改革及沪浙试点 胡继雄 / 292

书 评

- 思想政治教育创新研究的佳作
——评杨业华教授《思想政治教育创新的价值基础》 杨鲜兰 / 311
- 中国哲学的特质及其特殊价值的阐发
——读周海春教授《中国哲学导论》 李 强 / 316
- 为自由的绝对优先性辩护
——评黄裕生的《站在未来的立场上》 李文倩 / 322
- 《价值论与伦理学研究》稿约 330

Contents

English Topics

- Yin-Yang and Moral Sentimentalism *Michael Slote* / 003
Adam Smith and Moral Facts *Julia Driver* / 016

Ethics of Rural Community

- Farewell to Renqing, Return to True Sentiments *Li Jialian* / 037
Role and Function: Analysis on the Role of Rural Elites in
Village Governance
—Take Z Village of Zhijiang City in Hubei as an Example
..... *Guo Xitong, Zhu Bifa* / 047
On the Role of Traditional Morality in Constructing Ethical
Community in Rural Areas *Xu Jin, Shen Ziwen* / 055

Western Value & Ethics

- The Impact on the Future Development of Western Political
Philosophy of J. Rawls' Theory of "Reasonable Pluralism"
..... *Qiang Yihua* / 065
Hume on the Values of Virtue *Zhao Yonggang, Cui Jiayou* / 078
A Comparative Study between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's
Pessimistic Life Value *Chen Jun, Li Meiyi* / 091
On Kant's Moral Interpretation of *The Bible* *Liang Weixia* / 104

- The Theory of Sense on Minimalism Wang Zhen / 117
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Independent Citizens of the True Republic
..... Michael White, translated by Tao Wenjia / 130

Theory Front

- A study on the Axiology of Xi Jinping's Ideological and Political Education
..... Li Yujiao, Song Jiali / 155
- The Value of Marxism in the Modern Transformation of Chinese
Traditional Values Chen Cuifang, Liu Yiheng / 169
- The Superiority of Chinese Road from the Perspective of Marx's
Capital Criticism Li Qi, Zhu Aola / 183
- The Axiological Description of Beauty Dai Maotang, Zhan Ni / 197
- The Characteristics and Influence of the Ethical Thought
on Leftist Wangxue Yao Caigang, Li Li / 209
- Research on the Role of Everyday Life in Trust Ni Xia / 222
- Traditional Culture Select Standard and Modern Transform Path
on the Perspective of Cultural Confidence Zheng Zili / 237

Social Hotspots

- Research on Constructing Civilized City in the Perspectives of Coordinate
Development Liu Wenxiang, Xiong Yanting, Lin Bo / 253
- The Value Expression of Public Administration
..... Zhao Hongmei, Ye Lu / 262
- On the Family Education Concept of Only-one Child Born in
the 1990s in Cities
—A Case Study of Xiaogan City
..... Yang Haijun, Zhang Yaqi / 276
- On the Value Innovation of the High School Academic Level Examination
—Based on the Reform of the Examination Enrollment System
and the Pilot of Shanghai and Zhejiang
..... Hu Jixiong / 292

Book Review

The Excellent Innovation Research on Ideological and Political Education

—The Comment on *The Value Foundation of Ideological and
Political Education Innovation* by Professor Yang Yehua

..... *Yang Xianlan* / 311

The Elucidation of the Characteristics and Special Values of Chinese Philosophy

—Reading Professor Zhou Haichun's *Introduction to*

Chinese Philosophy *Li Qiang* / 316

To Defend the Absolute Priority of Freedom

—Comments on Huang Yusheng's *Standing on the Position
of the Future*

Li Wenqian / 322

Notice to Contributors of *Axiology and Ethics* / 330

英文专题

Yin-Yang and Moral Sentimentalism

Michael Slote*

1

This conference is focusing to a substantial extent on moral sentimentalism, and I, a Western philosopher, am going to try to convince you, as briefly as I know how, that a fundamental and historical Chinese idea, the idea of Yin-Yang, can provide desirable grounding for the kind of sentimentalism that originated in the West in eighteenth-century Britain and that many claim can be found within certain classics of the Confucian and neo-Confucian traditions. The British sentimentalists knew nothing, of course, about Yin and Yang, but the Confucians (including neo-Confucians) certainly did. Yet they didn't substantially incorporate ideas about Yin and Yang into their ethical sentimentalism in the way I am going to propose here, and there is a reason for that. In ancient China Yin and Yang were contrasted mainly in physical terms as dark and light, wet and dry, cold and hot, female and male, and it is not easy to see how Yin and Yang thus conceived could be relevant to ethics—not just to the explanation of natural phenomena. So senti-

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mentalists like Mengzi and Wang Yangming don't make use of Yin and Yang to ground or even embellish their moral theories, but I am convinced that they missed an opportunity by not doing so, an opportunity I want to explore or sketch in this talk. However, in order for you to see the relevance of Yin and Yang or Yin-Yang to the ultimate justification of normative sentimentalism, I think it will help if I said something first about how I gradually came to understand the normative significance of these notions, and the beginning of it all concerned the concept of receptivity.

Very few Western philosophers have had much to say about receptivity, but Nel Noddings in her book *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* is a notable exception^①. She points out the receptivity involved in the kind of empathy (she called it "engrossment") that takes in or is (in Hume's terms) infused by the feelings and attitudes of others, and she makes much of this in her development of an ethics of caring or care. My own work on or in care ethics also emphasized the receptivity involved in coming to feel what others feel (Bill Clinton's "I feel your pain"), and like Noddings I recognized that rationalist (normative) ethics played down or ignored receptivity in a way that care ethics sought to remedy. But this doesn't tell you in the audience yet why or how receptivity is so important to ethics or moral philosophy—doesn't it all depend on how well care ethics or other forms of sentimentalism theorize the moral sphere by comparison with rationalist (or other) approaches? Well, it certainly does, and in what follows I want to outline the main case care ethics/sentimentalism wants to make against the latter views.

But right now I would like to show you how, given certain assumptions or arguments, an emphasis on the importance of receptivity can gradually turn into a belief in the normative significance of Yin and Yang. When I first emphasized the normative moral significance of receptive empathy, I didn't recognize the significance of receptivity beyond the confines of the moral, and when I finally did, I

① Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

came to see that Western philosophy and Western civilization on the whole gratuitously downplay or ignore the value (and virtue) of receptivity. Let me briefly give you a couple of examples.

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (following Aristotle in the *Eudemean Ethics*) maintains that any rational or intelligent individual should live in accordance with a total life plan, a plan that can be revised later on but that at any given time specifies all the potential good things in one's future life and indicates (often conditionally) how one plans to achieve them.^① What leaps out at one (I hope) is how much this idea of a life plan expresses a desire to control or take control of one's future life to the greatest extent possible.^② (Rawls talks about "taking charge" of one's life.) This attitude, as embodied in a total life plan, seems to preclude one's being open to one's future in any kind of spontaneous and receptive way, and it also entails that love and friendship, which are among life's greatest goods, need to be included within any overall plan of life. And that is absurd. One cannot plan to fall or be in love (even if one can plan ways to make it more likely that one will fall in love, e. g., by joining an Internet dating site). So Rawls's idea ignores the value of being receptive to what the future may bring one's way, and in the given instance the receptivity concerns how to intelligently or sensibly lead one's life, not anything specifically having to do with morality (moral obligation/duty and moral goodness/virtue).

In addition, Rawls was a liberal, and the general philosophy of liberalism has a certain tendency to ignore the value of receptivity toward one's past. Many liberals tell us that we should never let relationships or emotions enter or remain in our lives without first subjecting them to serious critical rational scrutiny. So one shouldn't just accept one's relationship with and feelings about one's parents, friends, or children without questioning whether they are good for one and should

① John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, pp. 398 – 449, 550 – 63.

② See *From Enlightenment to Receptivity: Rethinking Our Values*, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013, chapter 7.

play a part in one's life. But such an attitude as pushed to the limit shows a lack of gratitude and receptivity to what life has brought one's way. To be sure, if there are specific reasons to question certain feelings or relationships, one should do so, but the idea that on principle every feeling and relationship should automatically be put on rational probation seems hyperbolically rationalistic and ignores the fact that it makes good human sense to be more receptive to what life has brought one's way than the liberal view allows for. Again, this is not a point about moral right and wrong, and it shows that apart from any significance receptivity has for morality, it has an importance for or in life generally that important parts of the Western philosophical tradition tend to ignore. As indicated above, I have elsewhere spent a good deal of time expanding on this point and arguing that the Western philosophical tradition on the whole has downplayed receptivity in favor of an almost total emphasis on activity, control, and rationally directed thought/purpose. But let me tell you here and now how my thinking in this area led toward yin and yang without my knowing it.

When I initially argued against the Western tendency to ignore the value of receptivity, I noted that there is no such tendency in Chinese thought. Chinese philosophy has never developed the kind of ethical rationalism (especially Kantian ethics, but also rational intuitionism) that has prevailed so noticeably in the West, and receptivity as a value seems implicit in much of the Chinese ethical tradition. But in fact there is no precise word for "receptive" in the Chinese language and the concept of Yin has been variously translated into English as "receptivity", "pliability" and "passivity", So the role of receptivity in Chinese thought is at best implicit or subtle, and my initial take on both Chinese and Western philosophy was that neither tradition places sufficient emphasis on receptivity.

Then I began to reverse engines. I began to look at the way Chinese thinkers have conceived Yin and Yang and realized that there was a long-standing tendency to treat Yin as inferior to Yang. Yin was identified, among other things, with the female side of things, and Yang with the male side, and in one of the earliest *ethical* applications of the ideas of Yin and Yang, Dong Zhongshu argued that Yang

was benevolent and male and Yin was mean-spirited (or covetous) and female. Yin and Yang were (typically) thought to go together, to be mutually complementary, but one side of the complementarity was conceived as superior to the other. It immediately occurred to me how strange it was to identify benevolence exclusively with the male side of things, as if there were no benevolence involved in mother love or wifely devotion. Rather than fall in with such sexist and bizarre assumptions, it made more sense, I thought, to try to see both male and female, both Yin and Yang, as valuable, equally valuable. And it then occurred to me that of the three standard ways of translating “Yin,” only one of them, receptivity, had broadly positive evaluative connotations. No one or almost no one values passivity, and pliability or pliancy is of dubious or at least limited value. But receptivity has positive ethical or human significance in a broad way, as the future-oriented and past-oriented examples from Rawls and liberalism that I mentioned earlier only begin to show us, and this led me to the idea that if we wanted to make use of the category of Yin for contemporary ethics-theoretical purposes, we should *conceive it as receptivity*. If we update Yin in this way, we can then update Yang as representing the complementary idea of directed rational purpose.^① The latter value has dominated Western thought, but a balance between receptivity and directed purposiveness, both seen as virtuous and valuable, makes more sense of what we truly value in our social and personal lives. But how does this lead us to view moral normativity as essentially a matter of (our updated conceptions of) Yin and Yang?

Well, it can lead us in that direction if we are already moving toward a normative moral sentimentalism that bases virtue and morality on sentiments like compassion and benevolence, but even in the absence of any commitment to moral sentimentalism, we can see acknowledged virtues like compassion and benevolence as

① When *From Enlightenment to Receptivity* discusses what opposes or is complementary to receptivity, it designates that quality or factor as (practical) rational control. But Yin-Yang sentimentalist approach, in opposition to almost the entire Western philosophical tradition, can see rationality in Yin-Yang sentimentalist terms; and I subsequently decided that it makes better and deeper sense to conceive Yang, without bringing in rationality (or any other explicitly evaluative term), as directed active purpose.