



北京大学博古睿
研究中心

Berggruen Research Center
Peking University

Tianxia Conference 2022

FORMULATING A MINIMALIST MORALITY FOR A PLANETARY ORDER: ALTERNATIVE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

August 2022

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FORMULATING A MINIMALIST MORALITY FOR A PLANETARY ORDER:

ALTERNATIVE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES



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THE TIANXIA ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

CONFERENCE CONCEPT

One might argue the success of any conference series is not determined as much by providing answers to a given question as it is in clarifying the further direction of an intelligent conversation.

We in our present world are living in apocalyptic times in which the pandemic is ravaging humanity, and extreme weather events have become the new normal. Today, the Westphalian modern state system of equal, sovereign nations is the prevailing understanding of international relations. According to contemporary philosopher Zhao Tingyang, since the Westphalian model begins with the nation state, it is not a true “world order.” Instead, it is a global system of competing nation-states that with each nation seeking its own interests draws the world toward an international anarchy. Some nations dominate others, where this domination is enabled and exacerbated by the perspectives such a model generates, namely nationalism and racism.

This zero-sum game of winners and losers at an international level has proven to be wholly ineffective in addressing the pressing issues of our times where the pandemic is only the first among many crises we face: global warming, environmental degradation, income inequities, food and water shortages, massive species extinction, proxy wars, global hunger, and so on. The issues defining this human predicament are themselves organically interrelated, and unless they are addressed in a wholesale manner, there can be no effective resolution. Traversing any and all national, ethnic, and religious boundaries, this perfect storm can only be engaged and weathered effectively by a global village working collaboratively for the good of the world community as a whole.

By contrast with the Westphalian model, Zhao argues a starting point for thinking about the world in classical Chinese texts and its historical tradition was *tianxia*, a term he sees as signifying the entire world and thus “viewing the world as a world.” Zhao believes by conceptualizing international relations from the planetary perspective of *tianxia*, we can develop a sense of “worldness” instead of “internationality,” and that this can lead to a less divisive world order.

The two most important lines of critique that have emerged in two previous conferences with respect to Zhao Tingyang’s *tianxia* theory are 1) his *tianxia* system is self-consciously a purely rational endeavor that lacks a vision for its practical implementation in the real world, and 2) as a political economy it conspicuously and again self-consciously avoids any engagement with non-utilitarian ethics. With this critique in mind, the next conference of Berggruen China Center’s *tianxia* program will set as its primary objective the search for possible practical and ethical dimensions that can build upon Zhao’s theoretical work on *tianxia* as a planetary sense of “worldness.” The fundamental premise here is that in order for the *tianxia* system to remain relevant and significant in the world today and in our vision for a global future, it must at once acknowledge the plurality of moral ideals defining of the world’s cultures while at the same time seek practical ways to formulate a shared morality that can provide the limited solidarity needed to bring the world’s people together.

In this spirit, Michael Walzer in his *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* wants “to endorse the politics of difference and, at the same time, to describe and defend a certain sort of universalism.” His claim is that “there are the makings of a thin and universalist morality inside every thick and particularist morality.” Again, Walzer insists that “minimalist meanings are embedded in the maximal morality, expressed in the same idiom, sharing the same (historical/cultural/religious/political) orientation.” He makes a good argument that moral minimalism in the formulation of all thick moralities is not foundational as “a common idea or principle or set of ideas and principles” and thus the same in every case. Nor is it some commonality at the end point of cultural differences. It cannot be reduced to generalizable procedures or generative rules of engagement. And as for the substance of thin morality, importantly for Walzer, such minimalism does not mean minor or emotionally shallow morality; on the contrary, thin and intensity come together as “morality close to the bone.”

For Walzer himself, his candidate for this thin morality would be “a common, garden variety kind of justice.” Other philosophers within the “thick” liberal morality would undoubtedly appeal to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as their basis for universalist ethic. However, for Robert Solomon and Elizabeth Wolgast, still within the liberal camp, humankind develops a sense of what is moral not from the application of some abstract ideal, but practically and incrementally from earliest childhood in our families in the feelings we share as we respond to perceived instances of immorality. The growth of moral meaning and behavior takes place locally in the ecologies of family and community.

Turning to alternative traditions, if we begin from the fact that the population of China is almost twice that of a combined eastern and western Europe, we can appreciate the scale of the diversity that has been pursued over the millennia among so many disparate peoples, languages, ways of life, modes of governance, and so on. While this diversity is truly profound, there seems to have been enough of a shared minimalist morality to hold it together as a continuous civilization and history for four thousand years and counting. Zhao Tingyang argues the shared identity that has provided the “continuity in change” (*biantong* 变通) over time lies in the written Chinese character and the classics engendered from this writing system. But what is missing in Zhao’s story is an account of the minimalist morality not only as it has been made explicit in these canonical texts, but also as it has been practiced across the centuries. Tacking in the same direction as Solomon and Wolgast, Confucian ethics takes the cluster of terms surrounding “family reverence” (*xiao* 孝) as the prime moral imperative that has made family feeling not only the explanation of its minimalist morality, but also the root and the substance of the living Confucian social, political, and global order.

When we move from liberal and Confucian thinking on a minimalist ethic to include other cultural traditions—Buddhist, Indian, Islamic, Ubuntu, Japanese, European, Jewish, and so on—how would they formulate an answer to the contemporary challenge of a fragmented and failing Westphalian “internationality” to reconceive of the world as a world? What would they offer as their conception of the shared and practicable morality so sorely needed at a planetary scale?

CONFERENCE GUIDELINES

[JOIN IN]

- For Panelists, your designated participation link had been sent to your contact email.
- For Attendees, once your registration is approved, you will receive the participation link in your registration email.
- For both Panelists and Attendees, click into the Zoom link and follow directions given.
 - The Conference will use a recurring Zoom meeting room.
 - All sessions can be accessed through the same link.

[Q&A]

- Attendees are welcome to submit questions through the [Chat] function in Zoom Webinar.
- Questions will be collected and organized for Session Chairs to ask.
- Due to time constraints, Panelists may not be able to address all questions.
- If you would like to include your name, contact information along with which panelist you would like to address your question to, we will do our best to follow up with an answer.

[OTHER]

- If you have successfully registered but experience technical problems during the conference, please contact Berggruen China Team at chinacenter@berggruen.org

PROGRAM AGENDA

***All time below is China Standard Time (UTC+8)**

****Each speaker will open each session with a presentation on key arguments followed by a discussion with panelists.**

*****Attendees of the webinar are welcome to submit questions through the chatbox following our conference guidelines.**

I. Keynote Session:

8:00-10:30 Aug 18, 2022 (UTC+8)

Chair: Roger T. AMES

Peking University

Keynote: The Moral Minimum (8:00-9:30)

Michael WALZER

Institute for Advanced Study

An Ethical and Social Epistemology for Meeting Global Crises (9:30-10:00)

David B. WONG

Duke University

From Epistemology to Justice: Thinking through a Cross-Cultural Exemplar (10:00-10:30)

Vrinda DALMIYA

University of Hawaii

II. On the Possibility of a Minimalist Ethic

15:00-17:00 Aug 18, 2022 (UTC+8)

Chair: WEN Haiming

Renmin University of China

Against Order: Interregnum and Ethics of Disorder (15:00-15:30)

LV Xiaoyu

Peking University

Maximalist and Minimalist Justice in a Scalable Tianxia World Order (15:30-16:00)

ZHANG Feng

South China University of Technology

Minimalist Amoralism: A Contemporary Daoist Perspective (16:00-16:30)

Hans-Georg MOELLER

University of Macau

Qinqin: Between the Same and the Other (16:30-17:00)

SUN Xiangchen

Fudan University

III. An Ethical and Social Epistemology for a Minimalist Ethic

20:30-22:30 Aug 18, 2022 (UTC+8)

Chair: James BEHUNIAK

Colby College

The *Topos* of *Mu* and the Predicative Self (20:30-21:00)

Baird CALLICOTT

University of North Texas

The United Nations and Minimalist Morality (21:00-21:30)

Owen FLANAGAN

Duke University

May No One Suffer: More than a Minimalist Ethic (21:30-22:00)

Amita CHATTERJEE

Jadavpur University

Minimalist Morality among Civilizational Dyarchies (22:00-22:30)

James HANKINS

Harvard University

IV. Liberalism and the Alternatives for a Minimalist Ethic

10:30-13:00 Aug 19, 2022 (UTC+8)

Chair: PENG Feng

Peking University

***Tianxia* with Liberal Democratic Characteristics? (10:30-11:00)**

Albert WELTER

University of Arizona

***Tianxia* as a Trans-systemic Society (11:00-11:30)**

WANG Hui

Tsinghua University

Beyond the Polarised Human Rights Politics in the United Nations Human Rights

Council (11:30-12:00)

HE Baogang

Deakin University

Wisdom and Engaged Global Citizenship (12:00-12:30)

Jin Y. PARK

American University

Remapping Global Realities: The Need for Building a More Sustainable and Inclusive World (12:30-13:00)

Workineh KELBESSA

Addis Ababa University

V. Life Forms, Social Justice, and a Minimalist Ethic

21:00-23:00 Aug 19, 2022 (UTC+8)

Chair: Karl-Heinz POHL

University of Trier

Ritual and Geopolitics: The Case of Judaism (21:00-21:30)

Oliver LEAMAN

University of Kentucky

Confucians and Daoists: On Minimal Morality (21:30-22:00)

May SIM

College of the Holy Cross

**The Confucian Concept of the Political and 'Family Feeling' (*xiao* 孝) as its
Minimalist Morality (22:00-22:30)**

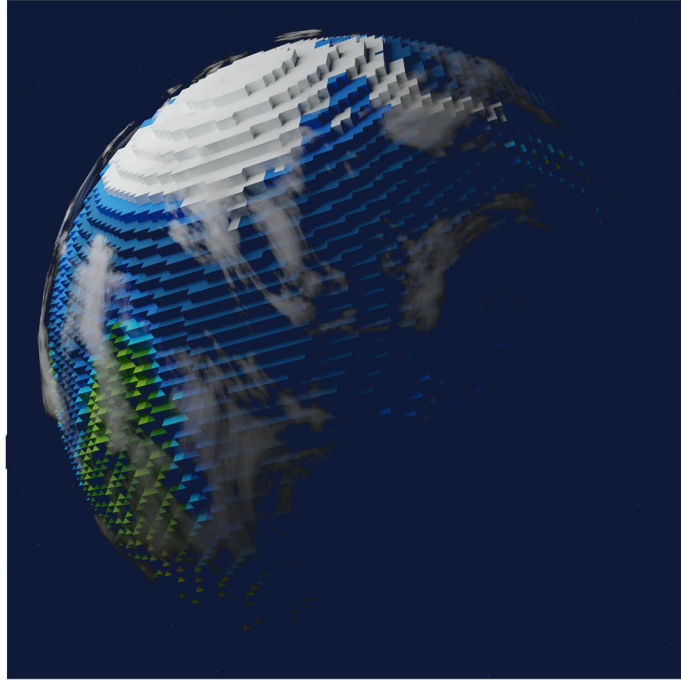
Roger T. AMES

Peking University

Will to Control, Will to Power, Will to Strength, Will to *biantong* (22:30-23:00)

Brook ZIPORYN

University of Chicago



PARTICIPATING SCHOLARS & THEMES



The Moral Minimum

Michael WALZER Institute for Advanced Study

ABSTRACT:

This paper aims to give an account of the moral minimum and defend it against people who want an even greater affirmation of difference (particularists, relativists) and against people who believe in absolute or near-absolute singularity (universalists). In our efforts to address problems, crises, emergencies that are global in their extent and that require some kind of global response--unitary or cooperative in character, internationalist or cosmopolitan--we need to ask that how far will a minimalist morality take us?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Professor Emeritus of Social Science, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ. As a professor, author, editor, and lecturer, Michael Walzer has addressed a wide variety of topics in political theory and moral philosophy: political obligation, just and unjust war, nationalism and ethnicity, economic justice and the welfare state. His books (among them *Just and Unjust Wars*, *Spheres of Justice*, *The Company of Critics*, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, *On Toleration*, and *Politics and Passion*) and essays have played a part in the revival of practical, issue-focused ethics and in the development of a pluralist approach to political and moral life. For more than three decades Walzer served as co-editor of *Dissent*, now in its 64th year. His articles and interviews appear frequently in the world's foremost newspapers and journals. He is currently working on the fourth volume of *The Jewish Political Tradition*, a comprehensive collaborative project focused on the history of Jewish political thought. His book *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions*, was published in March of 2015, and *A Foreign Policy for the Left* was published in 2018. A new book called *The Adjective Liberal* will be forthcoming.



An Ethical and Social Epistemology for Meeting Global Crises

David B. WONG Duke University

ABSTRACT:

I suggest an alternative to the idea of finding substantive, action-guiding moral principles that would serve as the basis of a global order. Such principles would be ones held in common by the differing specific and substantive moral norms and practices that making up different ways of life. To garner sufficient consensus these principles will have to be general and sufficiently vague to elide important conflicts and tensions between values, but to meet the enormous challenges we face on a global level today, we must deal with those conflicts and tensions. We are better off, I shall argue, marshaling communities around specific practical issues that urgently require collective, concerted action. Fortunately, and unfortunately, there is no shortage of such issues, accelerating climate change and the continuous threat of pandemics are among the most urgent. Fortunately, and unfortunately, many of our greatest challenges are synergistically linked, so that making progress on one of them will require progress on others. It is fortunate because the synergism supplies driving incentive for more comprehensive solutions, but unfortunate because it also makes each challenge much more difficult. Indeterminate and general values, and the hedging and fuzzy priorities we posit if pressed to give them can only be usefully specified through finding and constructing what they might mean concretely when engaging with problems. We can only know the commonalities in goals and values that will enable coordinated response across global communities when we engage with each other, not only on the problems, but also attempting to reach mutual understanding on what is concretely important to different communities. We will not know ahead of time what bases for cooperation we will find in the search for solutions. What we might need first of all, then, is an ethical and social epistemology that can help us structure the way communities can interact in the search for solutions and mutual understanding. I draw from Confucian and Daoist traditions of thought to characterize this epistemology.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

David B. Wong is the Susan Fox Beischer and George D. Beischer Professor of Philosophy at Duke University. He has written essays in contemporary ethical theory, moral psychology, and on classical Chinese philosophy, including “Soup, Harmony, and Disagreement,” *The Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 6.2 (2020), “Practical Reasoning in Early Chinese Philosophy,” in *Routledge Handbook of Practical Reason*, ed. Ruth Chang and Kurt Sylvan (2020), “Relativism and Pluralism in

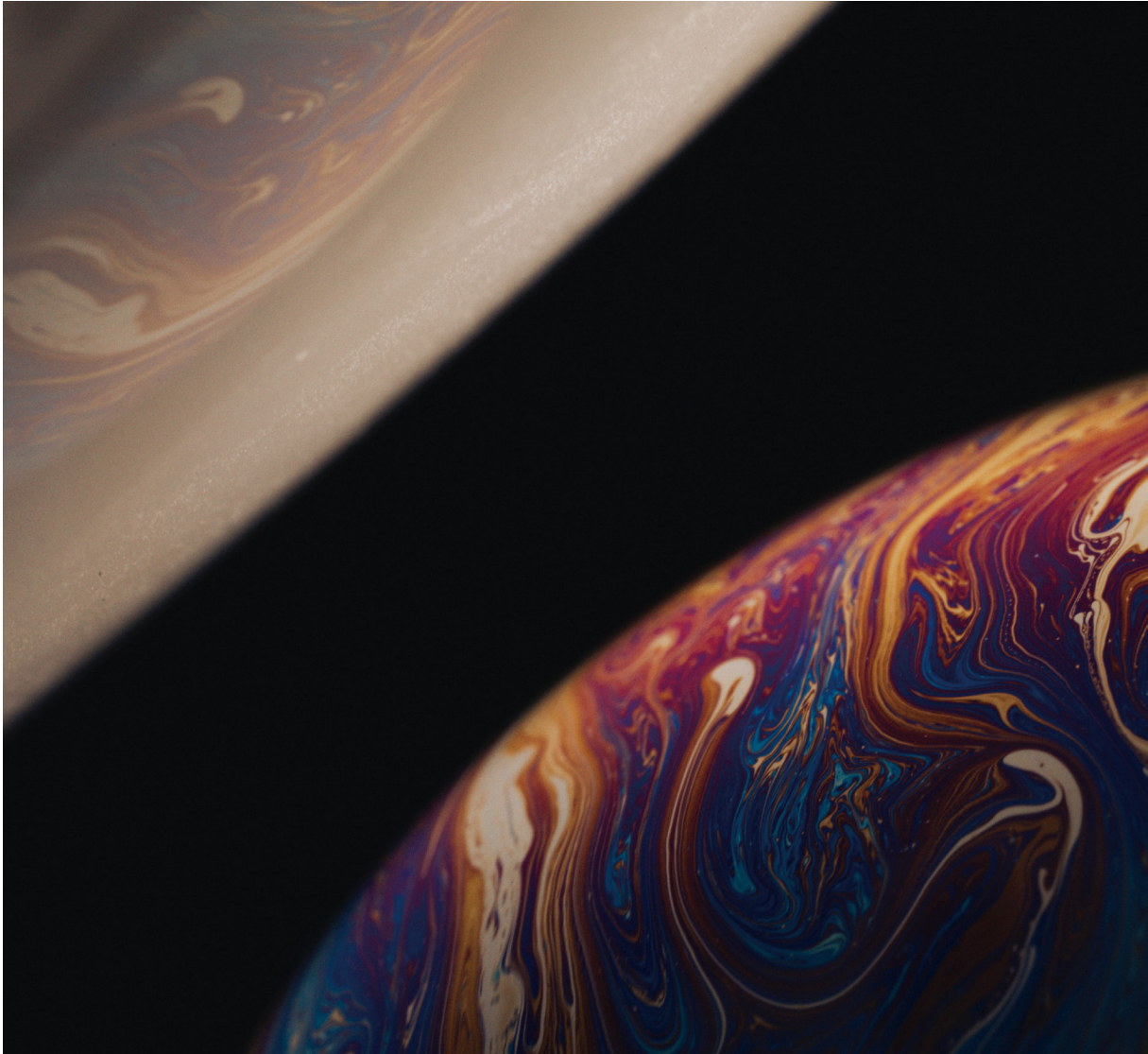


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Moral Epistemology,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Moral Epistemology*, ed. Aaron Zimmerman, Karen Jones, and Mark Timmons (2018), “Early Confucian Philosophy and the Development of Compassion” *Dao* 14.2 (2015), His books are *Moral Relativity* (University of California Press, 1984) and *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism* (2006, Oxford University Press). He has co-edited with Kwong-loi Shun *Confucian Ethics: A Comparative Study of Self, Autonomy, and Community* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). *Moral Relativism and Chinese Philosophy: David Wong and his Critics*, edited by Yang Xiao and Yong Huang (2014, SUNY Press), is a book of critical commentaries on *Natural Moralities* and contains responses to each of the commentaries.



From Epistemology to Justice: Thinking through a Cross-Cultural Exemplar

Vrinda DALMIYA University of Hawaii

ABSTRACT:

My argument looks at *epistemic injustices* sustaining politically exploitative frameworks, and claims that staving off the former is necessary for envisioning a just geopolitical order. Why don't we, for example, seriously explore alternatives to a neoliberalism pushing the planet to destruction? Are there "willful ignorances" propping up ideologically-biased reasoning that perpetuate oppression, and even the very construction of ideal theories of justice? This line of thought in contemporary feminist and philosophers of color, leads me to explore a non-traditional understanding of an ethical exemplar from the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata*. Could the figure of a King who *fails* and is *stopped* from fulfilling his promise - a paradoxically "non-ideal Ideal" – enable a different kind of 'being together' modelled on embracing vulnerability? Roadblocks to global justice are both structural *and* agential, requiring different kinds of intervention. Articulation of alternative concepts and principles is an important response to the former. However, restructuring subjectivities to possess intellectual virtues that can correct for epistemic injustices are equally important for imagining and upholding a just planetary future.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Vrinda Dalmiya is a Professor in the Philosophy Department at the University of Hawaii, Manoa. She was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and a Visiting Professor at Ashoka University, India. Her research interests lie in care ethics, feminist epistemology, environmental philosophy, and comparative philosophy. Besides publishing in several journals and anthologies, she is the author of *Caring to Know: Comparative Care Ethics, Feminist Epistemology and the Mahabharata* (India: Oxford University Press, 2016) and the co-editor of *Exploring Agency in the Mahābhārata: Ethical and Political Dimensions of Dharma* (New York: Routledge, 2018).



Against Order: Interregnum and Ethics of Disorder

LV Xiaoyu Peking University

ABSTRACT:

The liminal and in-between state of the global is no longer a short crisis, but a state of prolonged and permanent interregnum. Driven by the urge for order, alternative proposals with minimalist and maximalist moralities represent the consensus-oriented approach to facilitate transitions towards new orders. This paper overturns the direction of inquiry and asks how we already manage to live in disorder, in the absence of normative consensus. Living in disagreement opens the space for ethics of disorder and practices of conviviality that do not require the pre-existence of a planetary order. It celebrates the spirit of doubting and forgetting and allows the switching of moral worlds that deals with change, uncertainty and alterity in our time.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Lv Xiaoyu is an Assistant Professor at School of International Studies at Peking University and was a Research Fellow at the Australian National University. He received MSc and DPhil degrees in Politics at University of Oxford, and previously worked at the United Nations Development Programme. His academic works focus on international relations theory, conflict and peace, and political anthropology. He is also a fiction writer.



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Maximalist And Minimalist Justice in a Scalable *Tianxia* World Order

ZHANG Feng South China University of Technology

ABSTRACT:

All durable orders rest on principles of justice and a good degree of their instantiation in practice. China's traditional *Tianxia* world order rests above all on the principle of fairness, derived from the cosmological and humanistic outlooks of early China. I describe two conceptions of this fairness—fairness based on merit, virtue, or status, and fairness based on the reciprocity of obligations—as a maximalist morality rooted in Chinese culture and offer early Ming China's foreign relation in a circumscribed East Asian *tianxia* order as a case study of this morality in operation. I then consider whether and how a thin version of fairness might serve as a universalistic morality in a global *Tianxia* world order.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Feng Zhang is Professor of International Relations and Executive Dean of the Institute of Public Policy at the South China University of Technology in Guangzhou, and editor of the book series *IPP Studies in the Frontiers of China's Public Policy* published by Palgrave. He studies Sino-American relations, Chinese foreign policy in East Asia, international relations in East Asian history, and international relations theory. He is the author of *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford, 2015) and, with Professor Richard Ned Lebow, of *Taming Sino-American Rivalry* (Oxford, 2020) and *Justice and International Order: East and West* (Oxford, 2022). His articles have appeared in leading journals including the *European Journal of International Relations*, *Pacific Review*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Review of International Studies*, *Survival*, and *Washington Quarterly*. He previously held positions at Tsinghua University in Beijing and Murdoch University and Australian National University in Australia. He received his MSc (comparative politics) and PhD (international relations) from the London School of Economics and Political Science.



Minimalist Amoralty: A Contemporary Daoist Perspective

Hans-Georg MOELLER University of Macau

ABSTRACT:

The concept summary of the *Tianxia III Conference-A Minimalist Morality* states that a “shared and practicable morality” is “sorely needed at a planetary scale” to cope with “apocalyptic times in which the pandemic is ravaging humanity, and extreme weather events have become the new normal.” This paper argues that the moralization of health and climate crises in media and politics has not increased the ability of world society to manage these problems more effectively. Based on Daoist philosophy and contemporary social systems theory, the paper proposes that the contrary is the case: Due to the complexity of world society and the nature of moral communication, the moral framing of health and climate issues does not bring about social consensus but creates further divisions. Instead of trying to identify a “minimal shared morality,” a Daoism-inspired approach aims at minimizing moral communication to reduce and resolve conflicts. Rather than striving for a minimalist morality, it advocates to minimize morality so that it becomes amoral.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Hans-Georg Moeller is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Macau. He works on Daoism and contemporary society and culture. He is author of *Profile Yourself: Identity after Authenticity*; *Genuine Pretending: On the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi* (both with Paul D'Ambrosio), *The Radical Luhmann*, *The Moral Fool: A Case for Amoralty*, and *The Philosophy of the Daodejing*. He is also content creator of two YouTube channels: *Carefree Wandering* (contemporary philosophy and cultural critique, history of philosophy) and *Philosophy in Motion* (animated stories from the *Zhuangzi*).



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Qinqin : Between the Same and the Other

SUN Xiangchen Fudan University

ABSTRACT:

Different from the Western philosophical tradition and the Jewish thought heritage, the Chinese thought tradition reveals another aspects of the human existential structure. Western philosophy, based on its own language and thought tradition, has constructed a path from ontology to subjectivity; E. Levinas made a sharp criticism of this tradition, thinking that beyond this kind philosophy of "the same" and "totality", hegemony and violence are implied, and he puts forward his transcending ontology and the subjectivity for the other. However, Levinas's argument still has a strong sense of strangeness and sacredness to the non-Western traditional civilization. Based on its own traditions, the Chinese world has revealed the theory of Perpetual Growth and Change, which is different from Western ontology and Jewish transcendence, and put forward the theory of Kinship Affection, in a way different from Eros, Philia, Agape. In the path of this kind of existential structure, a "warm world" in which people live is constructed with "kindness" as the starting point and by the way of "the path is not far from man".

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Sun Xiangcheng is Professor and Dean in the School of Philosophy and Director of the Center of General Education at Fudan University, Shanghai. He is also the member of steering committee of FISP, Council Member of World Sinology Congress, Vice-president of Association of History of Western Philosophy in China, Chair of Council of Federation of General Education in China, Co-Chief-Editor of *Review of General Education*. His studies fields include early modern philosophy, political philosophy, Jewish-Christian philosophy, comparative philosophy. As a visiting scholar, he had been in Yale University, University of Birmingham, University of Chicago, University of British Columbia, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Free University of Berlin and many other research institutes worldwide. The major books he published: *On Family: Individual and Qinqin* (2019), *Facing the Other: On Levinas' Philosophical thought* (2008), *Metaphysics of Seventeen Century* (co-author, 2006).



The *Topos* of *Mu* and the Predicative Self

Baird CALLICOTT University of North Texas

ABSTRACT:

Terminologically, the “*topos* of *mu*” and the “predicative self” originated in the Kyoto School and are traceable to the work of its founder NISHIDA Kitarō. The full phrase was coined by NAKAMURA Yūjirō. Conceptually, the *topos* of *mu* or place of nothingness is Nishida’s development of the Buddhist notion of *anatta* or no self and radiating out from that locus of emptiness is a self constituted by its predicates or the things to which it is connected by an existential copula. Deeply ingrained in Western languages, metaphysics, and religion is the subjective self, in both the linguistic and psychological senses of “subjective.” That Buddhism, as reworked by the Kyoto School, or Daoism or any other non-Western tradition of thought, will catch on in the West was a puerile fantasy of some members of the first generation of environmental philosophers. There is a good chance, however, that the Western worldview may evolve toward a similar conception of the self—as ecological, relational, or systems thinking becomes ever more ingrained. We in the West may come to understand that we are constituted by our social and environmental relationships, in which we are deeply embedded and on which we are utterly dependent, such that world care is the essence of self help.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

J. Baird Callicott is University Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus and Regents Professor of Philosophy, ret. at the University of North Texas. He is co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Encyclopedia of Environmental Ethics and Philosophy* and author or editor of a score of books and author of dozens of journal articles, encyclopedia articles, and book chapters in environmental philosophy and ethics. Callicott taught the world’s first college course in environmental ethics and, with Roger T. Ames, also founded comparative environmental philosophy. His work has been translated into many other languages including Chinese, Japanese, French, Spanish, German, and Russian. Callicott has served the International Society for Environmental Ethics as President, Yale University as Bioethicist-in-Residence, the UNT Department of Philosophy and Religion as chair, and *Conservation Biology* as an assigning editor. He is the leading contemporary exponent of Aldo Leopold’s land ethic and has elaborated an Earth ethic, *Thinking Like a Planet* (OUP 2013), in response to climate change. His most recent book is *Greek Natural Philosophy: The Presocratics and their Importance for Environmental Philosophy* (Cognella 2018).



The United Nations and Minimalist Morality

Owen FLANAGAN Duke University

ABSTRACT:

United Nations initiatives of 1. *The UN Declaration of Human Right (UDHR)* of 1948; 2. *The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* of 2015; and 3. *The Happiness Agenda* of 2011 all appear to express an unforced but overlapping international consensus on minimal morality. The UDHR and the SDGs are defensible examples of minimalist international morality. The happiness agenda is a specific version of well-being philosophy and science, with the ultimate aim of policy as maximizing the number of people who are subjectively happy with their lives or, what is different, maximizing the total amount of happiness for humans. That sets an example of overreach that tries to locate agreement where none exists.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Owen Flanagan is James B. Duke University Professor of Philosophy at Duke University, Durham, NC, USA. He also works with the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences seeking religious and ethical consensus on human rights and sustainable development. He is the author most recently of *The Geography of Morals: Varieties of Moral Possibility* (2017) and *How to do Things with Emotions: The Morality of Anger and Shame Across Cultures* (2021).



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May No One Suffer: More than a Minimalist Ethic

Amita CHATTERJEE Jadavpur University

ABSTRACT:

In this presentation, I would like to discuss minimal morality in two senses - (a) Walzer's sense and (b) Mill's sense. For more than two thousand five hundred years Indian way of living has been governed by two sets of moral duties, enjoined in the *Dharmaśāstras*, the Ancient Books of Moral Principles; one set relates to the moral duties of one's station in life and the other set comprises a number of universal moral precepts binding on everyone across castes and creeds. Whether these two sets of moral precepts correspond to the thick and the thin morality of Michael Walzer is debatable and needs to be examined carefully.

Though the number of universal moral principles varies in lists given in ancient texts, five duties have been admitted in all lists mentioned in the authentic texts of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, either in the form of positive or of negative injunctions. These are *Ahimsā* (non-violence), *Satya* (truthfulness), *Asteya* (non-stealing), *Brahmacarya* (celibacy in thought, word and deed) and *Aparigraha* (non-covetousness). These principles of individual moral conduct also form the basis of social harmony and have therefore been incorporated in the Five Principles of International Code of Peaceful Existence. There have been several attempts of further minimizing the number of basic moral principles and M. K. Gandhi's interpretation highlights the inter-relation amongst the five. On this interpretation, which we are going to discuss at some length, other four precepts can be brought within the fold of *Ahimsā* because the general principle underlying all five precepts is the avoidance of action and speech that are harmful to oneself and to other people. However, this irreducible Gandhian principle 'not to let anyone suffer', resonating the spirit of the hymn of the *Vājasaneyā Samhitā*, '*Om, sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramayah*' ('May all be happy, may all be free from illness.') asserts more than J.S. Mill's sole principle of a minimalist ethic that one can live one's life as one likes so long as no harm is done to others. because it encapsulates positive connotations and duties to oneself over and above the duties towards others.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Amita Chatterjee is Professor Emerita at School of Cognitive Science and Department of Philosophy, Jadavpur University, Kolkata and was the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* (2014-2017), Second Vice President of the Division of Logic, Methodology, Philosophy, History of Science and Technology (DLMPST) of International Union of Sciences (2016- 2019). She was National Fellow (2012-2014), Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, Professor

of Philosophy, Head of the Department and Co-ordinator, CAS (UGC- SAP from 2002-2004) and Co-ordinator of the Centre for Cognitive Science, Jadavpur University (1999- 2010). She was the First Vice-Chancellor of Presidency University, Kolkata (2010-2011). Widely published, her books include, *Understanding Vagueness*, *Mental Reasoning: Experiments and Theories*, *Indian Philosophy and Meditation: Perspectives on Consciousness*, *Acharya Brajendranath Seal*, *The Study of Internal States in Theory and Practice: A perspective from Indian Psychology* and more than 100 articles in national and international journals and anthologies. Her areas of research are: logic (Indian and Western), fusion philosophy, philosophies of logic, language, mind and cognitive science and as part of her academic engagements, she has researched and taught at universities in the U.K., Europe, U.S.A. and across India.



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Minimalist Morality among Civilizational Dyarchies

James HANKINS Harvard University

ABSTRACT:

In early modern times it was widely held in Europe that kings existed to win glory in war, whereas commercial republics were constitutionally inclined to peace. When republicanism and monarchical principles were combined in the 19th century nation-state, incentives to war and conquest became almost irresistible in the West. Competition among states was exacerbated by a broadly Westphalian concept of interstate relations, combined with Machiavellian ideas about what counted as success for a prince or a republic.

The return of China to a leading position on the world stage and the emergence of civilizational states in Russia and perhaps India offers hope that a different model of international relations could replace the system of violent competition between nation states that dominated the twentieth century. Civilizational states tend to be “hierarchical dyarchies” with a central power that keeps order and provides for common security while allowing less powerful political entities, within and outside its formal writ, a large measure of independence and self-rule. Civilizational states are thus incompatible with militant ideologies, just as civilization itself is incompatible with fanaticism. Historically, though internal peace has been the major benefit of civilizational states, relations between and among civilizational states have also, on balance, been more peaceful and more cooperative than those among competitive nation states in a Westphalian-style order.

Modern civilizational states tend not to make claims for the universality of their own civilizational norms and traditions. They are protective of their own traditions against aggressively “modernizing,” often pseudo-scientific ideologies. The latter seek to undermine traditional customs, religions, gender and class relations in the name of supposedly universal values inspired by a particular vision of the future. Though such ideologies have their origin in the West, they threaten Western civilization as much as other world civilizations.

Different civilizations prioritize values such as liberty, equality, meritocracy and harmony differently based on their historical experience and deep-rooted customs. Yet not all civilizational norms are so culturally embedded as to be incommensurable, particularly those that emphasize transcending private interest, such as the Golden Rule. A “thin and universalist morality” (Walzer) based on shared ideas of justice and avoidance of harm to others is possible but must also be corroborated by the less self-protective principles of benevolence (Confucian *ren*) and the common good. Machiavellian thinking must be rejected. Thinking about inter-civilizational relations has to begin with those norms



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that would govern concrete interactions such as trade, the security of borderlands and waterways, immigration, and protections for (and duties of) those practicing “foreign” religions. It should be recognized that persuasion is preferable to coercion, and competition should be in the form of “noble rivalries,” contests to see which civilization can best benefit its people.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

James Hankins is Professor of History at Harvard University and General Editor of the I Tatti Renaissance Library. He is the author, editor or translator of 30 books and some 200 articles on Renaissance philosophy, humanism, and political thought. His *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* was published by the Belknap Press of Harvard University in 2019. It is currently being translated into Chinese. He is a Corresponding Member of the British Academy. He also writes opinion pieces and longer articles for the *Wall Street Journal*, *First Things*, *American Affairs*, *The New Criterion*, *Law and Liberty*, *Public Discourse*, and *The Claremont Review of Books*. He has taught for many years a course entitled “Care of the Soul,” comparing moral self-cultivation in ancient Western philosophy, Islam, and the Buddhist and Confucian traditions.



***Tianxia* with Liberal Democratic Characteristics (Precedents for a Cultural Renaissance based on inclusive engagements)**

Albert WELTER University of Arizona

ABSTRACT:

Situated in the third decade of the 21st century, it is clear that the Western-led liberal international order established after the Second World War is coming to some kind of end. Or, at the very least, it is transitioning into something else, yet to be defined, but incredibly crucial for the future of the planet. Even as the world convulses between old 20th century paradigms, it seems inevitable that these are destined to crack and pave the way for something new, or possibly, revert to something older in the guise of restoring a nostalgic past. As with all critical transitions, this one demands all the interpretative resources we can bring to it. Many bring expertise on economic and international relations and power analyses, but in the present case, cultural, religious, ethical, and historical analyses are needed as well. These may play a much more important role in the new era than generally estimated. China's role in this transition is beyond dispute given its precipitous rise and expanding influence.

As China contemplates its role in the 21st century, it faces new opportunities and challenges. These opportunities are not only China's but the worlds. The existing liberal and capitalist international order suffers under the strain of its own inability to curb the excesses of unbridled capitalism stemming from notions of individual autonomy (also as applied to corporations and nation-states). Given the excesses of uninhibited individualism, can China provide a model for the world to move beyond these excesses to provide a new framework for harmonious relationships? Many see identity in the Chinese and larger East Asian context as instilled by the Confucian tradition, where individual identity is subsumed within the collective, as a necessary corrective to a world beholden to the acquisitive will of powerful individuals, corporations and nation-states. In principle, I agree with this need to correct the current course. My paper, based on the template of China's past, suggests that the road to that place for China may be a lengthy one, and one that must address directly and indirectly the values that the current world order, based in liberal democratic principles, is engaged with.

I question the ability of proposals that forget the recent past and forge a new reality via a "blank slate," as if current realities can simply be erased. Instead, I propose that any new world order must be built on past advances provided by liberal ideology, reformulated as a "tianxia with liberal demo-

cratic characteristics,” a renewed world order based on inclusive engagements. The tianxia model as traditionally conceived is not unproblematic and needs to be reformulated. I base my model on precedents from the historical record, specifically Confucian and Buddhist (and to a lesser extent Daoist) engagements in the Song Dynasty and proposals for a grand harmony of the three traditions as supports for the imperial mission. The reinvention of Confucianism, the second iteration of Confucianism or Neo-Confucianism, was built from this consensus, a kind of “Confucianism with Buddhist characteristics” acknowledging and responding to key questions posed by Buddhism, whose ideologies had provided the basis for a pan-Asian international order. Is it possible that China can provide the model for a new order based on its traditional tianxia framework, adapted to an international setting that presumes value instilled by liberal democracy? This is the question my paper explores.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Albert Welter is currently Professor and Head of the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona. His research focuses on the study of Chinese Buddhism, particularly on the transition from the late Tang (9th century) to the Song dynasties (10th-13th centuries). His work also encompasses a broader interest in Chinese administrative policies toward Buddhism, including Chinese notions of secularism and their impact on religious beliefs and practices, as well as Buddhist interactions with Neo-Confucianism and literati culture. He is currently involved in the Hangzhou Region Buddhist Culture Project, supported by the Khyentse Foundation, in conjunction with Zhejiang University, the Hangzhou Academy of Social Sciences, and the Hangzhou Buddhist Academy. His monograph, *A Tale of Two Stūpas: Diverging Paths in the Revival of Buddhism in Hangzhou China*, is currently in press (Oxford), as are two other volumes, *The Future of China's Past: Reflections on the Meaning of China's Rise* (SUNY Press), and a co-edited volume (with Jin Y. Park and Steven Heine), *Approaches to Chan, Sōn, and Zen Studies: Chinese Chan Buddhism and Its Spread throughout East Asia* (SUNY Press). He has also received funding from the American Council of Learned Societies (with the support of the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation). Before coming to the University of Arizona, Dr. Welter was based in Canada, where his research was regularly supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Tianxia as a Trans-systemic Society

WANG Hui Tsinghua University

ABSTRACT:

Since the early years in 21st century, Chinese-speaking academic circles have seen many discussions about empire, the tribute system, All-under-Heaven (*Tianxia*), civilizational states (*wenming guojia*), and grand unification (*da yitong*), which also echo and respond to discussions in Europe, America, and Japan. The re-emergence of these concepts or categories stems from dissatisfaction with the nation-state paradigm, but in most cases is again the result of looking at China and its historical changes through the prism of the nation-state. However, since the nineteenth century, categories such as empire and civilization have become entangled with the concept of nation-state and nationalist ideas, becoming racialized and one-sided. For example, the concept that emerged in Japan of “East Asia” and its Confucian civilizational sphere is a transnational and trans-civilizational category, but this concept cannot contain the vast western and northern regions of China and their civilizational diversity. Therefore, this paper does not propose to replace the concept of nation-state (*minzu guojia*) with empire or civilizational state, but rather to critique the empire/nation-state binary and to explore how a political culture centered on Confucian learning operates in a trans-systemic society and changes in response to the conditions of the times.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Wang Hui is the distinguished Professor in the School of Humanities at Tsinghua University and Director of the Tsinghua Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences. His research interests include Chinese intellectual history, Chinese literature and social and political theory. He has received numerous awards for his scholarship, including the Luca Pacioli Award (2013) and Anneliese Maier Research Award (2018), and has been Visiting Professor and fellow at Harvard, Edinburgh, Bologna, Stanford, UCLA, Berkeley, Tokyo University, the University of Washington, Wissenschaft Kolleg zu Berlin and Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study among others. He was the co-editor of the influential Chinese journal *Dushu* from 1996 to 2007. In 2008, the magazine *Foreign Policy* listed him as one of the top 100 most influential intellectuals worldwide. His recent publications include *China's Twentieth Century* (2016), *China from Empire to Nation-State* (2015), and *The Politics of Imagining Asia* (2011).



Beyond the Polarised Human Rights Politics in the United Nations Human Rights Council: How can the right to development be a minimalist morality for a planetary order?

HE Baogang Deakin University

ABSTRACT:

Competing human rights discourses are dividing the world, and the return of great power rivalry between the US and China has resulted in the polarization of human rights between Beijing and Washington. Such a polarization is unproductive and unnecessary. Both Washington and Beijing need to manage this normative clashing and avoid an ideology-based New Cold War. To do so, we need to find normative convergence. The search for a normative merging and reconciliation implies an overlapping consensus and requires a minimalist morality. To achieve this requires a critical reconsideration of the Chinese promotion of the right to development. *Tianxia* offers a new interpretation of the transformative nature of China's human rights efforts in UNHRC: from a simple defence of its human rights record to the articulation of contemporary human rights principles for all the people, especially those in developing countries. Following this interpretation, Washington's simplistic dismissal of Beijing's developmental approach is detrimental not only to American interests but also to the course of human rights itself. Washington needs to develop a nuanced understanding and analysis of China's developmental approach to human rights and reconsider its narrow civil and political rights approach. The right to development might be a candidate for a minimalist norm for a planetary order. This paper will examine why human rights discourses are divided, why it is difficult for the right to development to provide a basis for a minimalist morality, and what can be done to overcome the obstacle.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Baogang He (Ph.D 1994 ANU) is Alfred Deakin Professor at Deakin University, and the Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia. Professor He is widely known for his work in Chinese politics, in particular the deliberative politics in China as well as in Asian politics covering regionalism, international relations, federalism, and multiculturalism in Asia. Professor He has published 7 single-authored books, and 88 international refereed journal articles. He is co-author of *The Galaxy Empire of China* (with John Kean) will be published by Oxford University Press in 2022. His publications are found in top journals including *Science*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Peace Research*, *Political Theory*, *Political Studies* and *Perspectives on Politics*.



Wisdom and Engaged Global Citizenship

Jin Y. PARK American University

ABSTRACT:

This paper explores Buddhist wisdom as a “thin” account of Buddhist ethics. Wisdom has a special meaning in Buddhism, and embodiment of wisdom includes realization of various core teachings of Buddhism. In examining Buddhist wisdom, the paper examines the social self to consider how wisdom might manifest in the “thickness” of socio-cultural and political contexts. Recent developments in the social and political situation of the United States have testified to major shortcomings of the modernist approaches to democracy, education, and citizenship. The rights discourse, which has been a backbone of democracy, has revealed its bare face. As much as the rights discourse aims to protect individuals’ freedom, equity, and physical wellbeing, it can be and has been used to justify self-centered interpretations of the situations at hand, revealing a lack of concern for other people and escalating violence and inequality.

Admitting that Buddhist tradition has fallen short of developing a strong social and political philosophy, a critical and constructive reappraisal of the fundamental Buddhist worldview—here identified as “wisdom”—could nonetheless offer us an alternative to West-centered ethics in the context of contemporary geopolitics.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Jin Y. Park is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at American University. She was a Numata Visiting Professor at McGill University in Canada; a visiting professor at Korea University, South Korea; and a visiting researcher at Kobe University, Japan. Her research explores East Asian Buddhism, intercultural philosophy, modern East Asian philosophy, and intercultural ethics, focusing on the intersections of gender, violence, politics of discrimination, and narrative identity. Marginality has been a consistent theme in her scholarship. Her books include *Approaches to Chan, Sŏn, Zen Studies* (2023), *New Perspectives in Korean Buddhism* (2023), *Women and Buddhist Philosophy* (2017), *Reflections of a Zen Buddhist Nun* (2014), *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism* (2010), *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* (2010), *Buddhism and Postmodernity* (2008), and *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* (2006). Park currently serves as President of the North American Korean Philosophy Association and Vice President of the American Academy of Religion. She has also served as President of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy and was the Founding Director of the International Society for Buddhist Philosophy. She is a recipient of the Korea Foundation Advanced Research Grant, American Academy of Religion Research Grant, and most recently, the Uberoi Foundation Religious Studies Grant.



Remapping Global Realities: The Need for Building a More Sustainable and Inclusive World

Workineh KELBESSA Addis Ababa University

ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the place of Africa and other “developing” countries in the current world order and shows the importance of developing more inclusive ethical and epistemological foundations that are required to reconceptualize and remap our current situation and contribute to the emergence of a more sustainable and inclusive world. Africa and other “developing” countries have very little influence and voice in today’s global policy-making forums either through lack of membership or through lack of capacity for effective presentation and participation. This paper stresses that the voices of “developing” countries have important contributions to sustainable development and environmental agendas, and can help us to remap the world in a way that makes sense to “us”. Thus, the current global power structures should be changed to accommodate all nations’ concerns. The global community has an ethical obligation to create more inclusive and sustainable global structures. Thus, instead of searching for short-term profits or looking only for immediate gratification, TNCs and other powerful players in the current world order should respect the knowledge, need, aspiration, and voice of “developing” countries.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Workineh Kelbessa is Professor of Philosophy at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. He is the author of two books and numerous articles in referred journals, book chapters and invited reviews. His research focuses on environmental philosophy, environmental ethics, development ethics, climate ethics, water ethics, globalization, philosophy of love and sex, African philosophy, and indigenous knowledge. In 2012, he was appointed by the Director General of UNESCO as a member of the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology (COMEST), on which he served until 2019. He is also a former Research Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Germany, and a member of the International Panel on Social Progress, and the Ethiopian Academy of Sciences. Moreover, he was a member of the editorial board of *Environmental Ethics* (2011-2021). He has also served on the Editorial Boards of various journals including *Health Care Philosophy and Policy* (2006-), the *African Journal of Environmental Ethics and Values* (2010-2014 and 2019-), and *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (2021-).



Ritual and Geopolitics: The Case of Judaism

Oliver LEAMAN University of Kentucky

ABSTRACT:

The Abrahamic religions are well adapted to dealing with the crises and controversies of the modern world. They have existed for a long time and been able to cope with a wide range of changing circumstances and problems. They often urge their followers to abandon parochial thought and think of themselves as part of an interconnected world, and so no new ethical demands are made by current events. Like Confucianism which bases itself on the idea of humaneness (ren), the Abrahamic faiths see the main issue as guiding their followers to adopt virtues that extend themselves towards others both in their local societies and beyond. For Confucius this can only come about through ritual, since it is ritual that enables us to control our emotions and link up with others. Judaism has seen in recent decades a return to ritual, as though echoing this idea. Reforming religion to do away with ritual and concentrate on universal moral values has largely proved to be a dead end, resulting in a form of action that is vague and without direction. Yet the social forces in the modern world that stimulate the idea of reform such as rationality, efficiency and ever-increasing choice have made Jewish ritual often look narrow and blinkered. The challenge will be to construct a notion of ritual that is capable, as Confucius would see it, of grounding our behavior in something that appears to be authentic and meaningful. This is not just an issue for Judaism of course but is perhaps most dramatically played out within that religion, and its consequences have implications for the whole gamut of religions and cultures that see opening ourselves up to others as the central ethical demand of present times. The intriguing issue is whether within the context of modern times a turning towards ritual can be anything more than a parody of what it ought to be. The focus of the discussion will be on this point and what implications it has for the notion of a geopolitical ethics.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Oliver Leaman teaches at the University of Kentucky and he has just finished editing the Routledge Handbook of Jewish Ritual and Practice and the Routledge Handbook of Islamic Ritual and Practice. He is the author or editor of books on Jewish, Islamic and Asian philosophy and culture.



Confucians and Daoists: On Minimal Morality

May SIM College of the Holy Cross

ABSTRACT:

Confucians and Daoists share the view that sages are unlike ordinary people. Sages possess virtues that enable them to act morally and ordinary people are best governed by sages. Instead of ruling by legal sanctions or coercion, both schools of thought agree that sages inspire people to also become virtuous so that their way of ruling is effortless (*wuwei*). If Confucians and Daoists hold that sages inspire people to become virtuous, it seems that ordinary people too can become sages. The highest morality seems to be accessible to everyone. Yet, there are claims in both Confucianism and Daoism that the majority of the people are unlike sages. For both philosophies, even though ordinary people are inspired and transformed by sage-rulers, they nevertheless don't end up perfecting themselves, thereby failing to become sages. In such cases, Confucians and Daoists seem to espouse a minimal morality. Namely, people are somewhat moral, yet aren't perfectly virtuous.

Is this lack of perfection a minimal morality that is easily accessible to everyone in each of these traditions? What conditions do Daoists and Confucians require for people to access such morality? Is the tolerance/acknowledgement of imperfection in the majority of people a more practical way of realizing the moral principles to which each of these schools subscribe (albeit imperfectly and hence, only to a certain degree)?

If people are in different degrees Confucians or Daoists, and thus can live *like* Confucians or Daoists, respectively, how do these different philosophies compare in this respect of minimal morality? Is one tradition more accessible to the common people than the other, and thus, is it more practical to implement? Comparing Confucians and Daoists, I aim to evaluate which, if either of their ideas of perfection offer more resources for more ordinary people to achieve a minimal degree of morality. Would the achievement of a minimal morality by more people lead to a slightly better ordered world, than one in which the majority of people can neither perfect themselves nor approximate morality even in a minimalistic sense?



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ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

May Sim is Professor of Philosophy and Director of Asian Studies at the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts. She is the Director of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy and served as the past president of a couple of regional societies, as well as the Metaphysical Society of America. Her publications include *Remastering Morals with Aristotle and Confucius* and over 50 essays on Eastern and Western philosophies. She is the contributing editor of *The Crossroads of Norm and Nature: Essays on Aristotle's Ethics and Metaphysics* and *From Puzzles to Principles?: Essays on Aristotle's Dialectic*. Her current research includes two books: a Confucian account of human rights, and *Metaphysics and Ethics: East & West*.



The Confucian Concept of the Political and ‘Family Feeling’ (*xiao* 孝) as its Minimalist Morality

Roger T. AMES Peking University

ABSTRACT:

If we begin from the fact that the population of China is almost twice that of a combined eastern and western Europe, we can appreciate the scale of the diversity that has been pursued over millennia among so many disparate peoples, languages, ways of life, modes of governance, and so on. While this diversity is truly profound, there seems to have been enough of a shared minimalist morality to hold it together as a continuous Chinese history and civilization for four thousand years and counting. Foregoing any appeal to a single, univocal concept, what has provided a sustained “consensus” in the etymological sense of “shared feelings” over time lies in the family-based values promoted through the written Chinese character and the classics engendered from this writing system. The Confucian conception of the political is an isomorphism between family, state, and world (*jiaguotianxiatonggou* 家國天下同構), where state and world are simulacra of family. Confucian ethics takes the cluster of terms surrounding “family reverence” (*xiao* 孝) as its prime moral imperative, and family feeling is not only the explanation of its minimalist morality, but also the root and the substance of the living Confucian social, political, and global order: the “continuity in change” (*biantong* 變通). The argument is not that the world should be persuaded by the Confucian emphasis on family feeling, but rather be prompted to acknowledge that on reflection, it is the minimalist morality in their own thick culture as well.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Roger T. Ames is the Humanities Chair Professor at Peking University, Senior Academic Advisor of the Peking University Berggruen Research Center, and Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Hawai’i. He is former editor of *Philosophy East & West* and founding editor of *China Review International*. Ames has authored several interpretative studies of Chinese philosophy and culture: *Thinking Through Confucius* (1987), *Anticipating China* (1995), *Thinking from the Han* (1998),

and *Democracy of the Dead* (1999) (all with D.L. Hall), *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (2011), and most recently *Human Becomings: Theorizing 'Persons' for Confucian Role Ethics* (2020). His publications also include translations of Chinese classics: *Sun-tzu: The Art of Warfare* (1993); *Sun Pin: The Art of Warfare* (1996) (with D.C. Lau); the *Confucian Analects* (1998) and the *Chinese Classic of Family Reverence: The Xiaojing* (2009) (both with H. Rosemont), *Focusing the Familiar: The Zhongyong* (2001), and *The Daodejing* (with D.L. Hall) (2003). Almost all of his publications are now available in Chinese translation, including his philosophical translations of Chinese canonical texts. He has most recently completed the new *Sourcebook in Classical Confucian Philosophy* (forthcoming) with its companion *A Conceptual Lexicon for Classical Confucian Philosophy* (2021), and in writing articles promoting a conversation between American pragmatism and Confucianism.



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Will to Control, Will to Power, Will to Strength, Will to *biantong*

Brook ZIPORYN University of Chicago

ABSTRACT:

In the concept summary for the Tianxia III conference on “A Minimalist Morality,” mention is made of Zhao Tingyuan’s identification of the Chinese written system as the key factor that has allowed Chinese civilization to maintain its unity in diversity over several millenia. This suggestion is gently critiqued in this same summary for omitting the main thrust embedded in the canonical texts of this written tradition: the Confucian notion of “family reverence” (*xiao* 孝), which is there presented as a more likely candidate for the sought-for key factor enabling both diversity and unity (and their integration) in Chinese history, but much more, as a proposal derived from that Confucian tradition toward a possible truly world-oriented minimalist morality of the future. But the concept summary also mentions, as if in passing, Zhao’s way of describing the means whereby this minimalist morality accomplishes its exemplary unity in diversity and diversity in unity, its prospective way of worlding the world: *biantong* 變通, “continuity in change,” or more literally, “transformation and unobstructedness.” The proposal is therefore that something or other has allowed the diverse strands of Chinese civilizations to “transform and interpenetrate without obstruction”—that something being the writing system according to Zhao, and family reverence according to the writers of the concept summary. In this paper I propose to cut out the middle man and put forward *biantong* itself as the content of minimalist morality.

Gropings in this direction may be found in the value-theories of a few contrarian European thinkers who work against the grain of the dominant Platonic-Aristotelian-Theistic traditions: I have in mind Spinoza’s notion of *conatus* and Nietzsche’s notion of Will to Power in particular. That dominant tradition is characterized by a tendency to posit a pre-existent substantive desire-independent concept of the good as what grounds and motivates all desire; the minority contrarian position in European thought sees pre-reflexive factual desire (*conatus*, Will) as the ground of any conception of goodness. It is clear that the former tends toward a maximalist morality, the latter toward a minimalist morality, so it is in this latter minority tradition, precisely because it does *not* posit a unifying concept of the Good but *does* seek out commonality only as a shared structure of intrinsically diverse and even conflictual desires, that we can perhaps seek out a promising direction for a minimalist

grounding for a world ethic which maintains both the diversity and the unity in equilibrium. But perhaps the most thoroughgoing and undiluted versions of what I have in mind here are found in ancient Daoist writings like the *Zhuangzi*, in particular in the exploration of “the transformation of things” (*wuhua* 物化) specifically as “vast unobstructedness” (*datong* 大通) or even (to use the alternate and possibly earlier variant of this term from the *Huainanzi*), “transforming unobstructedness” (*huatong* 化通). We must also attend to what can be plausibly interpreted as certain Confucian and Chinese Buddhist elaborations thereof, in the tradition of the *Book of Changes* and Tiantai Buddhism. Here I will try to tease out the way in which this notion of minimalist morality would apply to all thicker moralities, and walk through the various refinements in our conceptualization of it, bringing us past notions of morality as *control* to the notion of the good as *power*, to the necessary *self-contradiction or self-overcoming of strength* embedded, ironically enough, in the *tautology* of Will to Power, to the convergence of strength and weakness as the ultimate strength, and finally to the simple notion of *tong* itself as the final term of any system of value, one for which the extensiveness of range is exactly proportional to the variability or uncontainability or non-identifiability of content: the overcoming of determinations and limits as the motivating force even in, and especially in, the establishment of determinations and limits.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

Brook A. Ziporyn is a Mircea Eliade Professor of Chinese Religion, Philosophy, and Comparative Thought at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago. Professor Ziporyn is the author of *Evil And/Or/As the Good: Omnicentric Holism, Intersubjectivity and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought* (Harvard, 2000), *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (SUNY Press, 2003), *Being and Ambiguity: Philosophical Experiments With Tiantai Buddhism* (Open Court, 2004); *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Hackett, 2009); *Ironies of Oneness and Difference: Coherence in Early Chinese Thought; Prolegomena to the Study of Li* (SUNY Press, 2012); *Beyond Oneness and Difference: Li and Coherence in Chinese Buddhist Thought and its Antecedents* (SUNY Press, 2013); *Emptiness and Omnipresence: The Lotus Sutra and Tiantai Buddhism* (Indiana University Press, 2016); and *Zhuangzi: The Complete Writings* (Hackett: 2020).

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