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The Music in the Heart, the Way of Water, and the Light of a Thousand Suns: A Response to Richard Shusterman, Crispin Sartwell, and Scott Stroud

THOMAS ALEXANDER

In organizing this discussion, Scott Stroud has opened up an important topic that, I hope, will be further seriously explored. We are at the beginning of a potentially significant dialogue between “East(s) and West(s),” in which even our misunderstandings may be illuminating. Aside from whatever views of “pragmatism” there may be outside of the West, it is not very well understood even on its home ground. And the aesthetic dimension of “pragmatism”—its living heart, I maintain—is not well understood by those who comprehend it as utilitarianism or even as enlightened technology.¹ That its aesthetic side might be where it is actually most open to Asian schools of “the art of life” is further indication of the need to rethink pragmatism itself. And this also means being able to see pragmatism itself within the Western tradition, in terms of themes it reacts against as well as those upon which it draws. But more important is the general issue of Western philosophy of whatever stripe breaking out of its cultural parochialism to engage in world philosophy.

Preface: The Origins of Western, Chinese, and Indian Philosophy

Since the papers presented by Stroud, Shusterman, and Sartwell go to the very roots of conceiving what philosophy itself is, before engaging them directly I will begin with some general observations about the predispositions of the three great philosophical cultures: European, South Asian, and Chinese. The origin of philosophy is quite different in each of these cultures, and this has affected the very nature of what philosophy itself is understood to be. Greek philosophy begins with the cosmological speculations of the Milesians. They ask “What is the *archē* (origin, source, principle) of nature (*phusis*)?” The primordial gods and goddesses of traditional Greek myth and religion have been banished from the outset and, when not ignored, are

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open for criticism from the likes of Xenophanes and Heraclitus. Philosophy in the West, then, begins with what will become the concerns of science and as a result engages in a radical rethinking of the nature of popular ethics, the most extreme utopian example of which is Plato's *Republic*. In this process there is an initial separation of philosophy from popular religion and a criticism of traditional morality. Not only does Greek philosophy begin with a set of questions that have given a "scientific" orientation to our conception of what philosophy is, but philosophy is at odds with popular culture, the most consummate symbol of which is the trial of Socrates.

A Confucianist would consider Socrates to be a very rude, disrespectful man. Chinese philosophy does not begin in wonder at the cosmos but with a collective political crisis: the old feudal order of the Zhou Dynasty had failed and from its dismembered body warring states emerged. The ceremonial chivalry of the Zhou disappeared with increasingly brutal warfare, ending in the brief triumph of the state of Qin. (The tough, harsh faces of the terracotta soldiers buried with the emperor of Qin tell a story of regimented, illiterate, pitiless fascism.) Chinese philosophy begins with the political question: "How may the Way (*Dao*) be recovered?" (Even the seemingly apolitical Daoists take their stance in relation to this question: the *Dao De Jing* is a *political treatise*.) Confucius, looking upon the degenerating political chaos and brutality of his day, turned toward the vision of an ancient ideal society at peace with itself and with "Heaven" (*Tian*), one in harmony with the "Way." He thought he found *evidence* that such a society had existed in the "classics"—records of the old Zhou empire—*The Book of Poetry*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Rituals*, *The Book of History*, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*. Plato, facing the political chaos of his day, yearned for an *untried* ideal—for, like Socrates, he had rejected the past. Confucius thought that history *proved* we had lived beautifully in harmony and therefore could so again.² Confucius looked to the ancient books from the "golden age" and saw in them reassuring proof that the Way had once been known and, presumably, could be known again; this was not creation but *re-creation*, recovery, restoration. Tradition, not some utopian vision of a brave new world, was the source of salvation. The problem for Confucius (at least in Mencius' way of reading him) was the problem of humanity finding its true, original nature that was in musical harmony with Nature conceived as the Way, not as a "cosmos" shaped by contending powers. In short, for Confucius good manners would save civilization. I have some sympathy for this view.

In India philosophy begins with yet another fundamental question first encountered in the remote forest thinkers whose teachings compose the *Upanishads*. The ritualism of Brahmanism had come to be trite and empty, the prayers for cattle, sons, and wealth silly and vain. The world is a spell bewitching us because of our ignorance; it is *maya* (etymologically related to our word "magic"), a circle of repetitious desire and rebirth. But there is

an ultimate, astonishing truth, discovered in the innermost self, in the self supremely realized, the *atman*—the self that is “not other” than this supreme, pure, blissful, supraconscious truth, *Brahman: Tat tvam asi*—“That thou art.”³ Thus, the origin of philosophy in India begins with the question, “How may liberation from the cycle of rebirth be attained?” And the answer is “by knowledge”—not scientific knowledge of the cosmos, but the kind coming about through “disciplines” (*yogas*) leading to supreme self-realization, to truth, to “enlightenment.” Here the debates begin that divide the schools: Buddhist from Hindu, Samkhya from Vedanta, Theravada from Mahayana.

These different origins define such basic presuppositions that it is difficult for those within a given tradition even to notice them, much less question them. We have seen in the twentieth century that the hegemonic analytic movement tried simply to dismiss the claim that any other form of philosophy was philosophy at all. Not only was there *no such thing* as “Asian philosophy,” but people like Heidegger were not philosophers! Continental philosophy has reflected other basic presuppositions from the political side of Greek thought: philosophy as political critique. Both approaches exemplify themes originating with the Greeks: concern with definition and argument (*logos*) and the thesis that man is a political creature. Pragmatism itself replicates the dual concern with science and social criticism. We might set these presuppositions of Western thought (reason, science, cultural and political critique, the individual as citizen, progress) over against those of the Asian traditions as a preliminary survey of where our misunderstandings are likely to arise.

Thus, any effort by a thinker within one of these traditions to engage in understanding philosophical issues from the point of view of one or both of the others is a highly significant—and very difficult—endeavor. Success or failure aside, what all such efforts have in common is a *global conception of philosophy*. And this approach is, I believe along with my colleagues in this forum, absolutely essential to the future value of philosophy itself as well as to any possible contribution philosophy may make in the world. To engage in philosophy in this way is to occupy a different world—literally—from the worlds of the parochial approaches. And *this* is why these three papers are different and bear consideration, aside from their specific claims. With this in mind, then, I hope that my subsequent remarks and criticisms will be contextualized by my sense of the fundamental importance this endeavor has aside from any specific point or question.

“Pragmatist Aesthetics and Confucianism”

I will begin with Richard Shusterman’s provocative essay, which explores the possible “convergence” of pragmatism and Confucianism; and indeed there is, I concur, a great natural affinity in the two schools.⁴ I share a number

of Shusterman's beliefs (as well as a long-standing love of Chinese culture), but we do have some differences, which I think boil down to a matter of emphasis—Shusterman has placed his focus on the bodily self (even if that is socially contextualized) whereas I place it on the “heart/mind.”⁵ Shusterman asks us to see philosophy in general and aesthetics in particular as praxis, “improving our humanism” by “preserving, cultivating and perfecting human life.” Aesthetics should aim at developing our *appreciation* of art and beauty, not just clarifying our thoughts about them. He finds a similar humanistic-aesthetic pragmatism in the Confucian tradition—citing the emphasis Confucius placed on music—and he goes on to describe Confucianism as advocating practical ways of enhancing our social existence with “grace and beauty” via the “rites.” He concludes by seeing a comparison in the ideals of “self-cultivation” and “self-perfection” in both traditions, with attention being given to “somaesthetics.”

Shusterman may be correct that pragmatism and Confucianism share a deep concern with practice and social existence. The aesthetics of moral existence has only barely been touched upon in pragmatic treatments.⁶ But I think we already begin to blur an important contrast if we think that Confucianism was concerned with “progress” achieved through experimental improvement of the human condition. As we have seen, Confucius, however much a genuine radical he may actually have been, looked to the past; there is no indefinite, future-oriented agenda of progressive change that makes sense of Confucian “action.” Instead there is the effort to *rejuvenate* the present by connecting it to those inherited forms that have defined the core values of a healthy, harmonious society, which Confucius believed were grounded upon a cultivated, humane, “attuned” character.

In the original version of his paper, Shusterman focused primarily on the aesthetic project of the individual. In that context, I had described his view as “a very individualistic project in which the philosopher ‘sculpts the self’ in thoughts, actions, body, mind . . . the ‘cultivation of the body’ in particular.”⁷ In this revised version, he has placed more stress upon the social function of music in Confucianism as a way of “giving grace and beauty to the social functions of everyday life” and “harmonizing one’s voice” with those of others in a way that is “creatively expressive.” This is certainly an improvement over the focus upon a project of “individual moral perfectionism” (to use Stanley Cavell’s phrase). But I think it still misses the heart of the Confucian position. In Confucianism art does not “adorn” social life any more than it adorns individual life; nor is its function to be “creatively expressive” in the way we would understand this in the West. “Art” for Confucius was a kind of moral *magic*; that is, it was a way of actualizing our genuine human nature by connecting it to the ancient social forms that constituted the “Way”—not *a* way, but *the* Way that put humanity in touch with itself and nature as a whole.⁸ The Confucian gentleman did not paint

or write poetry or play music to “create expressively”—the Western image of the artist has elements of the Hebrew God creating the world by act of will combined with the Greek image of Zeus as mastering the powers of the cosmos so that they exhibit rational order. The Confucian gentleman sought to maintain his *heart-mind* (*xin*) to be in harmony with the Way.

In his attempt to include the social aspect of music, I think Shusterman is still somewhat ignoring the central message of Confucianism, something important that it has to say to pragmatism—namely, *the salvation of society comes about by developing humanity in our hearts*. This is not about making life more attractive. It is not even about making government “rule by example” rather than by compulsion, though that is a central teaching of the Master. It is about the power of art to shape the way we perceive and feel about *other* human beings and *ourselves* so that we are “aesthetically attuned” to them and they to us. This is the great question that Confucianism poses to pragmatism: the real art is the art of humanity, and this is the art of *feeling humanity with a humanized heart*. This is an issue relatively unexplored by pragmatism—the role of “progressive education” as one of cultivating our moral wisdom and sympathies. Shusterman does say, “for pragmatism, as I construe it, aesthetic education, in its truest and widest sense, is an indispensable key to ethical education and to social and political reconstruction.” But what this means is left unclear. Pragmatism needs to develop a concern with “educating the democratic heart” (as I have put it) and the arts have *everything* to do with this.⁹ What pragmatism may see more clearly than Confucianism, however, is how complex and problematic the moral world may be—and how fallible our own traditions may be for providing wise paradigms. But pragmatism can learn the centrality of the heart from Confucianism.

The Way, for Confucius, was to be found in cultivating *ren*, often translated as “benevolence.”¹⁰ The ideogram in Chinese, which combines the pictogram of “man” with that of “two,” suggests “person-to-personness.” I will render it as “human-heartedness.” In Confucius’ day, it also connoted inward nobility of character: behaving like a true man, with great-heartedness.¹¹ This is a fundamental concern for the “aesthetics of social existence”—a concern that human life and its dignity, value, and web of meaningful inter-relationships is foremost in our *hearts*, and that our hearts are emotionally “attuned” to respond to this instinctively. *Ren*, human-heartedness, is the *raison-d’être* for the arts—they restore *ren* in us, but *ren* must be there:

The Master said, “The gentleman widely versed in culture but brought back to essentials by the rites (*li*) can, I suppose, be relied upon not to turn against what he stood for.” (VI. 27)

The Master said, “What can a man do with the rites (*li*) who is not benevolent (*jen*)? What can a man do with music (*yiih*) who is not benevolent?” (III.3)¹²

Ren signifies one's moral-aesthetic comportment to other people; it is the beauty of our shared existence, the moral "neighborhood" of our lives, which flows from us:

The Master said, "Of neighborhoods, benevolence is the most beautiful. How can the man be considered wise who, when he has the choice, does not settle in benevolence? . . . The benevolent man is attracted to benevolence because he feels at home in it." (IV.1-2)

The Master said, "Is benevolence (*jen*) far away? No sooner do I desire it than it is here." (VII.30)

The key to developing *ren* is "reciprocity" or "like-heartedness" (*shu*): do not do to others what you would not want to have done to yourself.¹³ So there is the aesthetics of the moral imagination—putting ourselves in other people's shoes, or better, trying to imagine ourselves *as them* and not *a ourselves* in their situation.¹⁴ As Shusterman says, human society is like music, and we are musicians. Culture is the musical language that allows us to play together. *This* is why we need ceremony, rituals, manners: *li*. Without them we would not know how to communicate our care, love, respect, devotion, honor, gratitude. But it is not just *any* music; the music must express this—*ren*—not pettiness, greed, small-mindedness. The heart must be there first. "Aesthetics" should deal with beautiful behavior, but the beauty comes from human-heartedness.¹⁵ Life was indeed art for "Master Kong," but art was concerned with an aesthetics of *living together*. The arts should be used in education to foster our moral feelings, enhance our power of true sympathy, and give us ideals of dignified, caring lives. *That* was how you saved civilization.

How does the individual factor into this? As a guiding example, Shusterman notes in the later version of his essay. This is where the "sculpted life" comes in: it is "*morally* sculpted" so that one's existence exemplifies human-heartedness. Because this life is beautifully noble, it attracts others. "How should I govern the state?" a duke asked the Master.

The Master said, "Guide them by edicts, keep them in line with punishments, and the common people will stay out of trouble but have no sense of shame. Guide them by virtue, keep them in line with the rites, and they will, besides having a sense of shame, reform themselves." (II. 3)

Chi K'ang Tzu asked Confucius about government, saying, "What would you think if, in order to move closer to those who possess the Way, I were to kill those who do not follow the Way?" Confucius answered, "In administering your government, what need is there for you to kill? Just desire the good yourself and the common people will be good. The virtue of the gentleman is like wind; the virtue of the small man is like grass. Let wind blow over the grass and it is sure to bend." (XII. 19)

Confucius idealized this “sculpted life” of the exemplary person in the image of the *junzi*, the noble-hearted man of culture (poorly rendered as “gentleman”; the “knight of letters” would be better), whom he contrasted with the “small-minded man” (*xiao ren*) who only looked out for himself. As Shusterman notes, the knight-of-letters has “a certain unity and integrity of character” that relies upon a selfless moral principle (*yi*). This distinguishes everything he does from the small man and makes him an example to follow. He turns to the arts, especially music, to stay in tune with his moral, humane character.¹⁶

The Master said, “In his dealings with the world the gentleman is not invariably for or against anything. He is on the side of what is moral (*yi*).” (III.10)

The Master said, “The gentleman has morality (*yi*) as his basic stuff and by observing the rites (*li*) puts it into practice, by being modest gives it expression, and by being trustworthy in word brings it to completion. Such is a gentleman indeed!” (XV. 18)

Unfortunately, this ideal of “principle” is somewhat at odds with at least the popular understanding of pragmatic ethics, and the issue remains to be explored. If pragmatism does have a place for “integrity of character” (which it does, I maintain), it has a hard time explaining it.¹⁷ So again, I think this is a point where pragmatism has something to learn from Confucianism.

The ideal of “self-cultivation” in Confucianism, as Shusterman stresses, therefore, has nothing to do with egocentrism or egotism. Our human-heartedness is tied to a principle of high moral integrity, a loyalty to the highest and best part of human nature. This is the true meaning of Confucian “individualism” or “improvement of the self.” But I am somewhat at a loss to see the connection here to Professor Shusterman’s concern for “somaesthetics.” While Confucianism may not have to overcome a Pauline dread of the flesh, and while it celebrates bodily functions of eating, dancing, and so on, the central emphasis is the heart.¹⁸ It may be that cultivating “love-making practices” can be part of a “beautiful life,” as Shusterman says, but a Confucianist would say that if you cultivate human-heartedness you will be a “better” (that is, more loving and human) lover.

To get some sense of this, I cite a poem by the greatest of the great Tang poets, a Confucianist who felt the agony of his country torn by strife and one of the greatest spokesmen for the power of our human hearts, Du Fu (or Tu Fu, 713-770 CE):

“The Return”¹⁹

Cliffs of scarlet cloud gleam in the west;

The sun’s feet are sinking beneath the earth.

By the rustic gate the sparrows are twittering.
The stranger returns home from a thousand li.

My wife is astonished that I still exist.
No longer bewildered, she wipes away her tears.

I was drifting sand in the wind of the world's anger.
It is just fate that has brought me back alive.

The fence gate is filled with neighbors' faces.
Sighing and shedding a few tears.

In the deep night we light a new candle
And see each other face to face as in a dream.

This poem itself is a journey to intimacy—from the vast horizon, to the village, to the house, to the room where at last Du Fu and his wife can see each other heart-to-heart in all the tenderness, love, and vast anguish of their lives. This is what great Confucian art can do—it can awaken in us those deepest feelings that give us our own humanity by seeing that humanity in the other, “face to face as in a dream.”

“Dewey and Daoism: Teleology and Art”

Crispin Sartwell's paper presents a “somewhat controversial” challenge in its claim that pragmatism is false and anyone who thinks otherwise is an idiot.²⁰ What can I say? He's right. Fortunately, there is no such thing as “pragmatism”—never was—as he presents it.²¹ What he himself advocates is more interesting than the straw man he sets up, having something in common with Daoism, but more so with the cynicism of Diogenes of Sinope, with a dash of Mark Twain's Calvinist fatalism, and sense of human evil thrown in.²² He likes the idea of play and “letting go,” which is as close as he gets to the subtle Daoist notion of “Non-doing” (*wu wei*). Letting go, he says, is usually the only real solution to our problems, and we can do this by either letting our consciousness “disintegrate around” us or “cease caring.” Aside from the fact that a real Daoist would not be so sermonizing and pessimistic (a Daoist says, “Take it easy. Go with the flow, man. Get out of the city and into Nature. Dream about butterflies. *Be* a butterfly!”²³), and aside from the fact that the *Dao De Jing* is a great pragmatist political manual of how small states can survive, Sartwell has raised a really interesting point: What can the Daoist idea of *wu wei* say to a “pragmatist,” even a nonexistent one?²⁴

The answer is, I think, "a whole lot." Dewey has his "undergoing" in relation to "doing," which is not altogether unlike the ideas of *yin* and *yang*. Daoism asserts the irreducibility of mystery, the "Dao that cannot be called 'Tao,'" which is at best only "dimly visible" and yet "guides the ten thousand things."²⁵ Dewey does advise us of the importance of Keats' ideas of "negative capability" and "half-knowledge" so that we quit the "irritable reaching after fact and reason."²⁶ Dewey states as strongly as possible that all reasoning "must fall back on imagination" where the mind has "its own silent workings" and truth "never signifies correctness of intellectual statements about things" but "denotes the wisdom by which men live."²⁷ "Reasoning' must fail man," he says, and ". . . the insight of imagination must suffice." "Ultimately there are but two philosophies. One of them accepts life and experience in all its uncertainty, mystery, doubt, and half-knowledge and turns experience upon itself to deepen and intensify its own qualities—to imagination and art."²⁸ Can Dewey appreciate the appeal to natural intuitions the way Daoism does? Dewey does stress—though many have missed it—the importance of our peripheral understanding, our "qualitative sense" of the whole situation, that makes everything else in the situation make sense. This cannot be directly grasped, but it is essential for intelligence.²⁹ This has a great deal to do with the ability to sense the possibilities of a situation—and the more we see the present in light of the possible, the more the meaning of the present becomes clear and the more meaningful our actions become. Art taps into this, not science. But Dewey turns back from the Daoist's love of untampered nature, rustic simplicity, and spontaneity. Dewey's thought—almost any Western philosopher's thought—would have been much improved by having some of this in it.

But what of Daoism's radical rejection of all learning and convention? Daoism is an extreme reaction to a very bad political crisis. "Empty minds, fill bellies," says Laozi. Dewey, sensibly, would call this a road to disaster. If your only alternative is to reify the past into the only model of a good society, maybe so. But pragmatism takes a middle path: use what is good in the past, but keep open to possibilities that something better may be out there. Dewey is in a third place from the Daoist and the Confucianism—a good place to be in my view. But pragmatist aesthetics needs to be able to see "shadows" and "empty spaces" better than it has, and Daoism—and Buddhism—can help with this.³⁰

Unlike Sartwell's cynic philosopher, the Daoist sage is no pessimist but is rather a spontaneous and natural person. The sage is like water, like a baby who is supple and yielding, like an "uncarved block"; he is empty and still.³¹ Yet the sage is *attentive* and knows when to act as well as when not to act: "It is easy to deal with a situation before symptoms develop . . . Deal with a thing when it is still nothing."³² Daoism teaches the wisdom not of *passivity* but *receptivity*, not cynicism but being alert to the life of growing

things. *Sometimes* the best way to get things done is not to meddle: Let nature take its course. *Sometimes* it means waiting to act until the right time. One must be sensitive to the potentialities. In practicing *wu wei*, the Sage is *receptive*, and this means being actively open to what is there in the world, intuiting its “way” or “flow,” responding to it so as to let it be what it is and yet move around it. That is the power of yin; it’s like dancing with someone or making love. That’s the *Dao*. You are attuned and the flow of life moves through you—hence Alan Watt’s description of the *Dao* as “the Watercourse Way.” I think Sartwell is right—American philosophy (including his mythical “pragmatism”) should have listened to this Daoist wisdom more than it has. It also could have learned a lot more about the philosophical value of laughter, which I do not think Sartwell has managed to do very well.

The great Chinese Tang poet Li Bai (Li Po) was a Daoist. He had a friend, probably China’s greatest poet, Du Fu, a Confucianist, whom we have met. As we saw, Du Fu wrote poems about the troubles of the empire, loneliness, despair, old age—you get it. Here’s what Li Po wrote to him:

“To Tu Fu”

On the Mountain of Boiled Rice I met Tu Fu,
Wearing a bamboo hat in the hot midday;
Pray, how is it that you have grown so thin?
Is it because you suffer from poetry?

Li Po had some advice:

“Conversation in the Mountains”

If you were to ask me why I dwell among green mountains,
I shall laugh silently; my soul is serene.
The peach-blossom follows the moving water,
There is another heaven and earth beyond the world of men.³³

This is a long ways from Sartwell’s “Truth is a discipline of nihilism.”³⁴ That is why if I had to spend an afternoon with Diogenes the Cynic or Zhuangzi (Chuang-tze), I’d pick Zhuangzi.

There is a famous theme in Chinese painting called “The Three Vinegar Tasters.”³⁵ Three men are standing around a barrel of vinegar. The first has a bitter expression: that’s the Buddha, who said life was suffering. The second man has a sour expression: that’s Confucius, who saw the world as a mess. The third man is laughing: that’s Laozi (Lao-Tzu). So here’s the American

version of the Three Vinegar Tasters. One man has a resigned and far-off look. That is Peirce knowing that only a whole community of inquirers over time will know the truth. The second has a very determined look. That is William James, who is trying his best to believe the vinegar is good for him. The third guy is laughing, though in a quiet, New England sort of way. That's Dewey. He probably put three fingers of whiskey in his tasting cup.³⁶ But "pragmatism" could learn a good deal from the Daoists, especially the sense of laughter.

"Orientational Meliorism, Pragmatist Aesthetics, and the *Bhagavad Gita*"

I turn now to Scott Stroud's intricate and interesting paper. Stroud proposes to extend Dewey's claim that much of our experience can be rendered aesthetic through arts to the universal thesis that *all* "life's activities" can be aesthetic—an extreme claim indeed.³⁷ He begins with the important insight that one prime source for producing consummatory experience lies within ourselves, in our "orientation to the world." *What* we experience in the world is greatly conditioned by *how* we are habitually disposed. This leads him to hypothesize that Dewey's aesthetics contributes to what he labels "orientational meliorism"—that is, our ability to affect the quality of experience by adjusting *our* "orientations toward activity in general." Scott's provocative claim is that "Karma Yoga," or, more precisely, devotional "Bhakti Yoga" (the main yoga of the *Gita*), is good pragmatism.³⁸ Since consummatory or aesthetic experience for Dewey involves the thorough interpenetration of ends and means, Scott infers that this is ultimately a matter of "our orientation" to experience. Experience can be integrated if I have the ability to see it that way. If we focus on the immediate and take it as ultimate and not as a mere means, it becomes "aesthetic."³⁹ He wishes to believe that Dewey's idea of "ends-in-view" supports this focus.

Now he turns to the *Bhagavad Gita*, which presents a way to uphold the "value" of present activity by discarding the "delusion of egoism—the thought that I [the agent] am the doer" and by "performing work without attachment." As Krishna says, "Be intent on action, not on the fruits of action" (II. 47).⁴⁰ The minimalist reading of the *Gita* simply stresses this: forget about the ends or fruits of action and perform the action selflessly, seeing the present task as "intrinsically valuable" so that experience becomes aesthetic. Beyond this is the "full account" that seeks to "improve experience" by enlightenment. A *religious orientation* can make experience more aesthetic, which in this case is "the concept of Krishna as divine and the idea of sacrifice." Action is done not for the sake of the ego and its desires but as a yoga of liberation in devotion to the Supreme; in this way one is freed from "the bonds of action"—that is, karma. Krishna, as the symbolic ideal of the "supreme renouncer," can function as a religious ideal in a Deweyan sense of

being an “ideal for action,” providing “an enhanced, imaginative meaning to one’s actions.”

There are many questions that can be raised here. First of all, I think Stroud presents something like the hedonist’s paradox: we can improve our experience by not focusing on improving our experience. Whereas Dewey says we should integrate means and ends, Stroud advocates turning the immediate into the ultimate end. I do not see that as consistent with pragmatism at all. To have the present moment interpreted by a guiding ideal so that it constitutes a growing moment of continuous experience, potentially becoming *an* experience, is not to disregard ends entirely and just “do it.” For Dewey, this would be to make the present unintelligent and, therefore, a recipe for all types of disaster and alienation. There are problems with this from a Hindu perspective as well: Is it not a complete mistake to adopt the outlook of the *Gita* as a *means* to a *self-oriented end*? The *Gita* teaches us a path of liberation from self-centered ends and from “ends” as such. The *Gita* says that we can achieve liberation by dedicating our existence, by sacrificing our self, to God in constant devotion. It does not say that *if* we do this *then* we will have happier lives or have a “better quality” of experience full of “intrinsic value.”

Second, in *The Quest for Certainty* Dewey distinguishes “arts of acceptance” from “arts of control.”⁴¹ For too long, he says, mankind has focused on the former—accepting one’s lot in the universe—but now it is time for us to focus on the latter. So my question is whether Stroud is in fact recommending a reversion to “oriental fatalism”? To put even more of an edge on it: after all, this is how the *Gita* was used to legitimize the caste system: do your duty in this life and you will get a better one next time.⁴² I put this question rhetorically, for I am deeply sympathetic to Stroud’s approach. But it is a question that demands an answer. I quite agree that our “habits of perception” have a great deal to do with the aesthetic quality of life, and I think he has pointed out a definite way in which pragmatism can link up with the disciplines of the East—Buddhism as well as Hinduism. Pragmatism has, I think, taken such traditions too lightly and has an underdeveloped sense of what it is to live a dedicated, careful, awakened life. But the question he must answer is, How can we avoid the “fatalistic turn”?

The *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the world’s great answers to the question, How shall I live? It inspired Gandhi—and his assassin. From a Jamesian standpoint, it certainly represents one of the major worldviews that human beings have used—successfully—to face the meaning of existence.⁴³ If I turn toward the Absolute—call it “Truth” or “God” or “Brahman”—it is not because I want to make my eight-hour workday more pleasant. It is because I have encountered for myself Arjuna’s despair: that in the act of trying to fulfill my highest duties, I may undercut the whole moral order I am seeking to sustain, and that has consequences called *karma*. In this life it

is impossible to act without destruction. That is *Kurukshetra*, the battlefield of existence; that is *dharmakshetra*, the field of *Dharma*.⁴⁴ The *Gita* presents us with hardheaded realism about existence: we cannot evade action and action means *karma*—everything we do shapes what we become, like it or not. Arjuna despairs—for life asks him to fight those whom he should honor and love; his great bow Gandiva falls from his hands as he slips into the clutches of the “quality” (*guna*) of torpor, inertia, depression, despair. Heraclitus was right: existence is a struggle, a harmony born of opposition. We are each Arjuna; Kurukshetra, the field of battle, is “*dharmakshetra*,” the field of dharma, of the *special* duty that falls to each of us because we are who we are, where we are, when we are.⁴⁵ I am beside a pool and a child falls in and no one else is close by. The child is floundering and going under. My dharma is clear: I must save the child. No categorical imperative or principle of universalizability is at work here: this is *my* dharma. So I save the child. But how I do so determines everything. Do I do it because I anticipate esteem for my heroism? Maybe I do it because I love my self-image so much, although I have masked it by the impersonality of a “moral rule.” Or perhaps I can perform this act as a gift to the Supreme so that it becomes its own form of yoga, “joining” inmost self with the utmost truth. Who saved the child? God did.

So, I think Scott Stroud also needs to answer this question: How can action be *redemptive* if I make it “aesthetic”? The *Gita* has some beautiful passages that illustrate what it is to perceive the world as a manifestation of the divine, indeed, it teaches a yoga of perceptive meditation: Krishna is the taste in sweet water, the light in the moon, the smell of the earth in spring, life in all creatures, consciousness itself, “the hymn the Brahmin sings.”⁴⁶ Such images are not pleasant poetry only—and this is a most important point; they are, rather, meditational techniques to be used by the devotional worshipper as an approach to the Ultimate. Krishna is teaching Arjuna how to see God in the world. Is the world, then, not more lovely?

If I adopt the teachings of Krishna because it makes life more beautiful and full of “intrinsic value,” am I not still enmeshed? Is my life really an act of sacrifice, a gesture of selfless love? This is what Krishna teaches: selfless love of “God” is what makes our actions holy and liberating. The finite symbol leads us beyond to the infinite in which Time itself vanishes. In Krishna’s self-revelation as the absolute he is described as a “light of a thousand suns” (XI.12). Arjuna’s ego is humbled before it, even terrorized by it, and he begs Krishna to return to his finite, beautiful form. Even so, we must use some finite, appealing symbols to focus our thoughts and come to terms with the transcendent, knowing them to be the substitution that it is. But, and this is the key, they are used to transcend finitude through love. This is not love of an abstract universal, which would blind us as a thousand suns: it is seen in lucidity (*sattva*) as present in everything.

I penetrate the earth
 And sustain creatures by my strength; . . .
 I am the universal fire
 Within the body of living beings . . .
 I dwell deep
 in the heart of everyone. (XV.13-14)

The ultimate answer of the *Gita* is *love*. The pragmatists have sung the praises of many things, but not of this, or at least not enough.⁴⁷ And love leads us beyond ourselves.

I have seen one of the great Bhakti saints, Mata Amritanandamayi ("Amma"), spend a day embracing her devotees one by one with an endless and *completely focused* outpouring of love and then spend an evening singing *bhajans*, or devotional songs, in a deep, powerful voice, flinging open her arms while singing, lost in ecstasy. Maybe this can be construed as "aesthetics," but then it would be an aesthetics that accepts the suffering of each human being and offers love, that faces the wreckage and carnage following the 2004 tsunami, helping the victims not only to rebuild their physical lives but to find their lives again. I'd like to call it "aesthetics" if only to shame the aestheticians.

Conclusion

As I said at the outset, we must now begin an era of engaging in global philosophy. The most difficult lesson any philosopher has is learning to listen, for we are already translating what others say into what we think. Alien traditions present even more of a challenge. If there are criticisms in what I have said, this is all of secondary (or tertiary) importance. Philosophy cannot continue as it has, and, together, I think we can find a better way. Let us forget the "isms" and get back to the rough ground. "Pragmatism" needs to step out of its American context in order to see that context better and develop insights into those areas of human experience it has not accounted for as well as has been done by other traditions.

NOTES

1. I think the tendency to lump a group of complex thinkers like James, Peirce, and Dewey together under the term "pragmatism," while useful for generic reference, like a family name, unfortunately makes us focus on the "pragmatism" of their thought rather than the thought that contextualizes it, much as it would be to call Aristotle a "logician." A serious misreading of "the pragmatists" has resulted. Each one of the "pragmatists" is much more than a pragmatist and their pragmatisms must be seen in terms of this "much more."
2. By using the terms *evidence* and *proof* I do not mean to imply Confucius was engaged in some empirical inquiry; the proof was in the fact that by reading

- these classics—committing them to one’s heart and opening one’s full being to them is what is meant in this context by “reading”—that one *became* a better person.
3. See, for example *Katha Upanishad* I and *Chandogya Upanishad* VI.
 4. The final form of his essay is much expanded and the focus is somewhat different from the version to which my comments were originally addressed. I have tried to adjust my response, but certain points may now seem less pertinent or even more obtuse than they did at first.
 5. The Chinese word *xin* means “heart” as well as “mind,” a common identification throughout the world.
 6. Pragmatism has barely begun to explore the aesthetic dimension of ethics, though I can point to Mark Johnson’s *The Moral Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), Steven Fesmire’s *John Dewey and Moral Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), and *John Dewey’s Ethics: Democracy as Experience* from Indiana University Press by Gregory Pappas. The connection between pragmatism and Confucianism itself has been a topic of recent discussion. See Donald Hall’s and Roger Ames’ *Democracy of the Dead: Dewey Confucius and the Hope for Democracy in China* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999) and Sor Hoon-Tan’s *Confucian Democracy: A Deweyan Reconstruction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).
 7. Confucianism certainly places importance on the body, which the Pauline heritage of the West does not—to the extent of regarding maiming or willful tampering with one’s body as an insult to one’s parents. “Somaesthetics” for Confucianism would not involve tattooing or cosmetic surgery.
 8. As Herbert Fingarette points out in his elegant classic *The Secular as Sacred* (New York: Harper, 1972), in using good manners—by saying things nicely—in social interaction, “magic” works. I say “please” and “thank you” and we cooperate and things go smoothly. I say “Do this now!” and “Can’t you do it faster?” and the music of society is replaced by cacophony. We can actually perform magic, bring things about by the use of “rites,” at least in social instances.
 9. See my essay, “Educating the Democratic Heart,” in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, ed. Jim Garrison, vol. 13 (Netherlands: Springer, 1995), 243-59.
 10. In the older Wade-Giles form of rendering Chinese phonetically, this comes out as *jen*.
 11. A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao* (Chicago: Open Court, 1989), 19.
 12. I have used the translation by D. C. Lau, *The Analects* (New York: Penguin, 1979); all citations will be given parenthetically in the text. Lau uses the Wade-Giles system for transliteration. Shusterman uses the more recent translation by Ames and Rosemont (using pinyin), which is also to be highly recommended; Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine, 1998).
 13. “The Master said, ‘Ts’an! There is one single thread binding my way together.’ Tseng Ts’an assented. After the Master had gone out, the disciples asked, ‘What did he mean?’ Tseng Tsan said, ‘The way of the Master consists in doing one’s best and in using oneself as a measure to gauge others’ (IV.15). ‘Tzu-kung asked, ‘Is there a single word that can be a guide for conduct throughout one’s life?’ The Master said, ‘It is perhaps, the word *shu* [reciprocity]. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire,” (XV. 24). “The ability to take as analogy what is near at hand [that is, oneself] can be called the method of benevolence” (VI.30).
 14. See my article, “Dewey and the Moral Imagination: Beyond Putnam and Rorty Toward a Postmodern Ethics,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 29, no. 3, (1992): 369-400.
 15. As Shusterman himself recognizes in quoting *Analects* XVII.11.
 16. “The Master said, ‘The gentleman (*chün tzu*) understands what is moral (*yi*). The small man (*shao jen*) understands what is profitable” (IV.16). “The Master said,

- 'The gentleman gets through to what is up above; the small man gets through to what is down below" (XIV.23).
17. See John Dewey's chapter on "The Moral Self" in the 1932 edition of *Ethics*, co-authored with James Tufts (volume 7 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey, The Later Works* [Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1989], 7). But here is perhaps a point where something like Josiah's Royce's thought has something to add.
 18. For an absolutely delightful celebration of life as art, nothing surpasses Lin Yutang's *The Importance of Living* (New York: John Day, 1937).
 19. Dufu, "The Return," trans. Nee Wen-yei, in *The White Pony*, ed. Robert Payne (New York: John Day, 1947), 189-90. I have broken the poem into its natural couplets so that the parallelism and progression of images, for which Du Fu is justly famous, may be more apparent.
 20. Also expanded from the original draft to which my comments were addressed, but not substantially changed.
 21. Sartwell quotes a popularized rendition of the pragmatist definition of truth from *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, not one of Dewey's best attempts (it was a series of lectures given in Japan, making it not only simplified, but something of a sermon to the Japanese empire). "If ideas, meanings, conceptions, notions, theories, systems are instrumental to an active reorganization of the given environment, to a removal of some specific trouble and perplexity, then the test of their validity and value lies in accomplishing this work. If they succeed in their office, they are reliable, valid, good, true." Sartwell puzzles over the "unaccountable" absence of "the beautiful" along with valid, good, and true.

But a careful reading of even this book discovers in its concluding paragraphs the following: "Conceptions of possibility, progress, free movement and infinitely diversified opportunity have been suggested by modern science. But until they have displaced from *imagination* the heritage of the immutable and the once-for-all ordered and systematized, the ideas of mechanism and matter will be like a dead weight upon the emotions, paralyzing religion and distorting art. When the liberation of capacity no longer seems a menace to organization and established institutions, something cannot be avoided practically and yet something that is a threat to conservation of the most precious values of the past, when the liberating of human capacity operates as a socially creative force, art will not be a luxury, a stranger to daily occupations of making a living. Making a living, economically speaking, will be at one with making a life that is worth living. And when the emotional force, the mystic force one might say, of communication, of the miracle of shared life and experience is spontaneously felt, the hardness and crudeness of contemporary life will be bathed in the light that never was on land or sea. Poetry, art, and religion are precious things" (John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, volume 10 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey, The Middle Works* [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982], 200-201). Of course, one of the main themes of Dewey's thought is how to imbue actual, ordinary experience with the full richness of aesthetic experience, nowhere better expressed than in his *Art as Experience*.

The caricature of pragmatist themes that Sartwell gives illustrates my previous point as to how very unhelpful it is to speak of James, Peirce, and Dewey as "pragmatists" when this simply denotes a narrow, contextualized theme in their much more complex philosophical positions. The sensible thought that to see the *possibilities in a present situation* is to be able to act more intelligently and freely is understood by Sartwell only as a crude notion of "goal directed activity." He transforms the complex, fallibilistic idea of truth as something ever to be reevaluated in light of ongoing experience into "holding or believing a proposition" because it is useful, something not even James would accept. The only way we can *live* is to see the possibilities in the present, and the more we see the more intelligently we can act—though never without the possibility of running up against the limits of intelligence. *Truth* is something that must be carried through history, not in one small, selfish action. To remove truth from any connection with experience over time is to open the door to "self-evident truths" and "eternal verities" that have always served ruling elites.

22. Diogenes could have written this passage in Sartwell's essay:

I'll give you an indication of how I'm going to participate. I'm going to sit on the periphery, abusing the suckers who are yapping and the pathetic, debased rhetoric they use in that yapping. I'm going to snicker at the consensus and its enforcement. Then I'm going to violate any of the laws of which I am myself the author whenever the mood takes me. Then I'm going to gaze with a jaundiced eye at the amazing world we have all created together. Then I'm going to try to forget about it, drink some beer and watch some football.
23. "Once Chuang Chou [that is, Chuang-tzu in Wade-Giles or Zhuangzi in pinyin] dreamed he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang Chou. But he didn't know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou." Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Waston (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 2:45.
24. See A. C. Graham's discussion in *Disputers of the Tao* (Chicago: Open Court, 1989). Oddly, Sartwell seems unaware that the old Daoists engaged in one of the most "pragmatic" (even in his sense of the term) activities—the effort to prolong life through alchemy; the heavy ingestion of mercury may account for some of the legendary eccentric activities in the Daoist sages.
25. See Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau (New York: Penguin, 1964), chaps 1, 14, 37. There are more translations—and "renditions" claiming to be translations—of this book than any other, which is perhaps appropriate for a book that says at the start that what it is about cannot be put into words. Besides Lau's reliable version, I recommend John Wu's *Tao Teh Ching* (Shambala) and the recent Hackett edition by Stephen Addiss, Stanley Lombardo, and Burton Watson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), which gives some idea of the enigmatic compression of the work. For interpretive studies I recommend Arthur Waley's *The Way and Its Power* and Alan Watts and Al Chung Liang Huang's *Tao The Watercourse Way*; Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh* is actually a very fine introduction to the book. You can't "get" Daoism without laughing.
26. John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, volume 10 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey, The Later Works* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1989), 39.
27. *Ibid.*, 40.
28. *Ibid.*, 41.
29. I discuss this in my book, *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience and Nature: The Horizons of Feeling* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), chap. III.5; see Dewey's essay "Qualitative Thought" in volume 5 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey, The Later Works* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988).
30. See Junichiro Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows* (New Haven, CT: Leete Island Press, 1977).
31. See *Tao Te Ching*, chaps., 55, 15, 76, 16, 20.
32. See chap. 64 in *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau.
33. Both from Robert Payne, ed., *The White Pony*, 212, 194.
34. I think Gary Snyder provides a better example of how a political Daoist might express himself; see *The Practice of the Wild* (Berkeley: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2003).
35. The image can be seen at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vinegar_Tasters.
36. We hear in *Dialogue on John Dewey*, ed. Corliss Lamont (Horizon Press, 1981) that Dewey mixed a special drink of three fingers of whiskey with molasses.
37. Dewey says that the roots of aesthetic experience are to be found in ordinary experiences, either potentially or in some rudimentary consummatory form, and that the potentiality for aesthetic experience can be developed by art. This is a long way from saying that *all* experience *actually* is consummatory, for obviously

- a great deal of it is not—otherwise why would art exist?—and from saying that *all* experience is *potentially* consummatory. Art can create aesthetic experience from decidedly unpleasant aspects of existence—tragedy, nightmares, hate, etc. This does not mean that all experiences can be so transformed.
38. The *Gita* seeks to integrate all forms of yoga by showing that *jñāna yoga* (yoga of knowledge) is a form of *karma yoga* (yoga of action); *bhakti yoga* (yoga of devotion) is presented as a way of making *karma yoga* work for all sorts of people—devotion is what makes action liberating. Devotion is the key, for the *Gita*, and this is why it is the “Hindu Bible.”
 39. “The individual’s attention is on present activity and not on the non-present goal” (see Stroud’s essay).
 40. *The Bhagavad-Gita*, trans. Barbara Stoler Miller (New York: Bantam, 1986). I recommend supplementing this lucid translation with the scholarly, annotated edition of S. Radhakrishnan (New York: Harper Collins, 1948).
 41. John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*, volume 4 of *The Collected Works of John Dewey, The Later Works* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), chap. 4.
 42. See XVIII.47-48, and preceding slokas.
 43. This is the proper understanding of James’s *Pragmatism*: “workability” is first and foremost a worldview that allows us to live life meaningfully.
 44. The very first line of the *Gita* poses this dilemma immediately and succinctly: *dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre* (I.1). Radhakrishnan notes, “*dharmakṣetre*: in the field of righteousness. The quality of deciding what is right or dharma is special to man . . . The world is dharmaksetra, the battleground for a moral struggle. The decisive issue lies in the hearts of men where the battles are fought daily and hourly” (S. Radhakrishnan, trans., *The Bhagavadgita* (Harper, n.d.), 79).
 45. *Bhagavad Gita*, I.1.
 46. *Bhagavad Gita*, VII, X. See also Emerson’s poem “Brahma.”
 47. Peirce had his agapism and Dewey speaks shyly of love at the end of *Art as Experience*; his poems reveal that he knew it.