

quite helpful. It is, however, possible that the responsibility for these shortcomings lies with the publishing house and its editing work rather than with the author. This, in turn, raises the general question of how the publishing house can justify charging about 100 US dollars for a paperback of undesirable quality, especially since part of the printing costs have been subsidized.

Martin Müller
University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany

ENDNOTE

1. See, for example, “bibliography,” entry Feng Qi (not Feng Qizhu), 331, entry “Kogelschatz” (it should be “Münchener Ostasiatische Studien”), 339, entry Zhang Dongsun “*Lao er wu gong*” (the German translation should be changed to “Vergebliche Liebesmüh”), 346. Titles mentioned in the list of abbreviations are, unusually, not included into the bibliography, 324, which makes it difficult to identify the correct references (e.g., for “*Kexue yu renshengguan*,” 268, fn. 14). The *pinyin* transcription on p. 217 should be “*chongxin guding yiqie jiaozhi*.”

Deconstruction and the Ethical in Asian Thought. Edited by Youru Wang. (New York: Routledge, 2007. xiii, 251 Pp. Hardback, ISBN 978-0-415-77016-3.)

Deconstruction and the Ethical in Asian Thought contains twelve essays ranging across texts and figures from Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, with about half of the essays drawing on Buddhist traditions. Taken individually, the essays are remarkably consistent in raising interesting and complex philosophical issues in a wide variety of contexts. While the essays are specific and sophisticated, they remain accessible and interesting for anyone with some knowledge of Asian thought. Though the traditions and topics discussed vary widely, the focus on the intersection of deconstruction and ethics provides a common thread, making most of the essays mutually informative and relevant.

The volume nicely avoids the most common pitfalls of comparative philosophy. The essays narrowly focus on particular figures or concentrated movements, not only eschewing generalizations about “Asian Thought” but also positively demonstrating the diversity of Asian traditions. The authors, being experts in the particular traditions they examine, avoid readily imposing European terms onto the texts, although the attempt to connect every tradition to deconstruction leads in this direction in a few cases. According to the editor Youru

Wang, the goal of the anthology is to investigate the various themes that underlie deconstruction as a cross-cultural practice, and to bring Derrida (and to some extent Lévinas) into dialogue with other traditions so as to see how they might mutually challenge and supplement each other. In pursuing these goals, the anthology moves beyond “comparative” philosophy and toward simply doing philosophy in an intercultural or global context, attempting, in the editor’s words, to “contribute to the deepening and enrichment of contemporary ethical discourse in a global context” (p. 5).

At first glance, using deconstruction as a base for transcultural dialogue seems misguided. Deconstruction presents itself as explicitly parasitic, working within and against an already existing tradition, so it seems no less provincial than those traditions it works against. Wang addresses this problem through a distinction between deconstruction as the particular movement associated with Derrida, and deconstruction as “the differential process itself, or what happens to binary oppositions in and of themselves” (p. 1). The latter not only transcends Derrida and European culture, but it is also addressed in some form or other in all major Asian traditions (p. 3).

At its thinnest, this deconstructive concern is a suspicion of ethical binaries and absolutes. Purushottama Bilimoria’s essay, “Dismantling Normativity in Indian Ethics—From Vedic Altarity to the *Gita*’s Alterity,” provides an excellent analysis of the ways in which the *Baghavad Gita* shifted and disrupted the transcendently grounded caste system and the Vedic focus on ritual adherence as a way to secure future rewards. Dan Lusthaus, in “Zhuangzi’s Ethics of Deconstructing Moralistic Self-Imprisonment: Standards without Standards,” has a nice discussion of the debates about objective standards in classical Chinese philosophy, revealing Zhuangzi’s view that standards do not solve social problems but rather form “contentious lines across which social friction grows” (p. 61). He argues that Zhuangzi’s ethics is aporetic because of its simultaneous rejection of standards and recognition that standards cannot be fully given up.

Several of the essays connect more specifically to deconstruction by approaching the concern with ethical absolutes from the broader context of the stability and reification of concepts. William Edelglass, in “Ethics and the Subversion of Conceptual Reification in Levinas and Santideva,” claims that both Lévinas and Santideva have a shared “concern for the moral significance of deconstructing one’s own concepts” (p. 160). He ties this focus to the fact that both advocate “a radical, asymmetrical ethics” in which one serves the other without seeking reciprocity (p. 154). A. T. Nuyen (“Levinas and Laozi on the Deconstruction of Ethics”) and Victor Forte (“The Ethics of Attainment: The Meaning of the Ethical in Dogen and Derrida”) take up

similar themes. Nuyen sees Lévinas and Laozi as both invoking an “undecidable element that is both outside a particular structure of thought and apt to disrupt this structure” (p. 166). In the *Dao De Jing*, that inconceivable Other is *dao* and its effect in the world is *de*. Forte casts a similar structure in terms of the immanent and transcendent or the attainable and unattainable. According to Forte, both Dogen and Derrida rely on a transcendent “not-yet,” which is neither immanent in the human nor entirely separate from it. This “not-yet” defers the finality of meaning or any possible totality. In the only essay that discusses a modern figure, Gereon Kopf (“The Ethical and the Non-Ethical: Nishida’s Methodic Subversion”) provides a remarkably clear explanation of Nishida’s core ethical ideas. His theme is very close to that of Forte, arguing that Nishida’s goal was to break down dualistic paradigms without falling into monism (p. 135). The value of a comparison with deconstruction, according to Kopf, is that it allows one to see “that paradoxes do not necessarily imply absolutism or mysticism but can also indicate subversive tendencies reminiscent of postmodern strategies” (p. 138).

Most of the essays share a common concern with the ethical consequences of deconstructing ethical norms. Many note that those who undermine, subvert, and deconstruct ethical standards have been consistently attacked by moralists as threatening ethics in general, a charge that has been made against Derrida as well as Zhuangzi, Nagarjuna, Wonhyo, and others. The key question is this: What kind of ethics follows from a position oriented negatively toward deconstructing ethics? One line of response argues that the foundation of ethics is openness to otherness or alterity and that rigid ethical codes close off this openness. David R. Loy, in “Lacking Ethics,” puts the point in concrete terms: “one of the main causes of evil in this world has been human attempts to eradicate evil” (p. 114). The essay by Youru Wang, “Deconstructing Karma and the Aporia of the Ethical in Hongzhou Chan Buddhism,” is one of several that emphasize the connection between ethical standards and attachment. He argues that in a Buddhist context, deconstruction of fixed ethical distinctions is meant to break down reifications and thus to free us from attachment to ethics itself (p. 87). Wang develops this further to show that such detachment is necessary for true compassion to emerge: “Only when a person fully understands and realizes this basic context/condition of interdependent arising can he or she be fully responsive to, responsible for, and compassionate for others” (p. 93). The underlying point is that because ethical codes so easily initiate a split between “us” and “them,” the codes themselves tend toward betraying the ethical. By revealing the inherent contradictions—the aporia—of ethics, deconstruction serves a more deeply ethical—an “archi-ethical”—purpose.

While the details and contexts are quite different, there does seem to be a genuine parallel between this Buddhist concern for nonattachment to goodness and the ethical thinking of Derrida and Lévinas.

The most interesting line of contention across the essays is around the status of ethical rules after deconstruction. Do we remain constrained by these rules? Can we do whatever we want? The response is generally conservative, namely that we remain bound to the conventional ethical rules in which we find ourselves. Robert Magliola, in “Hongzhou Chan Buddhism, and Derrida Late and Early: Justice, ethics, and karma,” most emphasizes this point, writing of Derrida: “the deconstructive mode does not and cannot replace the body in which it acts: rather, it displaces but necessarily retains the body, the body that—in the case of ethics—is an institutionalized ethics” (p. 179). Deconstruction is not iconoclastic; it displaces and unsettles rules, but does not reject them. While recognizing that Chan masters did sometimes violate the rules in order to disrupt attachment to those rules (p. 182), the danger of such violations was constrained by a strict separation between conventional and ultimate truth: “Thus the doctrine of two truths, while affirming one Reality, justifies a sorting out of ultimate (nirvanic) and relative (samsaric) perspectives in such a wise as to shore up the status quo” (p. 185). Douglas L. Berger, in “Deconstruction, Aporia, and Justice in Nagarjuna’s Empty Ethics,” articulates the same distinction through an excellent discussion of Nagarjuna’s deconstruction of *svabhava* (self-production), but Berger claims that Derrida does *not* separate the ultimate and conventional. This leads Derridean deconstruction into a kind of paralysis in the face of concrete action in the world, but it also allows for criticism of concrete injustices imbedded in conventional society, something that he thinks is lacking in Nagarjuna. David Loy, in one of the most interesting essays in the collection, seems to follow the same line of interpretation as Berger, but develops further the political dangers of separating ultimate and conventional truth. Regarding the equation of samsara and nirvana, he writes, “the true nature of samsara may be taken as nirvana itself, or nirvana can be redefined in more this-worldly ways that end up rationalizing cravings, nationalism, and subservience to secular authority” (p. 120). He thus suggests that (Mahayana) Buddhists might benefit from the political edge of European versions of deconstruction.

The tension between the conventional and the ultimate is the focus of Jin Y. Park’s excellent essay, “Transgression and Ethics of Tension: Wonhyo and Derrida on Institutional Authority.” Park claims that the commonality between Derrida and Wonhyo—and what makes both so difficult—is that “their awareness of the fundamental problem of categorization and institutionalization cannot and does not lead them

to a simple negation of normative ethics” (p. 202). The tension, or aporia, between these two perspectives (ultimate and conventional) is irresolvable and precludes any closure or final harmony. In this context, Park discusses the role of transgressive actions in the “mad monk” tradition:

Their transgression marks the very limits of institution but without endorsing the transgression as an alternative to an institutionalized social system. Transgression of Wonhyo in this sense cannot and does not offer any harmonizing vision that can come about by simply negating the institutional authority, be it social or religious. (pp. 211–2)

Transgressions of the status quo serve to both reinforce it and to free us from attachment to it.

It is in the conflicts around the tension between deconstruction and concrete action that this volume is most successful in establishing a dialogue that crosses cultural boundaries, even if it, as with any genuine dialogue, offers more promising starts than conclusions.

There are good pragmatic reasons for centering a collection like this on deconstruction (i.e., on Derrida and Lévinas). Nonetheless, there is something troubling about placing what On-cho Ng rightly calls a “small piece of recent Western intellectual history” (p. 102) on a par with all of Asian thought. Wang addresses this through his distinction between deconstruction as the European movement and deconstruction generally, but the latter is consistently articulated in European terms. As a result, the volume tends to treat other traditions as variations on Derrida rather than contextualizing Derridean deconstruction as simply one attempt to work through a fundamental tension between ethical norms and openness to others. This focus thus limits the possibilities for addressing this tension from radically different contexts. Some of the most interesting and suggestive moments in the collection come with the admission of fundamental differences. For example, Loy mentions in passing that in a Buddhist context, conceptual deconstruction does little unless accompanied by practice, something quite foreign to a contemporary European context. On-cho Ng’s essay, “The Ethics of Being and Non-Being: Confucian Contestations on Human Nature (*Xing*) in Late Imperial China,” is most explicit in rejecting the applicability of deconstruction. Ng provides a clear and succinct explication of the late Ming Confucian debates around the senses in which human nature transcends categories of good and evil. He points out that while this resembles the deconstruction of binaries, the Confucian conception of a relational self simply stands outside the dichotomy between modern and postmodern European conceptions of the self, both of which he thinks tend toward being individualistic and atomistic. Berger also

emphasizes the radical difference between Nagarjuna and Derrida, claiming that opposition and irreconcilable tensions, basically aporia, are exactly what Nagarjuna is denying. He explains:

Nagarjuna's project seems for its part to point to the deduction that all moral dualisms can only lead to a kind of ethical paralysis that weakens one's ability to move from attachment to justice. Nagarjuna's equation of samsara and nirvana lays aside any possible distinction between purely pure and purely impure acts, and along with these any need to posit an aporetic character to human goodness. (p. 55)

Edelglass notes a similar difference, writing that Santideva's denial of an absolute division between self and other would appear to Lévinas as a totalization and violent appropriation of the Other, while Lévinas' preservation of the Other would appear to Santideva as a reification and absolutism (p. 154).

From the broader perspective of comparative or intercultural philosophy, what is most interesting in this volume is how a similar pattern of undermining but not rejecting ethical norms recurs in such different contexts. Even though the tight focus of the collection on the European version of the pattern tends to obscure these differences, the collection is remarkably successful in retaining sensitivity to cultural difference while bringing about a fruitful conversation.

Franklin Perkins

DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois

The Ethics of Confucius and Aristotle: Mirrors of Virtue. By Jiyuan Yu. (New York and London: Routledge, 2007. xii, 276 Pp. Hardback, ISBN 0-415-95647-1, 987-0-415-95647-5.)

In a letter to a critic of his comparative sociology, Max Weber replied sarcastically: "Some may well sneer [that] dilettantes compare." While this may be an apt remark for some who attempt to do comparative philosophy, it definitely does not apply to Jijuan Yu in his groundbreaking comparison of Confucius and Aristotle. Yu, a well-established Aristotle scholar, is thoroughly trained in both European and Asian philosophy.

The successful comparative philosopher must offer a methodology that goes beyond superficial juxtapositions of texts and ideas. Yu proposes that Aristotle's concept of a friend as a mirror and a second self can serve as a key to unlock hitherto unrecognized insights that would escape those who study the Greeks and the Chinese apart from