

BOOK REVIEW

Soraj Hongladarom and Jeremiah Joven Joaquin (Eds.). *Love and Friendship Across Cultures: Perspectives from East and West*

**Singapore: Springer
2021, 190**

Love and Friendship Across Cultures: Perspectives from East and West is a result of the collaboration between the Philosophical Association of the Philippines (PAP) and the Philosophy and Religion Society of Thailand (PARST) during the first joint meeting in July 2019 at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand on the theme that entitles this book. Besides being a product of the attempt to bridge philosophical insights among Southeast Asian nations, this book exhibits attention to inklings of the fostering of comparative philosophy, admittedly an underdeveloped research area in the Philippine academic landscape relative to other well-established fields. This book is composed of an introduction written by the editors, Soraj Hongladarom and Jeremiah Joven Joaquin, and 13 essays by members of the two philosophical associations. The chapters are clustered into three groups according to their commonalities, the first two groups due to their historicity – the first part is for the ancient historical period and the second is for modern and contemporary thinkers – while the third part is entitled “Conceptual Analyses” which probes the theme from a conceptual perspective.

Andrew Tsz Wan Hung’s “Aristotle and Confucians on Friendship” opens the book’s first part with a comparison of the views of friendship of Aristotle and of the Confucian pair Confucius and Mencius, mapping the ancient terrain between the clearly pronounced views of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the aphorisms in both the *Analects* and *Mencius*. Hung presents two levels of debates in this essay: firstly concerning Aristotle’s taxonomy of friendship that centers on J. M. Cooper’s reading of Aristotle, which associates friendship with virtue contrasted to Michael Pakaluk’s and Howard Curzer’s emphases on the merit of friendships of utility and pleasure; and secondly the possibility for the 君子 (*junzi*) or a gentleman to be friends with one’s inferior, the possibility of which argued by A.Y. King, David Hall, and Roger Ames while Tan Siton and Norman Kutcher for the contrary. From this two-tiered debate, what Hung brings forward is a dialogue between the *megalopsychos* (the great-souled person) for Aristotle and the 君子 for the Confucians. From Aristotle, we understand the view that friends identify with each other as an “extension of the self in their shared activities” through which they are able to persevere through a “singleness of mind” in pursuit of moral excellence (17). Quite similar to this is the etymological root of the Chinese 朋友 (*pengyou*), which suggests a sense of accompaniment in one’s ulterior task of moral and intellectual cultivation. The Confucian thrust, therefore, of

considering “friendship as a bridge between family and civil society” stands as a supplement to the Aristotelian tradition with special consideration to the various relations found within society (17-18). On a technical note, it is unclear why there is a need to rely on more than one translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* for this chapter.

The second chapter follows a similar tenor with a comparison of the Greek and Indian approaches to happiness with John B. Brotamante’s “Aristotle’s and Buddha’s Notion of Happiness: A Comparative Study.” Candidly speaking, this essay, unfortunately, seems rather confusing in terms of its structure for several reasons: the introduction is comprised of four paragraphs that ramble first on the views on happiness from other thinkers that seem to be just mentioned with minimal to no engagement; a linguistic insight into the words happiness, eudaimonia, then *sukkah*; an unqualified sketch of comparative analysis; and with a vague contrast between an alleged individualist account of happiness for Aristotle and a collectivist one espoused in Buddhism (which is returned to at the end of the chapter). Secondly, the next portion of the chapter is awkwardly divided into an elementary discussion of what happiness is for the two traditions without any serious engagement of secondary materials, followed by a presentation of the origin, the end, and the means of attaining happiness in both theories. For the latter, the quality of scholarship is disappointing for there are engagements with pertinent literature for Buddhism, but this is completely absent for Aristotelianism. Thirdly, the remaining two sections are “Comparison and Contrast on the Concept of Happiness in Buddhism and Aristotle,” which seems misleading since bits of parallelism between the two stands were already brought to the fore in the previous sections, and the conclusion which summarizes the differences and similarities between the two. Rather than a novel approach to comparative philosophy, as a takeaway, this essay provides a direction for ascertaining numerous similarities and differences between the approaches of Buddhism and Aristotelianism that could be better articulated in a more scholarly work.

In stark contrast to the previous chapter, the third chapter, “Friendship in Aristotle and Buddhism: Confluences and Divergences,” by Kevin Taylor, provides a serious engagement with the two traditions yet concerning their view on friendship in particular found in Aristotle’s virtue theory and some types of friendships within Buddhism, namely “between (1) friendship between everyday laypersons who are not monastics, (2) friendship understood as existing between monks with the monastic community, and (3) friendship as spiritually understood” (39). Taylor hinges his discussion of Aristotle’s view on friendship through the external goods and the importance of these to be employed properly. Honor, wealth, and relationships are to be earnestly considered solely but in the context of the role of the Doctrine of the Mean in certain temperaments. The pinnacle of friendship, in this case, takes shape through the nature of friendship that “is good unconditionally and for the friend and therefore enduring and rare since such virtuous characters are rare and this friendship requires time” (43). This bridges the discussion to Buddhism; however, an important differentiation is made between the Buddhist monastery and Aristotle’s religious community, which shows an inequivalence for the former, the *sangha*, goes beyond the restricted usage of the latter. As such, there remain varying types of friendships that are textually based, especially in relation to one’s responsibility vis-à-vis dharma (49-51). The main difference between both traditions for the purpose of this chapter is

the “conception of the soul” along with its relation to happiness, yet despite this, what is similar to the two is a “sense of skepticism with regards to friendship” for an ideal friendship for the two is considered rare (47 and 51). Taylor ends the chapter with a review of the parallels between both views but also their uniqueness.

The fourth chapter, “Philia and Agape: Ancient Greek Ethics of Friendship and Christian Theology of Love” by Jonas Holst, continues the comparative motif by bringing together a view of friendship based on *philia* and *agape*, banking on the two traditions respectively. Holst begins the essay by presenting the relevance of *philia* in the Greek context, such as “ritualized friendships,” yet later interpreted in the context of material benefit, with only Plato and Aristotle providing a higher plane for such to be understood (56-58). While self-sufficiency is taken through Aristotle as “a person living alongside his parents, children, wife, and parents and fellow citizens generally, since a human being is by nature a political being[,]” a friend is “a sort of mirror for the one who cannot know himself all by himself” (59). From such a view, the chapter then proceeds, honestly speaking, not to a discussion of Christian theology per se but an elaboration of certain passages in the Bible that exhibit or reinforce the view of *agape* presented through the good Samaritan. Although some commentators of this idea (mostly saints) are mentioned in the following section, it would have been better if that portion had been included here, namely the discussion of *agape*’s link to *philoxenia* as written by Clement of Alexandria or in the context of the Holy Eucharist (63). This would present enormous potential if only more secondary sources were engaged with, from the Patristics down to more recent theologians such as Anders Nygren (who was cited in the paper) and John Caputo. The chapter’s last section is the comparison which brings the two traditions together with the idea of the ‘self’ for this self as the other rings through both in different respects: “They converge on the idea of receiving the stranger” (64).

The fifth chapter caps the first part devoted to the ancient perspective of Joseph Martin M. Jose’s “Towards a Confucian Ethics of Humane Online Relations,” which serves as a bridge between ancient and contemporary discussions on the Confucian take on relationships, arguing “a Confucian ethics of humane online relations/interactions in the online community” that “can aid in addressing the present malaise of the online community, especially problems confronting human relations/interactions established therein” (70). The introduction proceeds as a superb and precise review of pertinent literature on the intersection of the internet and Confucianism that ends with Jose’s main thesis and the limitations of this work. He then proceeds to identify the online realm as a community by working on the insights of Malcolm Parks concerning strong and weak communities yet wraps the section with the assertion that such a realm is an infraspatial realm, allowing individuals to share interpersonal sentiments and culture (71-72). The following section progresses with an exposition of seven issues of the online community. (73) Responding to this, Jose turns to the Confucian tradition in two ways. Firstly, a view on prominence and acknowledgment in light of online community is focused on one’s 名 (*ming*) or title, for “most online users have forgotten that there is a distinction between being known and being prominent” (74-75). One ought to be mindful of one’s 名 to not meander

into the celebrity worship evident online. Likewise, such a discussion into 名 natural proceeds to the discussion of the 五倫 (*wu lun*), the Five Relations. What is understated in the chapter, though, is the rectification of names that is essential to any conception of the Confucian take to any relations, yet this rings throughout Jose's reading of the Confucian take on friendships and relationships. In concluding the chapter, Jose presents how such a reading allows a further discussion into Confucianism while at the same time being mindful of current developments as images promoting love and friendship across cultures and even historical epochs.

The second part of the book is composed of essays that tackle modern and contemporary perspectives on love and friendship. This begins with the book's sixth chapter, "When Pompey's Elephants Trumpeted for Mercy: Levinas and Solidarity for the Animal Face" by Mira T. Reyes, which experiments with Levinas's ethical notions in the context of animal ethics and investigates "the experience of a universal love for the animal that collapses the social boundaries of class, culture, and species within the philosophical framework of Levinas" (84). After the introduction, the first section is an insight into the possibility of recognizing the *face* in animals. Reyes tries to reconstruct Levinas' approach toward the universality of the *face* to include the nonhuman through an interview in which Levinas, though admitting the universality of the *face* reserves its primary to the human being and with mindful attention to third-wave Levinasian scholarship (85-87). What remains fundamental in this analysis is the admittance that "[t]he ultimate criterion of being *face* and other in Levinas is the power of the other to hostage the I-ego and make an ethical demand" (88). Reyes recounts concentric movements in the Roman carnage of African beasts and in particular, a powerful moment that united the crowd to spare the slaughter on stage: the merciless killing of elephants in a gladiator fight between the animals and Gaetulian hunters despite the audience's eventually pleading for such a horrendous event to be discontinued due to the moving scene of one elephant visibly supplicating. This presents an ancient image of the *face*'s universal potential which is explored in the final part. To be succinct, animal ethics begins not due to their likeness in capacity to human beings but because of how their lives intersect with ours, and its universal appeal "arises out of the micro-praxis of living with animals [...] in a community space that is always co-inhabited by different neighboring animals" (96).

The following chapter is "The Good in Articulation: Describing the Co-constitution of Self, Practice, and Value" by Carlota Salvador Megias, which probes an alternative to Aristotle's account of friendship via a neo-Wittgensteinian philosophical anthropology, responding to the question "*How do we—and how should we—come to articulate ourselves to each other?*" through anthropological-historical studies of Fernando Santos-Granero and Martha Vicinus (101-102). This begins with a tension between the views of friendship between Aristotle and the views of Martha Nussbaum and Cora Diamond which Megias considers neo-Aristotelian (Nussbaum)/neo-Wittgensteinian (Diamond). Megias brings forward "the co-constitution of self, other, and social practice" as the greatest weight in arguing this view's superiority (102). After the introduction, the following segment centers on the intersection between what Megias coined as "self-articulation" – summarizing John McDowell's take on self-development and -recognition – vis-à-vis historico-

anthropological studies. The anthropological narratives ramify the experience of self-articulation in one's mind, which in turn bridges to "the self and socio-culture's co-constitution" that require the necessity of both (107). Megias then proceeds to the following segment that presents the opposing readings among Wittgenstein scholars to expose McDowell's reading which ultimately connects to how "there appears to be a minimal/irreducible foundation for mutual intersubjectivity/intelligibility" (110) which stands alongside "the 'tradition' within which we are raised, for which the language we learn is its 'repository'" (111). This leads to the conclusion with a defense of "a position that extracts value from practice, rather than measures practice against value[.]" showing how the forging of relationships does not simply follow an ideal or an *ur*-value but rather gives mindful attention to the processes involved in the actual relationships (112). The chapter ends with the insight that "[c]ontexts have their limitations as much as selves do [and] it is only by the stubborn attempt to honor both that they break and grow" (113). Parenthetically, this chapter is written without subdivision, and such breaks would better aid readers in grasping the particular ideas of each section.

The eighth chapter is entitled "Nietzsche on Actively Forgetting One's Promise (of Love)" by Jan Gresil S. Kahambing. This begins by setting Nietzsche's perspective against what is loosely presented and unqualified as a culture of broken promises. Kahambing equates such a culture to nihilism since "a promise is a valuable goal" while nihilism is this state of goallessness (117). In response to this, he utilizes Nietzsche's vision of a genuine culture banking on "the glorious mixture of both *identity-formation* as the Apollonian and as *identity-discharging* as the Dionysian" as a mark of life-affirmation (119). What is unclear is how the leap in culture is possible, for this is suspended until the following section which discusses responsibility's role in the dialectic of promising. However, it seems vague how quotations of Nietzsche's stress on *I will* than *thou shalt* contribute to an agent's desire to promise instead of its proper reading as an internal affirmation of one's sovereignty since a promise is fundamentally made not to oneself but to someone else (for the German *ich will* [from *willen*] does not denote a future tense as found in the verb *werden*). In this case, saying "[t]he task of man in this regard is to critically assess his promise, his greatness, as a gap that calls out for his action" (120) sounds something more aligned to the insight of Paul Ricoeur rather than Nietzsche since the latter heralds the revaluation of values and a break of imposed constraints. This is better articulated in the third part, where Kahambing (mis)quotes from the *Genealogy of Morals*' second essay that "Man is entitled to make promises," yet the entire passage is "Breeding an animal that *is allowed to make promises*—is not that the very paradoxical task that nature has set itself in relation to man?" (Translation is mine). Perhaps Nietzsche is once again misunderstood, for what we read in the *Genealogy* is the exact opposite of what the current section is trying to argue. Nietzsche shows that the breeding of the human species into this promise-making animal is in stark contrast to his presentation of the master morality in the *Genealogy*'s first essay. Although it is correct to say that active forgetting in Nietzsche's philosophy contributes to a renewal of existence (123), one perhaps should read this as an affirmation of life rather than of the self-imposed constraints that have no clear connection to Nietzsche's

admiration of asceticism (which is best read in the *Genealogy's* third essay). And so, it is more prudent to read Nietzsche's philosophy not as a renewal of promises (124) but rather as a renewal of life as a glimpse of perhaps what Kahambing tried to explain as the *Übermensch* in the preceding section.

Hazel T. Biana's "Love as an Act of Resistance: bell hooks on Love" is the ninth chapter of this book which exposes Gloria Jean Watkins' perspective of love sourced from her numerous works. Biana begins the section following the introduction with the type of feminism that bell hooks intended, one that is anchored on revolution against not simply sexist orientations but also other types of oppression (129). This, though, is not simply a reprise of resentment-driven struggle within the household but one that intersects social, political, and philosophical aspects. From this feminist perspective, we are afforded an insight into how popular culture, which is male-dominated, fantasizes about love in films and novels besides others. The essay's following section presents an insight into the love ethic theory that begins with the definition that "[l]ove is an invitation to truth that has been previously denied" (130). This runs contrary to its mainstream portrayal of loving, for love is a choice to be responsible and to respect the recipient of one's love. It stands as "an act of revolt or dissent" against what love may simply be portrayed which features dominance and violence, for it is ultimately "an act of resistance" that allows one to love the other but primarily to love oneself (131). The interaction between hooks' portrayal of feminism and love safeguards the former from being a replication of resentment politics. Biana then proceeds in the following section to present pertinent literature associated with the foundations of love ethic theory, such as the intersection of love and education and of love and spirituality. This chapter ends with a review of the main points of hooks' theory and the demonstration of the complementarity between hooks' reading of feminism and an ethic of love.

The book's third part is composed of essays that utilize conceptual analyses to approach love and friendship. This opens with Theptawee Chokvasin's "Posthumous Love as a Rational Virtue" as the tenth chapter that probes into the possibility and defense of posthumous love. Following the essay's introduction, Chokvasin crisscrosses what he labels as European literature from the Bible to the Renaissance and portrays the tensions in the conception of love remaining after death. In order to respond to the ambiguity of contrary arguments, the next section is devoted to the 13th-century English thinker Robert Grosseteste's view of love's invincibility understood through the word *Caritas* typically used to denote God's immeasurability, and what is clear through such is that "[p]osthumous love is pervasively and profoundly mentioned in literature [in relation to] ethical virtue" (145). Such an association shows a link between the physical and the eternal, and this is better qualified in the next section, which contrasts bodily and spiritual love, linking the movement from the former to the latter type of love which is equated as a virtue. The fifth section then highlights how such a view of virtue is considered rational from a neo-pragmatic perspective which then proceeds with the rationality of keeping a promise of eternal love in the sixth section. Chokvasin argues that "neither poetic nor figurative language [in] talking about eternal love needs with priority to represent the metaphysical reality for it to be meaningful" since "talk about eternal love considered as a virtue can still be meaningful in conversations between those who have faith in it" (149). The rationality,

therefore, of love continuing after death remains rational and virtuous in the context of the presentation of some Renaissance writings on Christian ethics and that “[t]he truth of spiritual love should eventually find its way out into the light of rationality” (150).

Laureen L. Velasco’s “Awareness and Aloneness as Foundations of Love and Friendship” is the book’s eleventh chapter which works primarily on Eastern insights to provide a reading into how awareness and aloneness can serve as the foundation of something shared among individuals. The first section on aloneness surveys varying views of how the state of being alone is understood, from the Zen master Osho’s adage of aloneness as one’s nature to Erich Fromm’s portrayal of the constant challenge of escaping to be alone (154-156). This proceeds to the second section devoted to awareness contrasted to interpretation best exemplified by the Zen notion of “suchness” as the direct representation of objects to one’s senses (158). Returning to Osho, Velasco shows that “with profound awareness comes freedom—freedom for yourself and freedom for the other to be him/herself, and unfold and reveal him/herself” (159). Velasco then devotes a section on attachment to distinguish it from love since it carries itself as a false sense of love, followed by another section on sexual attachment, which complicates friendships. The chapter ends not with a conclusion but rather in an open-ended manner with the direction pointed to the reader; instead of a review of the salient points, Velasco provides a series of questions that allows the reader to summarize for oneself the chapter along with the final piece: “Attachment limits. Love expands. Attachment kills you and/or the other. Love encourages growth and rejoices in it. Be aware of your aloneness. In your aloneness, be aware!” (164).

Chapter 12 is entitled “Romantic Love as a Love Story” by Jerd Bandasak. In this piece, Bandasak begins by presenting various ways to understand love, such as an emotion, a union, as robust concerns, and as values, and does so by citing thinkers from both East and West. Such a review allows him to present his main argument, which is in contrast to the conceptual analyses of Ulrika Carlsson and Raja Halwani concerning why a person is loved, the former due to the uniqueness while the latter, the properties’ combination since “a conceptual account is too complex and too distant from the practical aspects of romantic love” (170). The second section of the chapter is devoted to a refutation of Halwani’s position by establishing the link between romantic love and pertinent concepts such as uncertainty and voluntariness besides others. Such gives a visceral aspect to any conceptual analysis, which might miss the experiential aspect of being in a relationship. This is affirmed by the chapter’s third section, which deals with the experience of a love with due consideration to the narrative element within. Beginning with Ricoeur, Bandasak conjures the individual’s narrative as of great importance, which is enriched by the encounter with the beloved, deepened through an insight from emotional development through Aaron Ben-Ze’ev and Luke Brunning. This, therefore, establishes how “romantic love is a love story” (177). It is not simply a conceptual engagement, especially without reciprocation, but rather the intersection of individual narratives through this story of mutual agreement and healthy reciprocation.

The last chapter of this book is the only work authored by two individuals, entitled “For a Moment or for Eternity: A Metaphysics of Perduring Lovers” by

Jeremiah Joven Joaquin and Hazel T. Biana. This probes that which binds lovers together, the *relata*, and the nature of the objects (the I and you in promises such as “I will love you forever”) bonded by such. Following the introduction, the second section provides a review of pertinent insights on love from various thinkers. In showing these, what the authors do is to further problematize the *relata* since this remains an open question amidst the varying views. Joaquin and Biana provide their own take in the following section working on some essential elements raised by other thinkers, which they reviewed previously: “the capacity to desire is a necessary property of both the lover and the beloved” (182). Desirability eventually entails an attention to the individuality of the particular person desired, which is what draws the lover to the beloved and, opening the following section, allows such devotion to endure the length of time. Here, they introduce the idea of perduring lovers who, besides being particular people, exist in the plane of temporality. They explain such through an analytic approach and differentiate the perduring lover from other types of lovers, such as the companion or the undying lover. The conclusion they draw is that “the *relata* of the love-relation are particular people who persist through time by having temporal parts and that they have the capacity to intensely desire their beloved’s temporal parts” (188). However, their final note is a reminder that their analysis is but an attempt to grasp an understanding of the eternal nature of love.

With these 13 chapters, this book is a testament of how philosophy is thriving in Southeast Asia and also how diverse the authors’ perspectives are concerning the broad theme of love and friendship across cultures. Perhaps, though, it might also be due to such broadness that this book gives the impression of being scattered thoughts across countries that serve as a starter to an even greater work should the essays be devoted to a single theme such as comparative philosophy – as several chapters in the first part have exhibited – or just conceptual analyses which remains a subtext of a number of other chapters. The grouping of the essays into three parts is obviously arbitrary, for there are overlaps among the sections. This raises the thought that the essays’ categorization could have been improved specifically to address the awkward division of having two historical parts and then a sudden shift to conceptual analysis. It is understandable these works were written individually and only amassed after the conference, yet it would have been a better approach if all the parts maintained the historical passage or if each of the three parts took a different perspective, e.g., comparative, historical, and conceptual approaches. On a technical note, a common citation standard would have been preferred across articles and a more standard division of sections within chapters. Though there are certain essays that seem to be theoretically weak, this work as a whole is a decent beginning to what hopefully will be a more fruitful engagement across cultures of these two philosophical associations yet, not just on paper but among individuals.

Anton Heinrich L. Rennesland
University of Santo Tomas - Philippines