

# Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies



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## FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

Manyul Im

*Ways of Philosophy, Ways of Practice*

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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies

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PRASANTA BANDYOPADHYAY AND JEELOO LIU, CO-EDITORS

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## FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

### *Ways of Philosophy, Ways of Practice*

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For this issue of the newsletter, my goal was to enable wanderings in some lightly beaten paths of philosophical exploration, leading the reader through some unusual foliage. The authors here were invited to submit pieces about “practices” of Asian philosophy and encouraged to discuss social and physical activities that bear relevance to particular traditions of inquiry and that potentially provide ways of “thinking”—in a broad sense—that are disruptive of the usual ways of imagining philosophy.

Philosophy as essentially cogitative is a difficult template from which to break. In exploring ways that we might begin to pull away from it, two of the authors, Bin Song and Steven Geisz, understand the difficulties of reimagining the range of activities that might count as “doing philosophy.” They emphasize somewhat different contexts of activity from each other within which one might explore the possibilities. Song focuses on codified ritual activity from the Ruist tradition, while Geisz discusses a range of slightly less codified—though still scripted—meditative, movement practices from a variety of East and South Asian traditions.

The third author, Alexis McLeod, remains closer to a more mainstream concept of philosophical activity, though he discusses the importance of paying attention to people and sources that do not fall within the academically philosophical but are expert practitioners or manuals, respectively, of martial arts. McLeod takes us through some path-clearing as well, by removing certain misconceptions of what East Asian martial arts and their practices entail. He also takes us through some ways of thinking about how practice of those arts may develop intellectual and moral virtues.

My hope is that these discussions will inspire and encourage readers to explore further—both the written resources compiled for them by the authors as well as some of the activities themselves—in the context of their own philosophical activity and in classrooms where relevant.

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## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

### **GOAL OF THE NEWSLETTER ON ASIAN AND ASIAN-AMERICAN PHILOSOPHERS**

The *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* is sponsored by the APA Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies to report on the philosophical work of Asian and Asian-American philosophy, to report on new work in Asian philosophy, and to provide a forum for the discussion of topics of importance to Asian and Asian-American philosophers and those engaged with Asian and Asian-American philosophy. We encourage a diversity of views and topics within this broad rubric. None of the varied philosophical views provided by authors of newsletter articles necessarily represents the views of any or all the members of the Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies, including the editor(s) of the newsletter. The committee and the newsletter are committed to advancing Asian and Asian-American philosophical scholarships and bringing this work and this community to the attention of the larger philosophical community; we do not endorse any particular approach to Asian or Asian-American philosophy.

### **SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

- 1) **Purpose:** The purpose of the newsletter is to publish information about the status of Asians and Asian Americans and their philosophy and to make the resources of Asians and Asian-American philosophy available to a larger philosophical community. The newsletter presents discussions of recent developments in Asians and Asian-American philosophy (including, for example, both modern and classical East-Asian philosophy, both modern and classical South Asian philosophy, and Asians and Asian Americans doing philosophy in its various forms), related work in other disciplines, literature overviews, reviews of the discipline as a whole, timely book reviews, and suggestions for both spreading and improving the teaching of Asian philosophy in the current curriculum. It also informs the profession about the work of the APA Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies. One way the dissemination of knowledge of the relevant areas occurs is by holding highly visible, interactive sessions on Asian philosophy at the American Philosophical Association’s three
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annual divisional meetings. Potential authors should follow the submission guidelines below:

- i) Please submit essays electronically to the editor(s). Articles submitted to the newsletter should be limited to ten double-spaced pages and must follow the APA submission guidelines.
  - ii) All manuscripts should be prepared for anonymous review. Each submission shall be sent to two referees. Reports will be shared with authors. References should follow *The Chicago Manual Style*.
  - iii) If the paper is accepted, each author is required to sign a copyright transfer form, available on the APA website, prior to publication.
- 2) **Book reviews and reviewers:** If you have published a book that you consider appropriate for review in the newsletter, please ask your publisher to send the editor(s) a copy of your book. Each call for papers may also include a list of books for possible review. To volunteer to review books (or some specific book), kindly send the editor(s) a CV and letter of interest mentioning your areas of research and teaching.
  - 3) **Where to send papers/reviews:** Please send all articles, comments, reviews, suggestions, books, and other communications to the editor: Prasanta Bandyopadhyay ([psb@montana.edu](mailto:psb@montana.edu)).
  - 4) **Submission deadlines:** Submissions for spring issues are due by the preceding November 1, and submissions for fall issues are due by the preceding February 1.
  - 5) **Guest editorship:** It is possible that one or more members of the Committee on Asian and Asian American Philosophers and Philosophies could act as guest editors for one of the issues of the newsletter depending on their expertise in the field. To produce a high-quality newsletter, one of the co-editors could even come from outside the members of the committee depending on his/her area of research interest.

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## ARTICLES

### *“Three Sacrificial Rituals” (sanji) and the Practicability of Ruist (Confucian) Philosophy*

Bin Song

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Recent APA newsletters<sup>1</sup> make a strong case that Chinese philosophy is philosophy, and thus should be included in the standard curriculum of philosophy in American higher education. In addition to fully endorsing this case, as a philosopher, religious scholar and Ruist<sup>2</sup> practitioner, I have a more nuanced view engendered by the complexity of the Ru tradition: according to prevalent criteria of

philosophy in the current American academy, which sees philosophy mainly as the art of argumentation aiming for true knowledge,<sup>3</sup> the Ru tradition does not fall short of it but actually exceeds it. The “not fall short” part has been brilliantly argued by scholars such as Eric Schwitzgebel. That is, even according to the restrictive standard of philosophy, “Mozi and Xunzi clearly fit the bill,”<sup>4</sup> among whom Xunzi is a Ruist philosopher. However, the “exceeding” feature of Ruism has not yet been fully addressed by the previous arguments made for the aforementioned case, and this feature is mainly evidenced by Ruism’s commitment to practice. For Ruism, knowledge and practice are like the yin and yang aspects of human personality. They interact and complete each other, and ultimately form a unity that is indispensable to the healthy living of a whole human person in evolving life situations. This holistic treatment of the relationship between knowledge and practice means Ruism’s philosophical teachings on metaphysics, ethics, and politics are all ensconced with rich practical dimensions. As its long intellectual history shows us, Ruism uses all kinds of practical methods, including individual spiritual formation, communal ritual performances, skills for social and governmental management, etc., to enact Ruist philosophy as a comprehensive way of life, rather than just a way of arguing.

For readers who want to confirm this feature of Ruism within its textual tradition, in the period of Song and Ming Ruism, the “identification of knowledge and practice” (zhixingheyi) was a central theme of Wang Yangming’s philosophy. Moreover, although Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming disagreed with each other in regard to the order of Ruist learning—whether one should have knowledge at first and then practice it (Zhu), or one needs to treat the acquaintance of knowledge itself as a sort of practice (Wang)—they all agreed that practice is the ultimate goal of Ruist learning.<sup>5</sup>

In pre-Qin classical Ruism, all three major Ruist philosophers—Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi—expressed their shared approval of the intimate relationship between knowledge and practice. We can use examples from the *Analects* to illustrate this point. The *Analects* says that “there may be those who act without knowing why. I do not do so.”<sup>6</sup> The implication is that human practice needs to be enlightened by awareness of the *raison d’être* of the practice. Furthermore, “imagine a person who can recite the several hundred odes by heart but, when delegated a governmental task, is unable to carry it out, or when sent abroad as an envoy, is unable to engage in repartee. No matter how many odes he might have memorized, what good are they to him?”<sup>7</sup> This means that without enactment, Ruist learning is pointless. Finally, the opening verse of the *Analects* can be seen as a summary of Confucius’s organic view towards the relationship between knowledge and practice: “To learn and then timely practice what you have learned—is this not satisfying?”<sup>8</sup> In a word, for Confucius, a lucid awareness of correct practice and an active praxis of true knowledge are shot through with one another. This original Confucian perspective has perennial influence upon the later Ru tradition.

With a scholarly sensitivity nurtured by both the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies, I would like to submit

further that this holistic understanding of knowledge and practice is not only embodied by Ruism's textual tradition, but also by its religious practices, such as the "Three Sacrificial Rituals" (sanji), which help to explain the practicability of Ruist philosophy.

### THREE SACRIFICIAL RITUALS

According to their earliest expositions in Ruist texts, the "Three Sacrificial Rituals" are sacrifice in celebration of Tian, sacrifice in celebration of distinguished teachers and governors, and sacrifice in celebration of one's ancestors. Ru took these three sacrificial ceremonies especially seriously because they were thought of as symbolizing three roots: Tian is the origin of every creature in the world, teachers and exemplary governors are the basis for human civilization, and ancestors are the source of individual human life and families. Through consistent performance of these rituals, Ru can express and nurture their feelings of gratitude towards all these roots, and then, to a certain degree, return to these roots in order to integrate their lives as a whole.<sup>9</sup> Confucius and his Ruist school did not invent these sacrificial rituals; they already existed and were widely performed in pre-Confucian China. However, because of the Ru school's philosophical adeptness, Ruists successfully educated people about the spiritual and ethical importance of these rituals so as to have transformed their understanding and refined their performance.

For example, regarding the sacrificial ritual to Tian, some scholars have noticed a transformation of the idea of Tian from its pre-Confucian Zhou version of "supreme deity" (shangdi) to a more naturalized understanding of Tian as "cosmic power or force." One of the major reasons for the transformation is a sophisticated form of philosophical thinking stimulated by a theodicy-like question: If Tian is an omni-benevolent supreme deity rewarding morality and punishing immorality, in an extremely tumultuous social period such as late Zhou dynasty, why did the righteous frequently suffer and the wicked remain unpunished?<sup>10</sup> In response, the definitive metaphysical text of classical Ruism, the Appended Texts (Xici) of the Classic of Changes (Yijing), says that Tian is to be conceived as an all-encompassing, constantly creative, cosmic power that brings the myriad things under Heaven into being, but without a creator standing behind the scene. By this stage the Ruist idea of Tian became nontheistic, and accordingly, the Ruist conception of the cosmos developed as a process of spontaneous emergence of cosmic events, without any theistic plan, purpose, or telos.

This philosophical transformation of the idea of Tian also shifted Ruism's attitude towards the related performance of the sacrificial ritual: the theistic images and languages in the traditional prayer texts that were once used by emperors for their ceremonial performance were mainly treated by Ru philosophers as being of liturgical use. By contrast, in a Ru's everyday life, the pre-Confucian theistic tendency in understanding Tian is dramatically subordinated. One salient example in this regard is that for a Ru to participate in the sacrificial ritual to Tian, neither propitiation nor petitionary prayer is part of the ceremony.<sup>11</sup> If Ruists do something wrong, they repent of themselves and correct it by themselves. If Ruists want to achieve

something more, they must consistently contribute their own effort in addition to whatever objective conditions are occurring within Tian in order to try to create their desired outcome. In other words, because of their nontheistic philosophical understanding of Tian, Ruists believe that the way for humans to engage with Tian is to keep Tian's all-encompassing and constant creativity as a transcendent ideal, and then try to investigate the pattern-principles (li)<sup>12</sup> of cosmic changes within Tian so as to appropriately respond to them with a hope that the transcendent ideal can be continually realized in human society. Obviously, without its transformed philosophical conception of Tian, the nonpetitionary and nonpropitiatory features of the Ruist sacrificial ritual to Tian would not have developed.

Furthermore, the naturalized understanding of Tian also has decisive influence upon Ruists' performance of the other two sacrificial rituals. According to Confucius's answer to questions such as what happens to people's souls after they die,<sup>13</sup> classical Ruism reached a very naturalist view of human mortality: When people are born, this is a contractive form of the movement of the cosmic vital-energy, Qi; when people die, this energy dissipates, and, accordingly, people's lives lose their personal agency. Accordingly, life and death is seen as the embodiment of the constantly contracting (yang) and dissipating (yin) natural process of cosmic changes. Very little supernaturalism can register in this view. This causes Ruists' performance of the sacrificial ritual to distinguished teachers and governors such as Confucius to become also highly rational. Later Ruists have a summary of this attitude: "Confucius established his teaching through edifying people of the Way, and then all people under Heaven performed a sacrificial ritual to him. However, this ritual is not to sacrifice offerings to his person, but to his teaching and his Way."<sup>14</sup> In other words, during the sacrificial ritual to distinguished teachers and governors such as Confucius, Ruists do not believe that he is any sort of deity. During the ritual, Ruists honor his teaching, rather than his person, so that what Confucius taught is wished to be continually practiced and brought to fruition by human society. This definitely does not preclude any individual Ru from determining that some of Confucius's teaching may be not appropriate to his or her contemporary life, and then, the Ru should think through the problem critically and make his or her unique contribution to revise and enrich the tradition. In sum, the Ru tradition has no room for idolatry. The scholarly capacity for critical thinking is its pillar.

These insights further indicate the inappropriate translation of the Ruist sacrificial ritual to ancestors as "ancestor worship." The term "worship" would indicate that the sacrificial ritual was premised upon some sort of deification of one's ancestors, and thus offering petitionary prayer to elicit blessing and avoid punishment from one's ancestors would be indispensable to the ritual performance. However, such interpretations were not endorsed by the Ruist philosophical understanding of the ritual: "When a worthy pursues the sacrificial ritual, he will be blessed. However, this blessing is not what the vulgar people call a blessing. Here, blessing means perfection. And perfection means the complete and natural discharge of all one's duties."<sup>15</sup> In other words, Ruists believe that people can be blessed

through the consistent performance of the sacrificial ritual to ancestors because they have attuned themselves to all the pattern-principles which make an entire family fit together: following the virtues of the ancestors, expressing feelings of gratitude and filiality, cultivating oneself well here and now, and expecting cultural immortality in the future. Notably, none of these “duties” is premised upon a supernaturalistic understanding of human mortality, and so a better translation of the Ruist sacrificial ritual to one’s ancestors would be “ancestor devotion” rather than “ancestor worship.”

Moreover, keeping the naturalistic and humanistic philosophical kernel of the Ruist ritual of “ancestor devotion” in mind, some of Confucius’s sayings in the *Analects* become more clear. As attested by the aforementioned texts, classical Ruism’s naturalizing cosmology and anthropology entail that, cognitively, Ruists seriously doubt, if not utterly deny, any sort of personal agency in the afterlife. Emotionally, however, Ruists acknowledge that people express intrinsic feelings of gratitude and devotion towards their ancestors. In this sense, the ritual of “ancestor devotion,” as construed by classical Ruism, is to create a distinctive ritual space in which people are able to express their feelings and cultivate their morals without being required to assume any ontological misconceptions about what these feelings and morals ought to be devoted to. The ritual harmonizes the emotional and moral needs of participants along with their cognitive awareness in just the way described by Confucius: “When sacrificing to the spirits, you should comport yourself as if the spirits were present.”<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Confucius also teaches us to “respect the ghosts and spirits while keeping them at a distance.”<sup>17</sup> Both passages indicate that ritual participants need to sincerely perform the ritual of “ancestor devotion” as if these ancestors were alive for all the reasons mentioned above, but it would be a cognitive error to allow the idea of spirits and ghosts to interfere inappropriately with our lives.

In a word, key texts in classical Ruism and later Ruists’ understanding and practice indicate a “philosophical practice” of the “Three Sacrificial Rituals,” that is, a cautious practice of religious rituals that follows, realizes, and enhances a concordant philosophical understanding of these rituals at every step.<sup>18</sup> In this way, neither religion and philosophy, nor faith and understanding, nor practice and knowledge are segregated from one another, as so often happens in the Western academy.

## SHOULD WE RECONSIDER THE DEFINITION OF “PHILOSOPHY”?

Ruism may best be considered as a sort of “spiritual humanism” that tries to ground humanistic values within a well-thought anthropology and cosmology, and, thus, to philosophically understand these values while simultaneously being committed to their realization in human practice. This type of spirituality makes Ruism highly compatible with the post-Enlightenment intellectual and spiritual milieu of late-modern global society and so is both intellectually and practically relevant today.<sup>19</sup>

However, this Ru spirituality poses a significant challenge to the definition of philosophy prevalent in the current American academy. While some scholars have argued cogently that the inclusion of Chinese philosophy will broaden American philosophers’ vision and imagination so as to create innovative arguments regarding traditional philosophical questions,<sup>20</sup> such inclusion will also transform them. As this happens, not only will American philosophers have to consider the arguments of their Chinese colleagues, but the whole package of Chinese thought and practice will stimulate American philosophical educators to pose new kinds of questions: Should we include more practical dimensions of philosophy in our curriculum? Should the goal of philosophical education be cultivating a whole person, rather than just teaching people how to think and argue?

Of course, these kinds of questions have already been posed by Western philosophers themselves. Inspired by Edmund Husserl’s idea of “life-world,” a significant portion of the European phenomenological and existentialist movements tended to refuse the purely intellectual and analytic image of philosophy, instead attempting to locate philosophical discourses in their originated, all-interconnected, and living human world. An important instance in this regard is Pierre Hadot’s work on ancient Western philosophy as “a way of life,” rather than a way of arguing, and Hadot proposed an alternative way of doing philosophy as “spiritual exercise.”<sup>21</sup> In the analytic tradition, the understanding of philosophy primarily as a way of life also registers in some philosophers’ thoughts. For example, in order to reconcile his religious identity as a practicing Jew and his intellectual identity as a professional philosopher, Hilary Putnam found a promising idea of philosophy in the thoughts of four twentieth-century Jewish philosophers: philosophy is a way of life for humans to deal with each other face-to-face in their living experience.<sup>22</sup> This line of thought in Western philosophy leads to an even more intriguing question: Can the inclusion of Chinese philosophy in the American philosophical curriculum help Western philosophy return to its historic roots in order to generate vital energies in its contemporary situation?

## NOTES

1. These include the most recent *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* 15, no. 2 (2016) and a number of articles in the newsletter’s previous issues.
2. “Confucianism” is a misnomer devised by early Christian missionaries to refer to the Ru tradition with a primary purpose of religious comparison and conversion, just as Islam was once called “Muhammadanism” in a similar historical context. Through this article, I will use “Ruism” to replace “Confucianism,” and use “Ruist” or “Ru” to replace “Confucianist” or “Confucian.” Accordingly, “Neo-Confucianism,” which is normally used to describe new developments within Ruism during the Song and Ming Dynasties (960–1644 CE), will be replaced with “Song and Ming Ruism.” A most recent scholarly discussion at this issue can be found at Stephen Angle, “Should we use ‘Ruism’ instead of ‘Confucianism?’” *Warp, Weft, and Way*, <http://warpweftandway.com/should-instead-confucianism/>, posted May 4, 2016, accessed January 1, 2017.
3. I recognize that there are a variety of understandings of “philosophy” among American philosophers. However, for the same reasons to which critics attribute the exclusion of Chinese philosophy from American higher education, this particular standard for philosophy is a major concern. See David B. Wong, “Some Reflection on the Status of Chinese Philosophy

- in U.S. Graduate Programs," *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* 15, no. 2 (2016): 9; in the same issue, Alexis McLeod, "May You Live in Interesting Times: The State of the Field of Chinese Philosophy," 16, and Bryan W. Van Norden, "Problems and Prospects for the Study of Chinese Philosophy in the English-Speaking World," 24.
4. Eric Schwitzgebel, "What's Missing in College Philosophy Classes? Chinese philosophers," *Los Angeles Times*, Op-Ed, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0913-schwitzgebel-chinese-philosophy-20150913-story.html>, posted September 11, 2015, accessed January 1, 2017.
  5. See Hu Xiaolin, "Zhu Xi yu Wang Shouren de zhixingguan" (Zhu Xi's and Wang Shouren's Views on Knowledge and Practice), *Kongzi yanjiu* (Confucius Studies) 6 (2005): 53–58; and Dong Ping, "Wang Yangming zhexue de shejianbenzhi: yi zhixingheyi weizhongxin" (The Practical Essence of Wang Yang-ming's Philosophy: "Identification of Knowledge and Practice" as its Center), *Yantaidaxue xuebao* (zhxueshehuikexueban) [*Journal of Yantai University* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)] 1 (2013): 14–20.
  6. *The Analects* 7:28, see James Legge, trans., "Confucian Analects," in *The Chinese Classics*, Vol. 1 (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc, 1991), 203. Translations of the Analects selected according to my own scholarly discretion; in some cases, I have made minor changes to them.
  7. *The Analects* 13.5, Edward Slingerland, trans., *Confucius Analects* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. 2003), Kindle, 141.
  8. *The Analects* 1.1. Translation adapted from *ibid.*, 1. For an analysis on classical Ruism's understanding of the relationship between knowledge and practice, see Wen Keqing, "Luelun xianqin rujialunli de zhixingtongyulun" (A Review on the Theories of the Unification between Knowledge and Practice in Pre-Qin Ruist Ethics), *Daode yu Wenming* (Morality and Civilization), 2 (2005): 30–33.
  9. See the Xunzi 19.2a, in John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works*, Vol. III (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988): 58; the chapter of "Li San Ben" (Ritual has three roots) in the Elder Dai Classic of Rites (Dadailiji), in Huang Huaixin, ed., *Dadailiji Huijiao Jizhu* (An Annotation and Compilation of the Elder Dai Classic of Rites) (Xi An: San Qin Press, 2005), 96–125; the chapters of "Wang Zhi" (Royal regulations) 3.5 and 3.6; and "Jiao Te Sheng" (The single offering at the border sacrifices) 2.8, in James Legge, trans., "The Li Ki or Collection of Treatises on the Rules of Propriety or Ceremonial Usages," in *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 27, ed. Max Muller (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968, reprinted): 224–25, 430.
  10. See Robert Eno, *The Confucian Creation of Heaven: Philosophy and the Defense of Ritual Mastery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 24–28; and Li Jinglin, "Yilidetixi yu xinyangdexitong: kaocha rujiazongjiaoxingwenti de yigebiyaoshidian" (The Systems of Philosophical Connotations and Beliefs: A Necessary Perspective on the Religious Property of Confucianism), *Beijing Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)] 3 (2016): 79–95. On the problem of "evil" in classical Chinese philosophy, please refer to Franklin Perkins, *The Problem of Evil in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).
  11. That Ruists do not typically pray in a petitionary way can be attested as early as by Confucius in the *Analects* 3.13 and 7.35 (see Slingerland, *Confucius Analects*, 22, 76) and as recently as by Liu Shu-hsien in Liu Shu-hsien, "On Confucius' Attitude Towards Gods, Sacrifice, and Heaven," *Ching Feng* 34, no. 1 (1991): 16–27. That there is no propitiation in the Ruist sacrificial ritual to Tian has been well observed and described by James Legge in *The Religions of China: Confucianism and Taoism Described and Compared with Christianity* (New York: Scribner, 1881), 53.
  12. Inspired by Stephen Angle's discussion in *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), I define the Ruist concept "pattern-principle" (li) as "the dynamic and harmonious way how a set of cosmic realities fit together." The term was already philosophically significant in the texts of classical Ruism such as the Xunzi, the Liji (the Classic of Rites), and the Yijing, while its significance became even more prominent in Song and Ming Ruism. The Ruist way to engage with Tian which I describe here is a middle ground for the Ru tradition based upon my reading of these related classical texts and contemporary writings.
  13. See the Chapter of "Ji Yi" (The Meaning of Sacrifice) 2.1, in Legge, "Li Ki," *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 28, 220 and Chapter 4, part 1 of Xici, in Richard Rutt, trans., *The Book of Changes* (Zhouyi) (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005), Kindle, 8541. Although Confucius may not have actually said these words, they represent classical Ruism's view of death.
  14. Zhang Tingyu, "Qian Tang Lie Zhuan" (Biography of Qian Tang), in *Ming Shi* (History of Ming Dynasty) (Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, 1997), 1038.
  15. The chapter "Ji Tong" (A Summary Account of Sacrifice) of Liji; translation is adapted from Legge, "Li Ki," *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 28, 236–37.
  16. *The Analects* 3:12, Slingerland, trans., *Analects*, 21.
  17. *The Analects* 6:22, Slingerland, trans., *Analects*, 60.
  18. Lawrence Whitney has noticed this peculiarity of the Ruist understanding of ritual in the context of Xunzi studies: "What is notable about Xunzi in this regard, and very much unlike modern Western ritual studies scholars, is that he articulates what is included within the scope of ritual in terms of his systematic philosophy, including a philosophical anthropology generating a political philosophy, and both rooted in a philosophical cosmology." Lawrence Whitney, "Ritual Transformations: Reappropriating Xunzi in Ritual Studies," presented in the Ritual Studies Group at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), San Antonio, Texas, Nov. 20, 2017: 8. I take his statement to be applicable to the entire Ru tradition.
  19. In the first "Ruist Friends From Afar" Retreat in North America, hosted at Boston University, July 1–3, 2016, some of my Ruist friends, including Chinese, Asian Americans, and other Americans, performed repetitively the ritual of "Tian-worship and Confucius-veneration." For its details, see "Introducing a New Ruist (Confucian) Ritual: Tian-worship and Confucius-veneration," [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/introducing-a-new-ruist-confucian-ritual-tian-worship\\_us\\_57fe3b05e4b0210c1faeaa31](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/introducing-a-new-ruist-confucian-ritual-tian-worship_us_57fe3b05e4b0210c1faeaa31), posted December 9, 2016, accessed January 1, 2017.
  20. See Amy Olberding, "Chinese Philosophy and Wider Philosophical Discourses: Including Chinese Philosophy in General Audience Philosophy Journals," *APA Newsletter on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies* 15, no. 2 (2016): 8.
  21. An introduction to Pierre Hadot may be found in Arnold I. Davison, "Spiritual Exercise and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (1990): 475–82.
  22. Hilary Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein* (The Helen and Martin Schwartz Lectures in Jewish Studies) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008). A special thanks goes to Jonathan Weidenbaum in Berkeley College (NYC) who helped me to find this resource.

## Traditional Chinese Body Practice and Philosophical Activity

Steven Geisz  
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Philosophy, it seems, is something done in words and thoughts. It is a sedentary activity, often performed while seated. There is often at least a bit of bodily movement—tapping fingers, biting nails, some shifting in one's chair—but such movements are usually considered to be external to the philosophical activity itself. Philosophy, whatever it is, seems to be mental and verbal, with "mental" and "verbal" understood, implicitly, to mean other than "of the body."

Admittedly, there are exceptions, both in terms of how philosophy gets done (e.g., members of the Peripatetic school who did their thinking while walking and contemporary academic philosophers who come up with their best ideas in a spin class) and in terms of how the mental and verbal get conceptualized (e.g., enactivist accounts of cognition that treat the thinking as taking place through and in bodily movements). Nevertheless, it is fair to say that philosophy, typically, is both practiced as and understood to be a sedentary mental and verbal activity.<sup>1</sup>

This account of philosophy as sedentary, mental, and verbal is plausible, I think, regardless of the philosophical style or tradition we are discussing. Even philosophers who emphasize the theoretical importance of embodiment typically do so by talking or writing about the importance of the body rather than by doing anything obvious with parts of their body beyond what is required for the talking or writing. Experimental philosophy, in spite of its attempts to get out of the philosopher's proverbial armchair, is arguably sedentary, mental, and verbal in all the relevant ways. And it is not just philosophy in the broad set of traditions stemming from the ancient Greeks that is performed in this way. The teaching of and academic research on various so-called "non-Western philosophies" is done as much from a stationary position as any other kind of academic philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Several years back, however, I started looking at various traditions of body practice and meditation that at least purport to be closely connected with Asian and Indian philosophical traditions, and I began to consider whether these practices could amount to a *philosophy of the body*, not just in the sense of engaging in philosophical inquiry *about* bodies, but also in the sense of actually trying to *do* philosophy with the body. Specifically, in undergraduate courses on Chinese philosophy and religion, I began teaching moving forms of qigong (i.e., Chinese-style yoga) as well as meditations drawn from Daoism and other traditions. In a philosophy course focusing on the Asian martial arts, I taught taijiquan (i.e., "t'ai chi") as a practical component to complement our study of classic and contemporary texts. In a course on "Yoga and Philosophy," I began teaching hatha yoga in addition to leading students through traditional Indian philosophical/religious texts and contemporary works on yoga practice by academics and nonacademic practitioners.

In part, my motivations for including these practices in my courses were pragmatic: I wanted to find ways to get undergraduates interested in various philosophical traditions, and I used the practices that at least have a purported connection to the philosophical ideas as a way to liven things up and reach some students who might not otherwise have been reached. But my motivations have also gone deeper than that: I have tried to challenge the seemingly obvious distinction between doing philosophy and doing these various body and meditation practices, and my academic research has begun to focus on how we might conceptualize these various practices as kinds of philosophical activity.

In what follows, I will focus on one strand of these explorations: my incorporation of qigong into undergraduate courses and my exploration of it as something meaningfully philosophical.

The expression "qigong" (氣功) literally means "qi cultivation" or "energy work." It is a modern term that refers to a wide range of body practices, meditations, and assorted health techniques that are, to a greater or lesser degree, derived from traditional Chinese practices.<sup>3</sup> Qigong practices are connected to Daoism, Buddhism, and traditional Chinese health practices, although the connections claimed by qigong practitioners at least sometimes are not of the sort that would withstand the scrutiny of academic historians. Qigong forms typically involve a sequence of moves and postures, often done in a way that is linked to the pace of the breath. Some of the practices involve visualizing colors in one's body or imagining one's body as having dimensions that do not correspond to its physical shape or as containing a kind of inner landscape or analogue of the cosmos. Qigong forms are often transmitted from one person to another along with an accompanying mythic narrative about the origins and significance of the practice. The practices can be seen as body technologies that aim to heighten certain kinds of awareness and attention, often while implicitly (or even explicitly) encoding aspects of traditional Chinese metaphysics, cosmology, and visions of the body.<sup>4</sup>

Much of the contemporary marketing of qigong can seem crassly commercial or heavily influenced by New Age sensibilities, but in spite of the occasional presentation of the practices as a kind of *à la carte* spiritualism, there are many ways of doing qigong, ranging from those that are quite traditional to those that are adapted in various ways to contemporary communities and marketplaces, both Chinese and non-Chinese. The practices range from slow-to fast-paced and from easy on the body to extraordinarily taxing on the muscles and tendons. The aesthetics and behavioral norms of the learning environments in which qigong practices are transmitted from teacher to student are also diverse, ranging from arrangements in which a student is expected to submit to the authority of the teacher in disciple-like fashion and to display broadly Confucian respect to a lineage to situations in which the teacher is presenting practical health or self-defense techniques to students who are treated as something like co-collaborators. Sometimes practitioners emphasize the importance of believing in qi, but the practices can be done and transmitted from teacher to student in a way that allows the background narratives about qi and other aspects of traditional Chinese metaphysics to be treated as mere stories to guide the movements and visualizations or even as outdated superstitions that are best left behind.

All of that—the bodily movements, the visualizations, the particular kinds of attention to the body and the breath, the background narratives, and the various types of teacher-student relationships—will likely sound to many professional academics quite different than "doing philosophy," and perhaps many of my readers will be, at this stage, skeptical of the idea that this could somehow constitute "philosophical inquiry." However, note that the

same kind of charge (“this is not philosophy!”) can be (and, indeed, has been and still is) raised against traditional Chinese texts such as the *Analects*, the *Daodejing*, the *Zhuangzi*, etc.—but those of us who work on classical Chinese texts as philosophy have figured out ways to see beyond the surface-level dissimilarities between, say, critically reading and engaging with Aristotle or a recent article in *Ethics*, on the one hand, and critically reading and engaging with classical Chinese texts, on the other. Admittedly, the mere fact that we can cross the divide from one kind of text and style of thinking to another kind of text and style of thinking does not prove that we can cross the divide between the sedentary thinking and talking of the philosophy seminar, on the one hand, and the body disciplines of qigong, on the other, in such a way that qigong can be seen as philosophy, but it does provide at least a bit of hope.

Moreover, if we are willing to look even a bit beyond obvious differences in the surface-level phenomena, it turns out that there are intriguing similarities between the kinds of inquiry that happen when reading a traditional Chinese philosophical text and the kinds of inquiry that can occur when learning and practicing a qigong form. For example, it often takes multiple readings of a Chinese philosophical text (either in the original or in translation) in order to begin to understand what the text is really getting at. Similarly, a qigong form typically does not reveal its subtleties until a practitioner has submitted to doing it repeatedly, on many different days, over a long period of time. For both the Chinese philosophical text and a qigong form that purports to instantiate aspects of traditional Chinese metaphysics, one must approach it with an attitude that there is something important worth gleaning from it before one begins to challenge it with critical inquiries. If one instead begins by criticizing what one perceives initially in the text or the form before submitting to it over time, one can easily feel as if one has successfully rejected something, but one will often have missed the real point. While it is true that there is usually nothing analogous in doing a qigong form to reconstructing a premise-by-premise argument from a philosophical text and then analyzing its validity and soundness, rarely is that what one does when one fruitfully engages with a classical Chinese philosophical text, either. Thus, there are at least some intriguing commonalities between what is done when one critically approaches a Chinese philosophical text and what one does when one critically engages, as it were, with a qigong form.

All of those commonalities are arguably at the periphery, however. They involve how a reader or practitioner approaches the text or the form. What about the *content* of the Chinese philosophy versus any “content” of the qigong practice? Consider, for example, a claim to the effect that the traditional Chinese “five phases” correlative cosmology (i.e., the *wuxing* 五行, or the “five elements” theory) provides an accurate view of reality. According to *wuxing* theory, the phenomenal world is composed (in some to-be-determined sense of “composed”) of five different phases, or types of energy: metal, water, wood, fire, and earth. These five phases are related to each other in complex ways (e.g., via a “creation cycle” and a “control cycle”), and each somehow is correlated with or encompasses a host of

other aspects of reality such that each phase is correlated with a color, a season, a *yin* organ and a *yang* organ in the human body, an emotion, a virtue, a flavor, etc.

Understood literally and from the perspective of anything even remotely like the contemporary sciences as practiced in any decent university, the claim that the *wuxing* theory provides an accurate view of the phenomenal world is laughably absurd. And yet many of us who take seriously traditional Chinese culture find something valuable and perhaps even true in the *wuxing* theory, or at the very least we think that it provides important insight about the world as we live in it and that the *wuxing* theory can at least imply nontrivially true claims that would be difficult to accept were we not to see the world through the lens of the *wuxing* theory. There must be a way to understand the *wuxing* correlative cosmology charitably. And it is here, in trying to find ways charitably to understand Chinese philosophical views about the world, that qigong can become part of philosophical inquiry.

To see how, consider one example of a specific qigong body practice I have incorporated into the college classroom. When leading students through a qigong sequence, I typically have them perform a series of warm-up exercises in which I guide them to stand upright and repeatedly twist the upper body to the left and right while allowing the arms to swing out and then gently slap against the body at the end of each turn. After a minute or so of doing these turns, I guide the students specifically to tap various points on their bodies at the end of each turn. First, I have them tap the region around the navel in the front and the point on the spine directly opposite the navel (a point on the back called the “*mingmen*” (命門) or “Gate of Life”). As they do so, I tell them to imagine they are “waking up” an “energy center” in their lower abdomen called a *dantian* (丹田) in Chinese. I then guide them to tap near the kidneys, liver, and spleen. As I do so, I instruct them to imagine that they are releasing various emotions from each region of the body: fear from the kidneys, anger from the liver, and worry from the spleen. I then guide them to tap a point in front of each shoulder that is a point in acupuncture and Daoist visions of the body that is associated with the lungs. As they tap those lung points at the shoulders, I instruct them to imagine they are waking up the energy of the lungs and releasing sadness or grief from the lungs. Finally, I have them tap the sternum and imagine they are releasing impatience from the heart.

The warm-up exercise I just described may or may not be derived directly from any longstanding historical practice; for all I know, the warm-up set may be a fairly recent invention. Nevertheless, as it was taught to me by teachers affiliated with the contemporary qigong teacher Mantak Chia, it is a warm-up practice that utilizes traditional qigong principles and is part of a system of practice that derives from traditional Daoism.<sup>5</sup> The organs of the body that students are asked to think about are the five *zangfu* (臟腑) organs that are central to traditional Chinese medicine and Daoist visions of the body, and those organs are tied to the correlative cosmology of *wuxing* theory. The particular emotional/mental states that I ask the students to imagine they are releasing as they tap each region of the body are

emotional/mental states that are thought to be correlated with each *zangfu* organ in the *wuxing* vision of the body and cosmos.

This warm-up is just a fraction of what I typically take my students through when I have them do a full qigong practice. Including such practice as part of a course often makes it easier for students to learn the details of the *wuxing*/five phases correlative cosmology. It also lets practitioners begin imaginatively to “inhabit” the *wuxing* cosmology—to take it out for a test drive, as it were, and see if there is a way to begin to read the cosmology charitably. By trying out these practices in the body—and by coupling them with other, similar practices—one can begin to get a better feel for what the words in the traditional texts that spell out the *wuxing* theory might possibly have meant for the people who uttered them. Once one does that, one can begin to ask certain kinds of critical questions about the theory, about its relative value *vis-à-vis* other metaphysical views, etc. One can, in short, do philosophy, or at least something recognizable similar.

To say all this is not yet to prove that the extension of the word “philosophy” does or should include qigong practices or that qigong is paradigmatically a philosophical activity in the way that, say, Socrates questioning Meno or a contemporary philosophy professor outlining the premises of her argument via a Powerpoint slide projected on a screen in a windowless conference hotel room are paradigmatically philosophical activities. I do not yet have a full-blown account of exactly what is and what is not “philosophy” such that some qigong should count as philosophy and, say, eating a chocolate bar while driving on an interstate should not. I think it is clear, however, that qigong practices of the sort I have described can play a significant role in communicating, understanding, and even critically examining various metaphysical claims, and the experiences qigong practice generates can prompt important epistemic questions and conversations, such as, obviously, “Do the experiences generated by practicing qigong give us anything like a reliable way of assessing the truth of the metaphysical claims that are held by the advocates of these practices?”

In addition, qigong practice can serve to cultivate particular habits of perception (e.g., noticing subtle bodily experiences and the instability of many conscious mental states) and a variety of virtues (e.g., patience, dedication, a willingness to suspend judgement in order to be open to possibility, etc.). Those habits and virtues are not identical to the habits and virtues cultivated by other kinds of philosophical activity; think, for example, of the habits and virtues displayed by the characters in Socratic dialogues or in the conversations recounted in the *Analects* or the *Mengzi*, and think as well about the various habits and virtues required on the part of readers of these texts who are attempting seriously to study and understand them. Nevertheless, qigong practice arguably highlights and cultivates particular habits and virtues in a way that bears at least a strong family resemblance both to what is described in paradigmatic philosophical texts and to what gets developed in the process of critically engaging with those texts.

It may be that expanding our understanding of what counts as philosophical activity to include qigong and similar body practices would make it harder for us clearly to delineate the boundary between philosophy and nonphilosophy. Perhaps that is so. If it is, I am not sure that it is a terrible thing. However, my suggestion here is not that we completely annihilate any practical distinction between doing philosophy and doing other kinds of things, but only that we should take seriously the ways in which qigong and similar body practices can be more similar to paradigmatic philosophical activity than is obvious at first glance, and that these body practices can be useful tools to add to our philosophical toolboxes, at least when engaging with metaphysical claims and worldviews that we might otherwise struggle to treat charitably.

This is all just the beginning of an account of how the body practices of qigong might provide a mode of doing philosophy that is different than the sedentary mode described above. The devil is, of course, in the details, but so are the possibilities. I hope to have given at least a flavor of how this might work, both in the classroom and in one’s own philosophical work that is not directly tied to teaching.

Geisz (2016) discusses experiments in the classroom with qigong and other body practices and the possibilities and challenges of such an approach. Others who have written about similar experiments in college classrooms, either with qigong or with other body practices, include Peimin Ni (1999); Natalie Helberg, Cressida J. Heyes, and Jacklyn Rohel (2009); Richard Shusterman (2012); and Eric C. Mullis (2013).

Livia Kohn has written extensively on qigong, its history, and its current manifestations; one place to start in her work on qigong is Kohn (2008). David Palmer’s *Qigong Fever* (2007) is arguably the best academic book on twentieth-century qigong in China. See also Elijah Siegler (2011) for a good and sophisticated academic treatment of qigong as a contemporary movement.

For those who are interested in practicing qigong or finding ways to introduce qigong into their classrooms and do not have access to a teacher, I recommend two resources by one of my own qigong teachers: Ken Cohen’s *The Way of Qigong: The Art and Science of Chinese Healing Energy* (1997) and his multimedia box set, *The Essential Qigong Training Course: 100 Days to Increase Energy, Physical Health & Spiritual Well-Being* (2005). I also recommend the resources of Michael Winn (another of my qigong teachers) at his HealingTaoUsa.com website. Note that although Winn’s audio and visual products might not be produced with the typical sensibilities of professional academics in mind, he is a fantastic teacher of qigong and Daoist meditation, and some of his resources can provide a particularly good gateway into qigong for beginners. The various resources put out by Mantak Chia (the founder of the Healing Tao qigong organization and one of Michael Winn’s teachers) and other Healing Tao teachers can be very helpful too.

There are many other resources available on qigong. Some of these resources are quite good and easy to use and benefit from, whereas others are more difficult to

appreciate. Many of the materials put out by contemporary practitioners are shaped by what those practitioners deem to be the exigencies of the market, and, consequently, if one approaches them with the scholarly and aesthetic standards of many academics, one will often dismiss valuable resources before having a chance to learn from them. In much the same way that exploring the possibilities of body practices and meditation as philosophy requires one simultaneously to have a very open mind and a critical sensibility, sorting through the books, videos, websites, and workshops on qigong body practices and meditations requires one to be open to possibility while remaining sharply critical of what one is being offered.

There is an increasing number of academic treatments of body practices and meditation that are of interest to philosophers. Ben Spatz's *What a Body Can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research* (2015) is a fantastic work in the field of performance studies that engages with philosophy and is of particular importance to philosophers working on embodiment in general and those of us thinking about body practice as philosophy in particular. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2011), Michelle Merritt (2015), and Kimerer L. LaMothe (2015) each, in different ways, provide insight into the way bodily movement can be seen as a way of thinking or knowing. Michael L. Raposa's *Meditation and the Martial Arts* (2003) is also very, very good. Philosophically interesting work focusing on martial arts in particular includes Barry Allen (2015), Paul Bowman (2015), Adam Frank (2006), and the essays in Graham Priest and Damon Young (2010) and (2014), including, especially, Henry Martin Lloyd (2014) and Markus Schrenk (2014).

## NOTES

1. While philosophy is sometimes considered to be an energetic and active kind of *inquiry*, the energy and the activity of the inquiry are not primarily *bodily* kinds of energy and activity, except insofar as all the thinking, writing, and talking, and the time they take, can exhaust a person over the course of a day or night.
2. In the past several years there have been interesting discussions about the degree to which philosophy should be understood to include, for example, traditional Chinese and Indian thought, and about whether to call academic philosophy that ignores such traditions simply "philosophy" or to mark it as "European and American Philosophy." See, for example, Garfield and Van Norden, "If Philosophy Won't Diversify, Let's Call It What It Really Is," and Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto*. See also Flanagan, *The Geography of Morals: Varieties of Moral Possibility*. But even those of us who side with an ecumenical view of what counts as philosophy typically treat philosophy, even applied philosophy, as something done via words and thoughts while seated or standing relatively still, or at least with minimal exertion of the sort that is distinctively of the body.
3. See Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China*, 4–7. In various contexts, the older expressions "yangsheng" (養生) or "daoyin" (導引) are used instead of "qigong," especially in reference to more traditional styles of Chinese body practices, but in other contexts these three expressions are used interchangeably.
4. For a discussion of the expression "traditional body technologies" applied to qigong, see Palmer, *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China*, 7–13.
5. For academic discussion of Mantak Chia and his Healing Tao qigong system, see Douglas Wile, *The Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics, Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts*, 63–65; Livia Kohn, *Chinese Healing Exercises: The Tradition of Daoyin*, 221–24; and Livia Kohn, *Introducing Daoism*, 215–17.

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## *East Asian Martial Arts as Philosophical Practice*

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### THE NATURE AND HISTORY OF THE EAST ASIAN MARTIAL ARTS

There are few practices more commonly associated with East Asia by people in the West than the martial arts. Perhaps the only practice *more* characteristically associated with Asia in the minds of many Westerners is meditation. As with that practice, there are many misunderstandings involved. First, and most characteristic, is the idea that martial arts are a uniquely and particularly East Asian practice. Ask most people what comes to mind when they think of “martial arts,” and you’re likely to get mainly answers concerning Karate, Bruce Lee, maybe, today, Jiu-Jitsu and even mixed martial arts. While the Asian martial arts have had a massive influence on the way we think about “martial arts” as a category, the martial arts have been practiced worldwide throughout human history and are certainly not limited to East Asia, even if we consider the arts that have become sports or pastimes. In addition to Karate, Taekwondo, Kung Fu, or Muai Thai, there is also Greco-Roman Wrestling, Boxing, Fencing, and even Arm Wrestling—all equally martial arts. Here, I am concerned with Asian martial arts, specifically.

Another common misunderstanding (one common even among many martial arts practitioners) is that modern martial arts such as those mentioned above are ancient in their origins and that the arts we practice today in *dojos* and other training halls are manifestations of ancient systems of martial art constructed by revered martial sages. While they may have some connection to early practices (especially in the form of inspiration), the martial arts practiced today did not exist as such much prior to the twentieth century. Martial arts as we know and practice them are modern arts. Despite the modern origins of what are commonly called “traditional martial arts,” there are many ancient origin stories associated with the arts. Every style and school has such a story—though some are more forthright about their modern origins than others. Practitioners of my own art, Taekwondo, commonly attribute its origin to the practices of the *hwarang* (花郎)<sup>1</sup> (“flower of youth”), a collective of upper-class youths in the Silla kingdom in the sixth century CE. In addition to practicing military arts, they followed a code of conduct drawn from Confucian and other elite cultural sources. These norms inspired the “codes of conduct” ubiquitous in contemporary Taekwondo schools. The problem with this story is that it is wholly an invention. Taekwondo is a fusion of modern Chinese and Japanese fighting forms integrated into a Korean context. The name “Korean Karate” that was commonly used when Taekwondo was new to the US (although the name is hardly ever encountered today) turns out to be fairly accurate. In the Japanese context, there is really nothing we can call systematized “Karate” until the Okinawan fighter Funakoshi

Gichin in the early twentieth century, who systematized and popularized his Okinawan fighting system in Japan, and maybe his teacher Itosu Anko in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

This leads to a third common misunderstanding—the idea that the Asian martial arts developed in cultural bubbles, such that Taekwondo is thoroughly Korean, as Kung Fu is thoroughly Chinese, and Karate thoroughly Japanese. In fact, the modern martial arts are a fusion of modern Asian and Western techniques, systematized by figures in China, Japan, and Korea in between the late nineteenth and mid twentieth centuries—indeed, this may be some of the reason these arts have caught on so well in the West.<sup>3</sup> Few Westerners would likely be attracted to something like the *hwarang*, and they would likely be barred from joining even if they were interested! My own style of Taekwondo is based directly on the Japanese styles practiced in the mid twentieth century. A number of the forms (Kor. *poomsae*, Jpn. *kata*) were integrated directly from the Okinawan fighting system designed by Itosu Anko, with few changes.

Despite all of this, the development of modern Asian martial arts have since their inception involved elements of philosophy, particularly surrounding character and action. Almost all of the modern Asian forms of martial arts include codes of conduct, precepts, or other codified guides, most often focusing not explicitly on the ends of fighting itself, but referring to character and the virtues to be developed in practicing martial arts. One of the earliest systematizations of such codes, by Itosu Anko, is also one of the most interesting, in that in it we see the variety of concerns, motivations, and attitudes that eventually become an integral part of the Asian martial arts in nearly every tradition. Itosu’s “ten precepts” were not designed as the guiding codes of a school but were, rather, an explanation of his style in a letter written to the Japanese government in 1908. In this letter, Itosu offers a number of different justifications for the practice of Karate, as diverse as those generally accepted today. Indeed, we likely have Itosu to thank for the associations we make with martial arts today. Insofar as we think of martial arts as development of character, a route to health, or a method of self-defense, we do so largely because of the lasting influence of Itosu’s explanation of his practices.

While the modern Asian martial arts are, as I mentioned, primarily modern developments, there are antecedent martial arts in earlier history that in many cases served as inspiration for these modern developments, in much the same way that traditional European swordfighting served as inspiration for the development of the modern art of fencing in the late nineteenth century. In the Asian context, the most influential schools of thought on the martial arts were Daoism and Buddhism, though Confucian elements can be found in the ideology connected to martial arts as well. Below, I consider some unique problems for Confucianism in connection with martial arts.

The methods of Daoism have natural connection to martial arts. Even in the earliest Daoist material in China, including the famous text *Daodejing*, Daoists discuss how the methods they advocate can be used to attain mastery in

combat and other military arts. Chapter 69 of the *Daodejing* offers an example of this:

用兵有言：吾不敢為主，而為客；不敢進寸，而退尺。  
是謂行無行

*Those who effectively use the military have a saying: "I dare not take command, but rather lay in wait; I dare not advance an inch, but rather retreat a foot. This is called engaging without engaging."*

Of the modern martial arts, this Daoist conception of martial practice finds its most complete expression in Aikido, developed by Ueshiba Morihei in the 1920s. The art focuses on blending with an opponent, using feints and retreats to overcome an opponent, and the value of the yielding position to allow an opponent's power to overextend them. To use the classical distinction between *yin* 陰 (low, yielding, dark, mysterious) and *yang* (high, forceful, bright, apparent), Aikido is an art recognizing and utilizing *yin*. By contrast, arts like Karate or Taekwondo are far more focused on *yang*—on power, force, and the clash. One way the martial arts are commonly distinguished, which fits quite well with the *yin-yang* distinction, is to categorize them into soft and hard arts. The soft arts, such as Aikido and *Taijiquan* (Tai Chi), also tend to focus on the cultivation or development of *qi* (vital essence), and for this reason are also called, in the Chinese tradition, the "internal" (*nei* 內) arts. The use of martial arts to develop and sustain vital essence is related to practices throughout Chinese history connecting types of movement to development of *qi*. In the Daoist tradition, certain practices of meditation, breath control, and controlled movement were seen as having a link to cultivation of *qi*. As far back as the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE–9 BCE), manuals such as the *Daoyin tu* ("chart of exercises") advocated controlled movement (some in the form of certain animals) to strengthen the body and develop *qi*. Another particularly Daoist practice that contributed to martial arts was that of *xingqi* 行氣 (moving the *qi*). Certain physical practices, according to the tradition, could facilitate the movement of *qi* to different areas of the body, thus producing salutary effects to both that area and the body as a whole.<sup>4</sup> The modern art of *qigong* is related to this practice.

The "hard" or "external" (*wai* 外) arts focus on power and are better known as the competitive arts today. Though the distinctions between hard/soft and internal/external are very general and not accepted by all schools, it can serve as a useful way to point out some basic differences between the arts.

The connection of Chan Buddhism in China to martial arts is mainly known through the famous story of the origin of Chinese martial arts at the Shaolin monastery, based on techniques brought to China by the Indian monk Bodhidharma. While this story is certainly apocryphal (there is no historical mention of martial art at Shaolin until the eighteenth century CE), the physical meditative practices of the Indian traditions introduced through Buddhism likely did have some influence on Chinese forms of physical culture, fighting, and martial art, just as did Daoist physical techniques. The much greater influence of Buddhism on

martial arts came in Japan in the tenth century with battles between Tendai Buddhist monks, and in the thirteenth century with the association of the Rinzaï school of Zen and the elite samurai class that became dominant in the Kamakura period (1185–1333 CE).

### WORKS ON MARTIAL ARTS PHILOSOPHY

Though the traditional martial arts are perhaps not as popular in the US as they were in the '70s and '80s, after the rise of a number of martial arts film stars, there is certainly still interest. And interest in the related sport of "mixed martial arts" (MMA) has significantly increased in the last ten to fifteen years. Arts like Brazilian Jiu-jitsu and Muay Thai, which used to have only a tiny representation in the US, have exploded onto the scene (largely due to MMA).

Much of the most vital martial arts philosophy was written by nonphilosophers (those without academic philosophical training). Indeed, it is my own view that those with the greatest philosophical insight into the martial arts are expert practitioners, most of whom are not professional philosophers. Indeed, professional philosophical training may even be a *hindrance* to writing well about the martial arts philosophy. There is something about the way we write as professional philosophers that doesn't seem conducive to properly expressing the spirit of martial arts. The most profound philosophical reflections on martial arts I have encountered are by martial artists such as Bruce Lee, Ueshiba Morihei, and earlier figures such as the seventeenth-century Japanese swordsman Miyamoto Musashi. Works on martial arts and philosophy by contemporary professional philosophers are, of course, also very useful and interesting. Though it is still a very small (and fringe!) area, there are a number of articles and books on the topic, and philosophers are beginning to apply their unique talents to thinking about the martial arts.

A number of recent works in philosophy stand out. Graham Priest and Damon Young have edited two volumes including articles on various philosophical issues in the martial arts: *Philosophy and the Martial Arts: Engagement* (Routledge 2014) and *Martial Arts and Philosophy: Beating and Nothingness* (Open Court 2010). Barry Allen's recent book *Striking Beauty* (Columbia 2015) offers a philosophical consideration of the martial arts from the intersection of the Chinese and Western philosophical traditions. There are also philosophical studies of martial arts by scholars in related fields, such as Paul Bowman's *Martial Arts Studies: Disrupting Disciplinary Boundaries* (Rowman and Littlefield International 2015) and Daniele Bolelli's *On the Warrior's Path: Philosophy, Fighting, and Martial Arts Mythology* (Blue Snake Books 2008, updated from the original 1996 version). There is also a professional philosophy association devoted to the study of the area, the Society for the Study of Philosophy and the Martial Arts, which regularly organizes panels at APA Pacific meetings.

My own interests overlap with concerns in the texts by philosophers mentioned (some of which I describe further below) and with those by nonphilosopher martial arts experts. The work of Bruce Lee is, in my opinion, the consummate expression of modern martial arts philosophy.

His books, other writings, and interviews show his development of a coherent and philosophically interesting conception of the martial arts and self-development that has been largely ignored by scholars, perhaps in part because of Bruce Lee's "pop culture" cache. Studies of martial arts by professional philosophers, as far as I can tell, do not mention Lee's views, and when they do invoke him, it is generally to discuss his influence in popularizing martial arts in the US. The sole book devoted to Bruce Lee's philosophy (and one of my favorite books on martial arts philosophy), *The Warrior Within: The Philosophies of Bruce Lee* (McGraw-Hill 1996), was written by John Little, a fitness author who studied philosophy at McMaster University. Indeed, Bruce Lee himself studied philosophy at the University of Washington for some time before his martial arts career took off. Philosophers have much to learn from taking seriously and engaging with the work of martial artists like Bruce Lee, Ueshiba Morihei, and others.

Bruce Lee wrote a number of works on martial arts and philosophy, including some of his notebooks which have been published in the years since his death in 1973. A personal favorite of mine is *The Art of Expressing the Human Body*, organized from Lee's notebooks by John Little. A number of other martial arts experts have written excellent philosophical works on the martial arts (far more common than books on martial arts by professional philosophers). A few of my favorites are Joe Hyams's *Zen in the Martial Arts* (1973), Dave Lowry's *Sword and Brush: The Spirit of the Martial Arts* (1995), and Doug Cook's *Taekwondo: Ancient Wisdom for the Modern Warrior* (2001).

Some more historically distant practitioners who reflected and wrote on martial arts and philosophy are perhaps of most use to someone who would approach the subject. The founder of the modern art of Aikido, Ueshiba Morihei (known affectionately as *Osensei*, or "great teacher" by Aikido practitioners), wrote a number of works about this art he developed in the 1920s, the purpose of which is to defend oneself against enemies without harming them. A number of his sayings on Aikido are also collected in *The Art of Peace* (1992). Funakoshi Gichin, the founder of Shotokan Karate, also discusses philosophical aspects of the martial arts in his *Karate-do: My Way of Life*. Further removed, the *bushido* tradition of Edo Period Japan, perhaps the single most profound flowering of philosophical martial thought in world history, produced a number of invaluable texts on martial art and philosophy, including Miyamoto Musashi's *The Book of Five Rings*, Yamamoto Tsunetomo's *Hagakure*, Yagyu Munenori's *Heiho Kadensho* (translated by William Scott Wilson into English as *The Life-Giving Sword*), and perhaps the greatest philosophical work on martial art of the period, the Rinzai Zen monk Takuan Soho's *Fudochi Shinmyoroku* ("Spirit Record of Immovable Wisdom," translated into English by William Scott Wilson as *The Unfettered Mind*). In the *bushido* texts, martial arts are fused with Zen and Confucian ideals, and the arts are understood as themselves Zen techniques that focus the mind and in which such focus can create martial advantage. As we might expect, fighting and other military or violent activity was not often seen as consistent with the spirit of Zen, which, as a form of Buddhism, prized nonattachment and nonviolence as central to its way of life, aimed at

ultimately ending suffering. The association of the Rinzai (Chn *Linji*) school in Japan with the samurai class (or *bushi*) began with the rise of the samurai in the early thirteenth century, which coincided with the development of uniquely Japanese forms of the Rinzai school.

Below, I offer and discuss just a few of the interesting philosophical questions connected to the martial arts, some of which are discussed by other philosophers and martial artists, as well as others that have received less attention.

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF MARTIAL ARTS TO VIRTUE AND VICE

Gillian Russell, in an article in Graham and Young's *Martial Arts and Philosophy* collection, writes about what she calls "epistemic viciousness" that may be caused by martial arts training. I would like to briefly consider this idea here, as I think Russell takes "closed mindedness and gullibility" as vices, something to which I (and probably most martial arts traditionalists) would agree. She also takes "unwarranted epistemic deference to seniors and historical sources, lack of curiosity about important related disciplines and lack of intellectual independence" as vices. This point is more problematic. What she calls vice, a number of people would consider to be virtue, at least in many cases. Whether we consider the states in this second class to be virtues or vices will be largely dependent on related views concerning the person and the proper relationship of the individual and community. This is a debate that played out over two thousand years in the Chinese philosophical tradition, generally between Confucians and their various opponents, including Daoists and Buddhists. It may turn out that viewing the martial arts as helping create virtues relies on a particular kind of conservative or communitist mindset traditional to certain East Asian philosophical schools such as Confucianism. These same states will appear vicious to those of a more individualist mindset (some Yangists, early Daoists, and contemporary liberal democratic thinkers). The fundamental question, if this is the case, is which of these, if either, is the proper understanding of the person and of virtue?

Whether the states Russell discusses count as vices depends on a number of things. One of these is whether martial arts actually do plausibly have "self-defense" as their ends. I contend that the martial arts do not, despite what teachers and practitioners often claim, either effectively contribute to self-defense or often have this as their actual end.

Russell asks,

Why are there so many fantasists in the martial arts, as compared to other activities? And there are; you won't find many sprinters or removal-men who would tell you that strength doesn't matter to their chosen tasks, nor will you find power-lifters who think they can move the bar without touching it or engineers who specialise in ki-distribution.<sup>5</sup>

One plausible answer is that, unlike lifting for the powerlifter and running fast for the sprinter, self-defense is not the primary activity or aim of the martial arts. Physical

violence is extremely rare in our society, and when it does occur, it usually happens with modern weaponry such as guns and knives, or even bats, tire irons, and sticks.<sup>6</sup> No martial art will help you defend against guns and knives, unless you specialize in the martial art of wearing bulletproof. A course in modern self-defense would most plausibly include instruction on situational awareness, how to escape, hide, etc., and would not involve much physical contact at all. Things rarely come to physical violence in nonmilitary situations. And when they do, the techniques we learn in the martial arts I know of are simply not very effective—or not much more so than raw fighting ability. Poking eyes, biting, scratching, and grabbing sensitive areas are most likely to be effective in such a situation, in part because only a fool will square up one-on-one as in a boxing or MMA match if they truly intend to do you harm, and escalation to physical violence is not something humans generally do automatically and on their own (without supportive others). The ex-military psychologist Dave Grossman discusses the human aversion to face-to-face violence and the surprisingly great effort it takes most of us to be able to engage in it.<sup>7</sup> Add to this the fact that most people who attempt to commit physical violence on others are not trained in combative techniques—your likelihood of being physically attacked by *anyone* is fairly low<sup>8</sup> (this rises if we consider sexual assault<sup>9</sup>), but your likelihood of being attacked by a trained fighter without weapons like a gun or knife is *astronomically* low unless you're James Bond. There may be some helpful techniques one can learn, but having a strong and conditioned body is likely the best thing one can do to prepare oneself for such a remote possibility.

The discussion about *justified* vs. *unjustified* deference seems to me to presume a particular (and possibly problematic) conception of the value of deference. We can look to Confucianism here for help, as the Confucian tradition developed, over more than two thousand years, robust conceptions of deference and authority far beyond anything we find in Western philosophy. One of the attitudes in martial arts Russell sees as a vice is what she calls “deference to history.” She argues that following the norms of a historical antecedent based on deference to this figure is clearly a vice, saying,

Famous Historical Master said such and such, therefore you should believe such and such—wouldn't pass muster in other areas. If you tell a long-distance runner that Pheidippides, the original marathon-runner, said that athletes should not spend time thinking about their equipment, but should focus their minds on the gods, he might say something like “oh yes, that's interesting” but he wouldn't infer that he should stop replacing his running shoes every 400 miles. Runners think that the contemporary staff of Runner's World know more about running than all the ancient Greeks put together.<sup>10</sup>

She continues to argue that deference to historical antecedents can lead to the vice of believing everything one's martial forebears said, even where it conflicts with evidence. The Confucians themselves encountered just

this kind of argument in the Warring States Period against deference to the historical sages, in the thought of Hanfeizi and the Legalist school (*fajia* 法家).

The Confucians generally advanced a number of considerations to support deference to historical sources. First, they considered one's historical forebears as important parts of oneself.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, commitment to self-development *requires* a commitment to the Way (*dao* 道) of one's ancestors and teachers. Second, the Confucian conception of a proper Way, including rituals connected to particular roles, was grounded in the practices and concerns of the great historical forebears Confucians referred to as the sages (*sheng ren* 聖人) and the “former kings” (*xian wang* 先王). Outside of the context of the structures they helped to build, there is simply nothing that we can rely on to determine the proper Way. Our Way is in part defined by their Way, and thus when we claim that the historical masters acted in a particular way, we are claiming that it is in part *constitutive* of the practice we engage in to act in this way. Perhaps one *could* wrestle a person to the ground and choke them out as in a UFC match, but this is not something Funakoshi Gichin (for example) endorsed, which is, in essence, to say that while it may be effective enough for beating someone, “it's just not Karate!”

Finally, as I have argued above, there has been far too much focus on the martial arts as creating fighting ability or the ability to harm others. There is plenty of evidence that, all things considered, martial artists do not have more opportunity or ability to physically harm others than any other individual, especially considered in a one-on-one “fight.” Conor McGregor is an excellent mixed martial artist, but if an untrained teenager meets him in an alley and picks up a metal post or a sign to assault him, McGregor is almost certainly going to be badly hurt. Perhaps the worst intellectual vice that can be created by martial arts training is one rarely discussed—the fact that despite our training, skills, and ability, we likely still do not have significantly better chances in physically violent encounters with others than we would without training. The fact is that the human body is not a particularly effective tool for inflicting anything more than superficial harm on the body of another human being.<sup>12</sup> Our efficiency at harming other human beings, animals, and the planet itself is due to our development of the ability to use tools, such as weapons, rather than any features of our bodies. It is simply implausible that training in martial arts will make us anything but minimally better as *fighters* in the sense of people who are skilled at harming others through physical violence while minimizing harm to themselves. “Hard headed” martial artists (usually in MMA) often disparage arts such as Aikido because they say that their techniques require “compliance” to be effective, that is, nonresistance or minimal resistance from the person on whom the technique is performed (*uke* in the Aikido terminology). Yet the same can be said of any martial art technique, including the most vicious strikes in an MMA octagon. In order for your low roundhouse or spinning elbow strike to be effective against an opponent, it requires them to avoid throwing a vase at you or hiding behind a desk to keep you off of them, or even picking up a tire iron and breaking your leg when you throw the kick. A different kind of “compliance” is necessary.

Barry Allen engages in an extended reflection on the question of what martial art is in his recent book on the topic. He argues that although martial art shares some features with both dance and sport, it cannot be understood as either. Allen's conception of the martial arts is restricted to the Asian martial arts, as he argues that sports such as boxing do not count as martial arts because their end is violence, or, at most, victory over an opponent in the ring. Indeed, he argues that features of the Western tradition itself and its view of the body necessitate this attitude toward physical culture. In the Asian martial arts, on the other hand, the ultimate goal is self-development, and violence as such is avoided even though the techniques developed are, at their core, violent.<sup>13</sup> I agree with this general view and think that the main focus of the martial arts is not only nonviolent in nature, but, on certain conceptions of the martial arts, they can actually promote social harmony.

### DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER AND THE QUESTION OF "HONEST SELF-EXPRESSION"

Throughout my own years of practicing and teaching the martial arts, I have come to see them as representing many things, and resisting an easy categorization as one particular focused kind of practice, or having one particular kind of significance. The martial arts contain multitudes, and martial art is a practice as broad and with as many meanings as there are practitioners. There are, however, a few purposes that rise to the top in most discussions of the martial arts. Martial arts as contributing to self-discipline and development is one of these. A closely related purpose less often explicitly expressed, but just as prized by practitioners, is self-expression through movement. In our martial arts practice we cultivate the ability to move in certain ways that create a sense of self. This sense of self may be connected to the confidence of a trained fighter, or the sense of the beauty of the developed body, or any of the myriad physical concerns that lead one to endure years of martial arts practice. When we perform martial art movements, we enact this sense of self, performing it whether for an audience or alone. The key, and what takes years of training, is for the movements we perform to accurately express the sense of self we have developed. Our movement becomes a *description* of this sense of self.<sup>14</sup>

One of my favorite quotes of any kind, martial arts-related or otherwise, comes from Bruce Lee, in a famous television interview he gave in 1971:

To me, ultimately martial art means honestly expressing yourself. Now, it is very difficult to do. I mean, it is easy for me to put on a show and be cocky, and be flooded with a cocky feeling, and then feel like pretty cool and all that. Or I can make all kinds of phony things, you see what I mean, and be blinded by it, or I can show you some really fancy movement. But to express oneself honestly, not lying to oneself, and to express myself honestly—now that, my friend, is very hard to do.<sup>15</sup>

There are a number of interesting philosophical things going on in this interview, and this section of it in particular. Just what is being expressed in martial arts movement? What is

the relationship between intention and the movement of the body in ways that express these intentions—not just to move an arm, but to tell a story, to reveal oneself? There has been quite a bit written about these issues in other areas in philosophy, surrounding embodiment in related practices such as dance. This, I think, is one of the most promising areas for future study of martial arts philosophy, and it connects with work in numerous other emerging areas in philosophy.

To develop oneself as a martial artist, in terms of communicative ability, control over one's movements, the "sense of self" that comes from development of those abilities and development of the body, and the expression of that self through movement—this is the "honest self-expression" Bruce Lee discusses. This is much more akin to dance or to arts like bodybuilding which involve physical development followed by expression (through posing) than it is to most activities we would call "sports." The nature of martial arts seems to make them hybrid—martial art can be sport (in sparring competition, for example), art, or both (sometimes these conflict, and sometimes people run together these two aspects of the pursuit).

### CONCLUSION

While the practice of meditation has featured in studies of Asian philosophies for quite some time, study of the martial arts by professional academic philosophers is still relatively new on the scene. Despite this, there is already excellent work on the topic, and many suggestive areas for further development. There are a number of interesting philosophical questions connected to the identity and practice of the martial arts, only a few of which I briefly explored here. It is a topic I hope more professional philosophers, particularly those who are experts in the martial arts, will take up as a topic of philosophical study. The martial arts show us the possibility of doing philosophy, in its purest sense of struggling to understand the self and the world, through movement. As Bruce Lee said,

The way that I teach it, all types of knowledge ultimately mean self-knowledge. So therefore my students are coming in and asking me to teach them not so much how to do somebody in; rather, they want to learn to express themselves through some movement, be it anger, be it determination, or whatever. So, in other words, what I'm saying therefore, is that they're paying me to show them, in combative form, the art of expressing the human body.<sup>16</sup>

### NOTES

1. 화랑 in the native Korean *Hangul* phonetic system. *Hangul* did not exist at the time of the Silla.
2. There were likely martial practices related to these arts prior to this time, but these practices were not systematized or integrated into any kind of fighting school. The situation is similar to that of modern sport—the sport of football (soccer) was created as such in the nineteenth century, but there were previous less structured games related in some way to the modern sport that inspired it. Indeed, both soccer and rugby developed from early forms of football, structured in different ways as systematic rules were imposed on the early game.

3. Evan Thompson, in his review of Barry Allen's *Striking Beauty*, discusses the interest in Western boxing in China during the Republican period and the possibility that it may have been an important influence on the development of the art of Wing Chun.
4. Kohn, *Science and the Dao: From the Big Bang to Lived Perfection*, 111–12.
5. Russell, "Epistemic Viciousness in the Martial Arts," 132.
6. Perhaps there is a connection between times of relative peace and the study of martial techniques as art and sport. Much of the most famous *bushido* literature in Japan, for example, was written during a time of martial decline and peace, ushered in by the conquest of Japan by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1600, which established a Shogunate that lasted until the nineteenth century.
7. Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. This is not a claim that humans are not violent toward one another, but rather that the closer the (lethal) violence is to hand-to-hand direct violence, the more difficult it becomes.
8. In 2012 the aggravated assault rate nationwide was 2.4 incidents per 1,000 persons. The simple assault rate nationwide the same year was 18.2 incidents per 1,000 persons (2015 *National Center for Victims of Crime Resource Guide*, [http://victimsofcrime.org/docs/default-source/ncvrw2015/2015ncvrw\\_stats\\_assault.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://victimsofcrime.org/docs/default-source/ncvrw2015/2015ncvrw_stats_assault.pdf?sfvrsn=2)).
9. Though it is far less than clear that martial arts techniques would be effective in such situations either.
10. Russell, "Epistemic Viciousness in the Martial Arts," 138–39.
11. For an interesting consideration of something like this idea, see Kupperman, "Tradition and Community in the Formation of Character and Self."
12. Note that it is very rare for serious (immediate) damage to happen even in cases in which people are attempting to knock each other out, as in boxing or mixed martial arts matches. There have been cases of people killed by a single blow—the so called "one-punch killers" in Australia being an example (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/10670485/Australia-leading-the-way-in-crackdown-on-one-punch-killers.html>)—but even in these cases it is not a punch that kills the victim, it is the hitting of their heads on concrete when they fall over. It is doubtful whether we should consider this effective violence against another using the human body. It is more akin to a case of killing someone by pushing them off a building or shoving them in front of an oncoming car.
13. Allen, *Striking Beauty: A Philosophical Look at the Asian Martial Arts*.
14. A number of philosophers have considered the idea of movement as expressing meaning or movement as language. Philosophers and other scholars working on dance in particular are sensitive to this. See Bresnahan, "The Philosophy of Dance," for a discussion of the issue of expression of meaning in dance.
15. Bruce Lee, from a 1971 interview on the Pierre Berton Show. Also discussed in Little, *The Warrior Within: The Philosophies of Bruce Lee*, 133.
16. Bruce Lee, in Little, *The Warrior Within*, 131.

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