VIEWING MANNERS THROUGH A WIDER LENS

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Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to Erin Cline for having organized this colloquium, and to all three commentators for their thought-provoking reflections on my book. It is quite a gift to have the chance to observe others taking elements of your work in directions you would never have considered—indeed, *could* never have considered without their insights. In his commentary, Bryan Van Norden notes that it is unfortunate that I did not include references to Confucianism in the book. I absolutely agree, although at the time, I knew far too little about Confucian thought to be able to incorporate it. While I have since been trying to remedy some of that ignorance, it is obviously an enormous task. I am indebted to Professors Cline, Olberding, and Van Norden for their efforts to point me in the right direction.

I will begin with Van Norden's comments. (I'd like to note that much of my recently acquired understanding of the various strands of Chinese philosophy and their historical and cultural settings is due to Van Norden's extensive efforts to make it comprehensible to novices. For instance, his *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* is written for undergraduates, but I can attest that more mature scholars find it useful as well. Needless to say, any false remarks I make about Chinese philosophy in what follows are entirely my own fault, not his.) In his comments and elsewhere in his written work, Van Norden argues that the most constructive way of thinking about etiquette is through a virtue ethics framework—a framework that is of course also useful for thinking about Confucianism. He wonders about my admittedly heavy reliance

on Kant in the book, and suggests that Kantianism is not well suited to expressing the moral importance of etiquette.

I can understand why my focus on Kant in the book is puzzling. The austere, ivory-tower dwelling Kant does not seem like an obvious choice for philosophical inspiration on the topic of etiquette. I also agree with Van Norden that there are some fundamentally different intuitions underlying Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantianism, most of which I set aside in the book. I myself seem to possess both sets of intuitions. Although I think of myself as an Aristotelian virtue ethicist at heart, I often find myself circling back to Kant's texts for insight into practical ethical problems, insight not always obtainable through an Aristotelian lens. In the book, I suppose I am trying to satisfy both of my philosophical predilections at once. I completely agree that virtue ethics provides us with immensely useful resources for thinking about etiquette, both in terms of its cultivation and its practice. This is perhaps especially true when we are trying to engage in comparative work that draws on Confucian ideas and texts, which certainly do seem to fit better within the broadly Aristotelian tradition that dominates contemporary virtue ethics.

But Kant had a surprisingly extensive amount to say about the moral nuances of social life, and he was capable of considerable acumen when it comes to the actual workings of human interactions. He was particularly sensitive to the ways in which respect and self-respect can be either enhanced or threatened in different social environments. I find Kant's observations on social conventions and etiquette practices fascinating, and I think Kantianism as a theory provides us with considerable philosophical support for the moral importance of these practices. I do not claim that we can say everything we want to say about etiquette in Kantian language; I'm fairly sure I cannot. Still, it is a powerful ethical theory and moreover, one that can reach into corners of etiquette where Aristotelian language seems awkward. Indeed, I would say that

for certain discussions about etiquette and its place in contemporary society, the Kantian ethical framework is a more natural home than the parallel Aristotelian framework. I will also venture (with some trepidation!) the thought that there may be some interesting points of contact between Kant and philosophers in the Confucian tradition, perhaps especially Xunzi.

Let's start with some of Kant's observations about etiquette. In a section of the *Anthropology* with the catchy title, "On the Highest Ethicophysical Good," Kant expounds at some length his views about the best way to conduct a dinner party.[1] He covers the appropriate number of guests (approvingly citing Chesterfield's recommendation that they not be fewer than the Graces nor more than the Muses), the appropriate entertainment while eating (conversation rather than festive music, which he regards as a "tasteless absurdity"), and the appropriate flow of conversational topics (moving through narration, reasoning, jesting). He urges hosts to make sure that topics are of general interest and to maintain connecting threads among the topics so that the participants will leave feeling better informed than before. Serious issues may be discussed, but only if participants can maintain control over their emotions. As he says, "what counts more is the *tone* (which must neither be ranting, nor arrogant), not the content of the conversation, so that none of the guests should go home from the company at variance with each other."[2] Finally, Kant recommends ending the dinner on a humorous note, as he thinks it both pleases the ladies and aids in digestion.

The seriousness with which Kant writes about dinner parties can come as a surprise to those who think of him as concerned primarily with our status as purely rational beings.

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[1] *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Lyle Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978). For a thorough exposition of Kant on this topic, see Alix Cohen, "The Ultimate Kantian Experience: Kant on Dinner Parties," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 25, No. 4 (Oct., 2008): 315-336.

[2] *Anthropology*, 190.

Certainly rationality is at the center of his ethical framework. Nevertheless, Kant was fully aware that the practice of ethics must take into account the fact that he is talking about rational beings who are also human beings. He spent quite a bit of time working out his view of what we might call empirical moral psychology and thinking through its implications for his theory as it applies to the circumstances of actual human life.

Perhaps the most significant of Kant's background beliefs about human beings is that we are prone to radical evil, which is a tendency to act on our inclinations and desires rather than on the requirements of morality, to which we are of course committed by reason.[3] Kant thinks that radical evil is pervasive and largely inescapable. The picture he paints of human nature in the *Doctrine of Virtue, Lectures on Ethics,* and *Anthropology* is thus a fairly grim one.[4] We are, he thinks, morally frail and flawed human beings, naturally prone to self-aggrandizement and self-deception. We seek out human society, but close proximity to our fellow flawed human beings readily devolves into misanthropy and contempt in the absence of constant efforts to the contrary. This unsocial sociability, as Kant calls it, stands in significant contrast to the Aristotelian picture of human moral and political community. Although both Aristotle and Kant regard human beings as naturally social creatures, Kant thinks that community does not come easily to us. In our efforts to live peacefully with our fellow human beings, we are constantly working against human nature.

This divergence between Aristotle and Kant on the natural state of human beings is, I think, one of those fundamental differences to which Van Norden alluded in his comments. And

[3] Exactly what Kant means by radical evil is a subject well beyond the scope of the present paper. He does not, I think, mean to suggest that we are evil in the way that, say, some religious thinkers have portrayed human beings. Such a view of evil would be hard to square with his considerable hope in humanity.

[4] It is worth noting that Kant is not consistently grim in his depiction of human nature. He is also exceedingly hopeful about the possibilities for human improvement, as I explain in more detail below.

unsurprisingly, this particular difference has a profound impact on how each tradition thinks about the task and challenges of cultivating virtue. Aristotle, of course, thinks of virtue as a state involving correct decision and appropriate feelings and actions. Virtue is cultivated over time, through guided practice and life experience, and some (perhaps most) people will always fall short. Virtue is also at least partly constitutive of human flourishing; to act virtuously just *is* to live well as a human being. By contrast, Kant thinks of virtue as strength in overcoming the inclinations that constantly pull us away from moral concerns and considerations. It has to be cultivated and certainly is not easy to come by. But as Van Norden notes, it is something that Kant thinks is within the power of human beings. Moral knowledge is not, for the most part, something obscure or rarified (though it does require judgment—more on that shortly). Here Kant was deeply influenced by the example of his own parents, who were not especially well-educated but who nevertheless understood what morality required. We *can* act morally if we are prepared to be honest with ourselves and put in the considerable effort it takes to overcome our contrary inclinations. Even if we can pull this off, however, there is no guarantee that we will be happier as a result, either in the subjective sense or in the richer sense of Aristotelian *eudaimonia*. On Kant's view, virtue makes us deserving of happiness, but it does not have the same relationship to individual flourishing that it does in Aristotle.

At the risk of oversimplifying what is obviously a very complex matter, let me suggest that the story I have just told about the differences between Aristotle and Kant on human nature bears at least some resemblance to a story we might tell about Mengzi and Xunzi, with Kant resembling Xunzi. Xunzi tells us that "crooked wood must await steaming and straightening on the shaping frame, and only then does it become straight."[5] Kant, rather more pessimistically,

[5] *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, trans. Eric Hutton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014) 248.

writes that, "nothing straight can be constructed from such warped wood as that which man is made of."[6] For both, human nature is something that needs shaping and straightening through an extensive, difficult process.[7] Now Xunzi seems to have greater confidence than Kant in the possibility of transforming our natures. Kant does not appear to think that we will ever master all of our morally troubling natural inclinations, although we should always try to master them and may sometimes even succeed. The wood, however, is not going to become perfectly straight, no matter how hard we work. Xunzi's picture of moral cultivation is more optimistic about the outcome. Still, both Xunzi and Kant face the challenge of articulating how this process of reforming our natures can take place.

What I find especially intriguing about Xunzi's account of moral self-cultivation is the fact that he clearly thinks that ritual is part of the solution to the problem. I know there is much to say about the comparison of how ritual functions in Xunzi as opposed to Mengzi, and that moreover, I am not in a position to say it. So that I don't overstep my expertise, I will stick with the narrow question about whether and how etiquette (and ritual more broadly) might perform a similar function in Kant's thought.

Whether or not Kant took etiquette practices to have moral importance depends on what we're prepared to count as an etiquette practice. As I discuss in the book, Kant emphasized that acts of beneficence must be carried out in ways that don't damage the self-respect of the recipient or encourage ingratitude. He seemed to think that being in the position of needing

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[6] Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) 46.

[7] Erin Cline has pointed out to me that P.J. Ivanhoe also draws a comparison between these two quotes. See *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2000) 36. I am grateful to her for this reference and for further illumination on Xunzi on human nature.

another's help is inherently degrading, and hence, that benefactors have to take care to minimize or offset the negative moral impact of their gifts. According to Kant, benefactors should:

> carefully avoid any appearance of intending to bind the other by it; for if he showed that he wanted to put the other under an obligation (which always humbles the other in his own eyes), it would not be a true benefit that he rendered him. Instead, he must show that he is himself put under obligation by the other's acceptance or honored by it, hence that the duty is merely something that he owes, unless (as is better) he can practice his beneficence in complete secrecy.[8]

This is not as specific as the descriptions of ritual that we find in Xunzi, but it indicates that Kant is interested not just with *what* we do, but *how* we do it. Taking another example, Kant says that we have a general duty to correct errors of reasoning, but we have to do it in a way that doesn't express contempt and or deprive the erring person of confidence in his or her own rationality. The fact that Kant is concerned with the 'how' of our moral duties shows, I think, that he recognizes the very nature of an action can be transformed by its context and by how it is received. A gift or a favor can be insulting if we are not careful. A joking remark about another's faults can cross the line between harmless banter and mockery, the latter of which he takes to violate a duty of respect.[9]

Thus for Kant, the way we perform our moral duties can matter greatly from a moral standpoint. But Kant's remarks about the moral importance of social forms go beyond this. The social graces themselves, he thinks, play a crucial role in helping us improve ourselves morally. Exactly how is not entirely clear; it is not the most thoroughly developed theme in Kant's ethics, despite appearing in multiple works. Broadly speaking, Kant appears to believe that the social

[8] Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 453. This reference and all further references to this text employ the Prussian Academy page numbers.
[9] *Doctrine of Virtue* 467

graces create an illusion of virtue. We may think that by calling them an illusion, Kant is denigrating their moral value, but it's not quite that simple:

> It is a duty to oneself as well as to others not to *isolate* oneself but to use one's moral perfections in social intercourse…to cultivate a disposition of reciprocity—agreeableness, tolerance, mutual love, and respect (affability and propriety), and so to associate the graces with virtue. To bring this about is itself a duty of virtue. These are, indeed, only *externals* or by-products, which give a beautiful illusion resembling virtue that is also not deceptive, since everyone knows how it must be taken. *Affability, sociability, courtesy, hospitality* and *gentleness* (in disagreeing without quarreling) are, indeed, only tokens, yet they promote the feeling for virtue itself by a striving to bring this illusion as near as possible to the truth. By all of these, which are merely the manners one is obliged to show in social intercourse, one binds others too and so they still promote a virtuous disposition by at least making virtue *fashionable.*[10]

This is a complex passage and not easy to interpret, but it certainly shows that Kant takes the social graces seriously and moreover, takes them seriously for moral reasons. The norms of etiquette reinforce the moral obligations we already have. They are not themselves virtues, but they promote the feeling for virtue, in part by making the virtuous life attractive. For someone who holds Kant's view about human nature, this is not unimportant. The path to virtue is difficult; when we make the practice of virtue pleasing, we do ourselves and others a considerable service. In this, I think Kant would oppose the author(s) of the *Daodejing* in their suggestion that etiquette has a morally corrupting influence by encouraging superficiality and hypocrisy. On the contrary, Kant sees it as a morally important hedge against the chaos that threatens to erupt if we give in to our natural inclinations. To put it differently, abiding by the norms of etiquette is a central tool that we employ in our efforts at moral self-cultivation.[11]

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[10] *Doctrine of Virtue*, 473-4.

[11] As an anonymous referee for *Dao* has pointed out to me, Paul Kjellberg has argued that Xunzi can be seen as taking this line in response to Zhuangzi. ("Sextus Empiricus, Zhuangzi, and Xunzi on 'Why be skeptical?'" in *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*, ed. Philip Ivanhoe and Paul Kjellberg (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) pp. 1-25). According to Kjellberg, "although Xunzi does not think of *wei* as something bad, he no doubt chooses this particular term to emphasize that, to begin with at

For all Kant's pessimism about human nature, he is also quite idealistic about the possibilities for individual human beings to overcome our natures and act as morality requires of us. The same goes for human communities. The kingdom of ends is an ideal, but it is an ideal that is supposed to guide our decision-making in the actual world. Kant sees the moral project as a constant striving to live up to what we already recognize as the requirements of the moral law. In this sense, I do think Kantian ethics can be understood as what Van Norden calls an ethics of aspiration.[12] We aspire to be better than we are by nature, and we have a duty to bring ourselves and our communities ever closer to that ideal.

Moral self-cultivation is obviously an important theme for Confucians and for virtue ethicists of all stripes. It is also an important theme for Kant, more so than is often realized. Indeed, Kant thought that each of us has a moral duty to cultivate our own natural and moral perfection. Part of Van Norden's skepticism about the value of Kantian ethics in thinking about etiquette rests on his interpretation of it as focusing primarily on rules. I do not share this interpretation, which perhaps explains my affinity for relying on Kant. It's true that when people think of Kant, the first thing that comes to mind is the categorical imperative—a moral rule if there ever was one! And certainly the categorical imperative is at the center of the theory, particularly in the *Groundwork*. (It plays a far less prominent role in his other ethical works, including the much later *Doctrine of Virtue*. The same is true of the motive of duty.)

It's worth noting, though, that the categorical imperative doesn't actually generate much by way of actual moral rules. Both the universal law formulation and the humanity formulation identify our perfect duties, which have the form of prohibitions or prescriptions regarding

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least, moral activity is *not* simply the sincere expression of one's true feelings. Quite the contrary, it is a self-conscious and deliberate effort to act contrary to one's natural and spontaneous inclinations" (p. 19).

[12] Van Norden, p. 7 in revised Word version.

particular actions. There we certainly get some rules—don't lie, don't destroy rationality in yourself or others, etc. But Kant is adamant that the requirements of perfect duty do not exhaust our moral responsibilities. That would be to treat humanity as an end in what he calls the merely negative sense—as something not to be acted against or treated as a mere means. As he makes clear in the *Groundwork*, if we are really to take seriously dignity in ourselves and other rational beings, we must also treat humanity as an end in a more robust, or positive sense. He gives this content by way of what he calls the two ends that are also duties: our own perfection and the happiness of others. These two ends, which generate our imperfect duties, are not duties in the ordinary sense. They are more like morally necessary commitments that are supposed to structure our lives. In fact, as the *Doctrine of Virtue* makes clear, those two imperfect duties shape a great deal of the moral landscape Kant thinks we inhabit.

Crucially, there is no indication that Kant thought we could spell out the requirements of self-improvement or beneficence by reference to rules. They are ends we must adopt, but having adopted them as ends does not settle the question of how we are to promote them in practice. There is no *a priori* procedure for determining whether it would be better for me to spend Saturday afternoon volunteering at the homeless shelter or reading up on Mengzi. Instead, Kant repeatedly refers to the need to exercise moral judgment in such cases, a kind of judgment that I think bears important similarities to the Aristotelian virtue of *phronesis*. There is actually considerable theoretical space in Kantian moral reasoning for what Van Norden aptly calls "a flexible responsiveness to complex situations that cannot be fully codified in advance."[13] It is true that Kantian ethics draws some boundaries that are absent in other theories. The requirements of perfect duties always serve as a limiting condition on what other projects we

[13] Van Norden, p. 8 in revised Word version.

might undertake. But when it comes to the specifics of living well on a daily basis, there is no substitute in Kant for the reflective judgment of a person truly committed to living a morally good life. To use one of Van Norden's examples, Gregory House needs to be able to determine when respect for his patients requires that he be blunt with them, a quality Kant endorses in many contexts. Indeed, a Dr. House who could not bear to tell his patients the truth about their conditions when asked would likely run afoul of his Kantian imperfect duty of beneficence. Knowing whether, when, and how to reveal an unpleasant truth is a complex form of moral knowledge, but this is a kind of moral knowledge that a good Kantian needs just as much as a good Aristotelian. An agent with a Kantian good will should cultivate it as part of the duty to improve her own moral character.

So on the Kantian view, just as on the Aristotelian and Confucian view, we should always be aiming to improve ourselves. This involves, as we have seen, sharpening our powers of moral judgment, but it seems like there is certainly more to the story on the virtue ethics view. There is also the cultivation of the emotions, a place where Kantianism has generally been thought to fall short. In her comments, Cline emphasizes that for Kongzi, it is essential that rituals be performed in the proper state of mind, where that includes having the appropriate emotions. Funeral rites performed without real grief are missing something essential. Aristotle famously said that we become just by performing just actions. It is through the repeated performance of the actions, helped along by the judicious use of pleasure and pain in childhood, that we come to do just actions in the way that the just person does them. Doing just actions in the way that the just person does them requires the appropriate emotional stance (whatever that might be for just actions).

As Van Norden points out, Kant did not believe that our emotions were under our direct control, although he did think that they could be cultivated. In fact, we have particular reason to try to cultivate love for our fellow human beings, given that we have duties of beneficence toward them. Interestingly, one of the methods he recommends for learning to love our fellow human beings is to do beneficent things for them:

> Well-wishing from love cannot be commanded, though well-wishing from obligation can. If, however, we do well by someone from duty, we get used to this, so that we subsequently do it from love and inclination as well. If we speak well of someone, simply because we see that he deserves it, we get used to this, so that we afterwards intone his merits in everything. Thus even love from inclination is a moral virtue, and might be commanded to this extent, that one should first practice well-doing as a duty, and later, through habituation, out of inclination as well.[14]

This passage suggests that Kant thought we could develop properly loving attitudes toward others through the performance of the right kinds of actions. We begin by doing such acts from duty, but over time, we come to do them from love. Acts of beneficence carve pathways in our characters, pathways that make it easier for us to continue on that route.

Now I don't want to overstate Kant's commitment to the idea that we make ourselves better through adhering to rules of etiquette and engaging in rituals. It's clear that he was not thinking of moral self-improvement primarily in these terms, as the Confucians appear to do. He also takes comparatively little interest in the various social roles that shape and constrain our moral commitments, social roles that seem to me at least to be quite important to Kongzi and many of his followers. (If Kant went around giving advice to kings and feudal lords about how to govern well, he didn't write about it.) What one is required to do in order to fulfill the requirements of *li* depends, I take it, on who one is and what is expected of the person who

[14] *Lectures on Ethics*, eds. P. Heath and J.B. Schneewind, trans. P. Heath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 27:417.

occupies this social role. Insofar as Kant is deeply interested in any role, it is the role of being a legislator in the kingdom of ends, which of course is a role we each play and play in the same way. There may be room in his theory for specific moral obligations tied to social role and position (indeed, we have seen this already in his discussion of how to host a dinner party), but it is not the primary way in which Kant encourages us to think about our relationships with other people. This means, I think, that we need to look elsewhere for a way of making sense of troubling funeral trends and what they can tell us about the moral dimensions of communal ritual practices.

I want to focus in on what I take to be two especially central and thought-provoking points in Professor Cline's remarks. The first point, which I have already begun to discuss, is that rituals are important because they play an essential role in the shaping of moral character (the developmental function) and the expression of morally important attitudes (the expressive function). Cline correctly notes that my book focuses mostly on the expressive function, but as I agree with her about the significance of their developmental function, I will try to say a bit more about it below.

The second point is that at least some rituals are importantly communal. Their nature is such that we cannot make individual decisions about whether or how to carry them out. I think this means that each of us bears moral responsibility for sustaining rituals, such as funerals, in our communities. I want to explore this idea and then take this remark of Cline's further (maybe beyond where she would want it to go) and argue that this is best explained in terms of our responsibility to acknowledge the social roles we occupy, whether permanently or temporarily, and the moral requirements of those roles.

Let's begin with the expressive and developmental point of rituals. As Cline points out, there is no sharp distinction in classical Confucian thought between etiquette and religious rituals. I assume this is in part because at the time, religious rituals were pervasive in ordinary daily life, and pervasive in a way that they are generally not in contemporary Western societies, where religious rituals tend to be confined to specific, clearly defined occasions and events. This is true of etiquette as well. In contemporary United States culture, there is what I regard as a lamentable tendency to associate etiquette primarily with specific occasions, most notably weddings. That is a shame, but more importantly, it is also a mistake about what etiquette is. Etiquette is in fact pervasive in our daily lives, whether we acknowledge it or not. We are constantly either following or flouting requirements of etiquette. I don't know whether the same thing is true of ritual, particularly if we take the view that ritual is somehow connected up with what we view as sacred. (I take it that a morning habit of turning on the coffeemaker, feeding the dog, and getting the newspaper falls short of a ritual.) And yet, etiquette and ritual are surely connected insofar as they set norms and standards for interacting with whom and what we regard as valuable and important. I think I would want to follow the Confucians on this point and be expansive about what falls into the category of manners or etiquette (or alternatively, subsume manners under ritual.)

Cline remarks that the rites "constitute a unified code of conduct and specify much of the content of Zhou culture, in terms of the patterns of behavior that govern interactions between members of families, communities, and society as a whole."[15] In my experience, when people in contemporary Western cultures get started on the subject of etiquette, the conversation often becomes a lament about the decline of manners, particularly among young people. (This is not a

[15] Cline, p. 8 in revised Word version.

new trend. People have been complaining about the terrible manners of today's youth for hundreds of years—maybe thousands.) Returning to Van Norden's comments, I don't think that there is *less* etiquette now than there was a century ago. But I do think that it is far less *unified* than it used to be, and certainly far less unified than the rites practiced by the early Confucians. People can and do get married by Elvis impersonators, or while skydiving (or both!) And apparently people now feel entitled to hold concerts instead of funerals. I share Cline's intuition that something important has been lost when people do not hold funerals and moreover, that we are not entitled to change up established social practices in quite this way. But I find it challenging to say just why.

Cline, picking up on points made by P.J. Ivanhoe and Eric Hutton, emphasizes the importance of the rites for shaping moral character and directing appropriate expressions of emotion. On her view, the "let's skip the funeral" trend is dangerous because it ignores the importance of funerals for facilitating emotionally healthy and morally appropriate grief for the community as a whole. It deprives people of the chance to engage in expressive function of ritual, leaving them with no clear, socially sanctioned way to communicate effectively their feelings about the deceased to the surrounding community. Presumably it also interferes with the developmental function of ritual by providing no way for parents to help children learn important aspects of coping with death and loss. The young people who are deprived of the chance to attend funerals are thereby deprived of the chance to practice dealing with death, and we might wonder how it will affect them later in life.[16]

I am going to take for granted Cline's claim that the lack of appropriately timed and conducted funerals in her hometown is a bad thing for everyone involved. It is worth noting,

[16] For more on this topic, see Cline's forthcoming book, *Families of Virtue: Confucian and Western Views on Childhood Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

though, is that not everyone is in a position to remedy the situation. After all, not just anyone can put on a funeral. One has to be related in the right way to the person who has died. It is not simply that one must be in a position to orchestrate what happens to the body, although that is certainly part of it. Rather, one must have *standing* to put on a funeral. That standing is normally tied to a particular social role; namely, being a close relative of the deceased. If it is your relative who has died, you are in a special position with regard to funeral arrangements and like it or not, it is a position that comes with associated responsibilities and indeed, perhaps even moral obligations. One way of putting Cline's point—perhaps more strongly than she would want—is to say that the people who have standing to put on a funeral *owe* it to the community to put one on, and to do so in a way that makes it recognizable *as* a funeral.

To clarify my meaning, I will fall back on another author, who also makes multiple appearances in my book—Jane Austen. In Austen's novels, the characters spend a lot of time attending balls. Indeed, there seems to be a general expectation that people who are in a position to hold a ball (namely, gentlemen in good health, with large houses, and significant disposable income) are under a defeasible obligation to hold balls at least occasionally, if not regularly. Balls are an extremely important form of entertainment in the social circles about which Austen writes. Not only are balls a prime opportunity for young people to practice dancing and find spouses, but they are also one of the only ways that poorer members of the set can be entertained without incurring obligations of reciprocity that they may not be able to meet. So if one has the social standing (where that includes economic resources) to put on a ball once in a while, one has a responsibility to do so.

But now once a gentleman—call him Mr. Bingley—has committed to holding a ball, he is not free to decide what the ball will be like. He may choose the day (although that will be

partly determined by the presence of moonlight), the musicians, and the menu, but that's about all. Even the guest list is pretty much predetermined by existing social relationships. Imagine now that his snobbish sister, irritated by the prospect of hosting what she thinks of as the local riff raff, insists that she prefers balls that focus on conversation rather than dancing, on the grounds that conversation is more rational. Austen's Mr. Bingley is compelled to point out that while she is obviously right that an evening of conversation is more rational, it would not be much like a ball. A ball, by definition, must involve dancing. In Austen's world, it also involves dancing of a certain sort, some minimum number of couples who can be counted on to dance, a supper, and so forth. Moreover, a ball cannot happen without the guests, because the guests constitute it as a ball by dancing. (Some of Austen's characters inappropriately turn other social gatherings into dances by dancing. If enough people commence dancing, any gathering becomes a dance—even a funeral.) Once the event has been announced as a ball, both the host and the guests are under obligations to do certain things in order for it to be a ball. These obligations differ by social role. The host obviously has special obligations. Male guests are under an obligation to ask female guests to dance, since female guests at a ball cannot commence dancing on their own. Men are supposed to ask unoccupied women to dance (which is why Mr. Darcy is in fact behaving badly at the ball where he meets Miss Elizabeth Bennet), and they are considered to be on call for dancing as the host requires. The female guests, for their part, are generally required to dance with any gentleman who asks. If they refuse, they forfeit their right to accept other requests.

Notice that we can find a parallel in the *Xunzi,* in the chapter, "Discourse on Ritual."[17] There it is spelled out who must take on what role in various sacrifices, based on their social

[17] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for *Dao,* who pointed me to this passage.

position. The *jiao* sacrifice must be performed by "no one lower than the Son of Heaven" and other sacrifices are restricted to people who hold specific positions.[18] As Xunzi puts it, "This is the means to distinguish that those who are lofty pay respect to the lofty, those who are lowly pay respect to the lowly, what is fitting for those of great station is done on a grand scale, and what is fitting for those of humble station is done on a small scale."[19] Readers familiar with Aristotle's description of the great-souled man (the person with the virtue of *megalopsychia*) will see another parallel here. One should act in accordance with one's station or role, and aim to fulfill that role well.

Austen's are filled with characters who inhabit their social roles well or badly. So are the *Analects* and the writings of Xunzi and Mengzi. Given the extent of the king's power and his ability to affect the lives of others for better or for worse, it's extremely important for him to fulfill his role well, whatever that entails. Likewise, in Austen's novels members of the gentry who own large estates have significant moral responsibilities in virtue of their standing in the community and their power to impact the lives of others. Some, such as George Knightley in *Emma,* execute this responsibility brilliantly. Others, such as Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion*, fail so miserably as to no longer deserve the moral status that attaches to that social role. Mr. Knightley lives frugally, but is generous with his money when it comes to the needs of others. He pays close attention to the management of his estate and is attentive to the circumstances of his tenants, who are dependent on him for their livelihood. In one of the novel's most striking scenes, Mr. Knightley uses his social rank to rescue a vulnerable young woman from major embarrassment at a ball. (She has just been snubbed by the arrogant Mr. Elton, who refuses to dance with her. Mr. Knightley immediately asks her to dance, thereby restoring her social status

[18] *Xunzi,* p. 203.
[19] *Xunzi*, p. 203.

and launching a pointed critique at Mr. Elton. He is the only person in the room with the standing to do those things; as he knew, no one else could have saved the day so effectively.) By contrast, Sir Walter Elliot is a disgrace in Austen's eyes. He has run up so much debt that he cannot afford to stay in his family home, and must retreat to Bath while renting out the house. He is pompous, stupid, and oblivious to the real obligations that he has in virtue of his title and his social position. He cares only about the superficial trappings of his title and hence on Austen's view, doesn't deserve his status. (The real gentleman heroes of that novel are the naval officers, not the landed gentry.) He cares deeply about protocol, but understands nothing of the point behind it. Let us just say that Walter Elliott is the kind of man who would insist on linen caps over silk and would bow at the top of the stairs if that's what had become fashionable.

Obviously contemporary United States society does not have the equivalent of ancient Chinese feudal lords or 19th century British gentry. But we do still have weddings and funerals, which require that various people temporarily occupy certain, very important roles. If it's your job to bring the wedding ring to the ceremony, you had better do it. And if it's your job to arrange for the death notice in the paper, you had better do that as well. The reason, as Cline nicely points out, is that a failure to perform the obligations of your role reverberates throughout the community. Every community needs to find a way to manage death, and a funeral is the standard way of managing death. Like a ball, the funeral itself is constituted by what the people at the funeral do. This is why that concert is not in fact a funeral. (I'm less certain about the merely delayed funeral.) A funeral or memorial service just is an occasion of people coming together to mourn. If there is no conventionally recognizable way to express one's grief at the event, it cannot be a funeral. I may burst into tears during a symphony performance because a

piece of music being played reminds me of my loved one, but I have not thereby made the performance into a funeral.

Where this leaves us I think, is with the conclusion that people who, in virtue of a temporary or permanent social role, have standing to put on funerals are under an obligation to put one on. Failing to do so is failing in an obligation to others, who, as Cline argues, require funerals as a way of expressing their own emotions in a healthy way and also demonstrating to young people how death and loss are to be handled. We show our love and respect for the deceased by doing something that resembles mourning for the person. And we must be able to make our actions recognizable to ourselves and others as mourning. This means that we need to create the events and practice that make this kind of mourning possible.

This does not mean that there can be no flexibility in what the mourning looks like. We have probably all been to funerals where mourners were asked to depart from conventions of dress or behavior, but for reasons that were articulated and made sense in the context. One can ask funeral guests to wear colors other than traditional mourning colors *if* one can provide a narrative in which wearing those colors becomes an appropriate expression of grief. But there are still limits on what one can ask others to do. For instance, I doubt that a person can reasonably ask his wedding guests to skydive along with him, or to dress up as Elvis. The entitlement to alter the rites to suit one's preferences and needs has constraints. These constraints can certainly shift over time. Perhaps in fifty years it will be standard practice to hold concerts as a way of mourning, and perhaps by then people will have adapted their mourning strategies in a way that makes these recognizable and appropriate as funerals. (Something along these lines has, I think, happened on Facebook and other forms of social media. People have very quickly developed ways to engage in public mourning of people on their Facebook

profiles.) But the important point is that we cannot do this suddenly and singlehandedly without abandoning our moral responsibilities to our communities.

Of course, in practice there are complexities. Weddings and funerals come in a variety of forms, and there can be disagreement about what would be the most appropriate form for those circumstances. Even so, we recognize that in the end, only certain people have standing to decide what a given wedding or funeral will be like. Our job is to conform to it, even if we disapprove. For instance, although Kongzi regards the lavish funeral of his beloved student, Yan Hui, as improper, he does not take himself to have standing to make alterations to it, since as Yan Hui's teacher, he does not occupy the appropriate social role.[20]

I will now, at last, turn to Professor Olberding's paper. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to reflect further on this last chapter of the book because it is the chapter with which I have always been the least satisfied. Moreover, Olberding has picked up on the element that troubles me most in that chapter and pointed me toward a better way to think about it. Olberding's focus is on a tension in my account of hospitality. The tension arises from the fact that I want to think of hospitality a virtue, but a virtue that does not unfairly burden women with an ever-higher bar to meet for domestic achievement. Olberding offers me a very promising route out of that tension with the help of Confucianism. In my remaining remarks, I'd like to pick up on her line of argument and see where it leads me.

In the book, I attempted to defend at least some creative domestic activities as expressing a kind of self-sacrifice in the service of one's guests. I suggest that there is something morally valuable about taking the trouble to create an aesthetically appealing experience for your guests,

[20] Confucision, *Analects*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett Press, 2003) pp. 114-115. Slingerland' suggests that it is Yan Hui's father who wants the lavish funeral, and although he is violating ritual propriety with it, it is nevertheless his decision to make. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for *Dao* for bringing this to my attention.

although it falls short of a moral obligation. (I, for one, don't hesitate to feed delivery pizza to guests.) But Olberding's comments nicely highlight a problem that I mentioned in the book, but did not attempt to solve; namely, the troublingly elevated and intricate standards to which women in particular are held and indeed, hold themselves. You check out a few books from the local library and the next thing you know, you're etching glass or using a variety of Bundt pans (which of course you already own) to construct pedestal lighting out of snow. If you've done it well, you post it on Pinterest; if you haven't, then you pretend to have been too busy working for that kind of nonsense.

Olberding suggests—rightly, I think—that these standards raise problems not just about women's overall workload, but about alienation. Certainly some of the projects Martha Stewart recommends are insanely time-consuming and involve toxic substances. More seriously, though, Olberding points out that they interfere with the appropriate relationship between a person's identity and her material environment, as well as the work she does to create that environment. As she puts it, "In Xunzi's idiom, we are existentially nurtured where our material environment and activity closely cohere with the values we most want to define the self."[21] The problem about alienation enters when the person does not or cannot identify with the values that are defining what she is doing. What she creates is not *hers* in an important sense and so she finds herself working within an environment that is fundamentally foreign to her. She is not connected to her work in the right way. This strikes me as exactly right, but I want to push the topic a bit further. Olberding's solution to the alienation problem, I take it, is to put down the Martha Stewart books and reject the aesthetic implicit in them. My own sympathies are with her, but I want to explore an alternative way of resolving the tension. This is because I am not fully convinced that we

[21] Olberding, p. 14 of the revised Word version.

aren't always required to take up these outside standards and make them our own. Maybe we should adapt ourselves to the aesthetic, rather than reject it. To put it differently, if Martha declares snow pedestal lighting to be a Good Thing, perhaps the proper response is for me to make it a Good Thing for me by becoming the kind of person for whom snow pedestals are an expression of my identity.

Olberding presents a compelling case against this strategy of assimilation to the Martha ideal. She argues that the aesthetic in question is "excessively, fastidiously stylized and radically narrow."[22] It is a world in which nothing is ever out of place, in which clutter never piles up on kitchen counters, and dogs certainly never shed on the upholstered furniture. Items may appear worn, but only in an aesthetically appealing way. The painted edges of a chair can be gently worn to show the aged wood underneath, but that chair had better not have faded Sharpie scribbles or vacuum cleaner dents in the legs. (And for that matter, the chair had better be made of real wood and not IKEA pressboard.) In reading Olberding's comments, I was reminded of a blog called *Catalog Living*. The blog's author, Molly Erdman, takes photographs out of popular home furnishing catalogs and chronicles the life of Gary and Elaine, a fictional couple who live in the house supposedly being depicted. Erdman comes up with storylines that explains why, for instance, Elaine has left twelve large balls of twine on a living room chair, why Gary keeps a large bowl of limes next to his collection of antique gardening shears, or why they have set up an entire guest bedroom outdoors. Gary and Elaine are, of course, absurd, which is why the blog is funny. Whatever the aesthetic appeal of the photographs, they cannot possibly represent an actual living situation.

[22] Olberding, p. 5 of the revised Word version

But useless balls of twine aren't the main problem here. As Olberding also points out, the aesthetic represented in lifestyle and shelter magazines is predominantly a WASP one—favoring muted color schemes and carefully curated items. (One of the reasons why patina on silver counts as an acceptable form of wear is that it suggests the silver has been handed down through the family for some time—proof of long-established wealth.) In the background of the aesthetic, we hear troubling echoes of race and class privilege. So there is excellent reason to be suspicious of the proclamation that aspects of this lifestyle reflecting that privilege are Good Things. But even if we reject Martha Stewart's particular take on Good Things, that doesn't mean that there is no such thing as a Good Thing. Indeed, I'm inclined to wonder whether there isn't a Confucian version of the Good Thing.

Olberding brings in Xunzi to help articulate a different way of thinking about the relationship between a person and her material environment, drawing on his account of ritual. As she puts it, "under enriched ritualized sensibilities, a person's environment, her food, and the material objects she uses and wears, are conceived as fittingly reflective of her circumstance and emotive orientation toward it. Material arrangements also, significantly, work to promote and maintain emotive attitudes."[23] This passage fits nicely with Cline's discussion of funerals, suggesting as it does that one can express the appropriate attitudes via one's use of material objects. A person in mourning might choose simple clothing and food so as to express a lack of interest or pleasure in adornment or sensual delight. In contrast, a festive occasion calls for much more extensive preparation, richer food, and more elaborate décor.

One of the things to note about this, though, is that I am not in full control of what is being called for by the occasion. Xunzi, I take it, advocates creating the material environment

[23] Olberding, p. 8 of the revised Word version

appropriate to the circumstance at hand. This is true regardless of whether I presently identify with that material environment. Suppose I am hosting Christmas dinner for my relatives. (Let us suppose for the sake of my example that I have willingly volunteered.) I have lovely china, but I am feeling lazy and don't really want to get it out. I also don't want it to chip. So I ponder using paper plates instead. It seems to me that I should resist this impulse. The occasion calls for the good china, and if I'm not feeling it, it is I who should change, not the tableware. I am not, I think, fully free to substitute my own aesthetic for the traditional one. Certainly I can fiddle with the details. I can, for instance, decide whether I'm going to devote my spare hour to snow pedestal lighting or to elaborate pine cone centerpieces. But as with funerals, a holiday dinner carries expectations and I am not at liberty to jettison them in accordance with my whims. Even if I decide not to pull out the china, I am nevertheless bound, in virtue of my role as a host, to create the atmosphere appropriate to the meal.

I raise this point because I think it may be in tension with Olberding's appealing suggestion about "arranging one's world to jointly reflect and promote what one circumspectly judges valuable and important."[24] The suggestion is appealing because it leaves our options open. It creates space for Olberding to take up etching glass because she wants to try her hand at it, while allowing her to reject snow pedestal lighting as silly and frivolous. It also enables me to reject both options in favor of buying glassware and outdoor lighting at Target and spending the time skeet-shooting instead. If I am entitled to shape my material surroundings and harness my creative powers toward activities in accordance with my own values and identity, then there's a clear escape from the Martha Stewart prison.

[24] Olberding, p. 9 of the revised Word version

But as Olberding is well aware, this is not how the world of Martha Stewart Living operates. The underlying assumption there is that if I don't see the appeal of the snow pedestal lighting, the problem is with me, not the lighting. Assuming I don't live in Florida, I have now been presented with *some* (defeasible) reason to take up this project. That is the effect of calling it a Good Thing. When it comes to snow pedestal lighting, this seems like a ridiculous conclusion.

But when it comes to the proper placement of mats (or, I would argue, the use of the good china), it does not seem at all ridiculous. For me to say, "oh, who cares whether the mats are straight" is to miss the point of what I'm doing, and also to miss the point of what Kongzi was doing with the mats. Proper engagement with my material surroundings through ritual, I take it, is supposed to change *me*, and change me for the better. Correct practice of the rites leads to the harmony that Olberding describes, but I achieve that harmony by altering myself so that I identify with what I am doing. This suggests that I am not in fact free to reject the aesthetic attached to the rituals. They are a Good Thing. It's possible (indeed, even likely!) that the novice in ritual, like the novice in virtue, will not understand why the ritual practices are a Good Thing. That requires the wisdom of the sage or, to use Aristotle's language, the *phronimos*.[25] The learner in ritual, like the learner in virtue, needs to engage in the practice in order to understand the point. But once she comes to understand the point, then she has been changed by the practice. Xunzi spells out the details of ritual practice not for the sages, who do not need the lesson, but for the learners to enable them to move forward on the path of moral cultivation.

What does this suggest about Martha Stewart and her snow pedestal lighting? If it is indeed a Good Thing, then the fact that I don't see it as such may simply reveal my own lack of

[25] I owe this point to an anonymous referee for *Dao*.

cultivation. My tendency to regard snow pedestal lighting as absurd is an indication of my status as a novice, and the path to insight lies in very activity that I am rejecting. I should try building some! Then, and only then will I be in a position to recognize the value of snow pedestal lighting in my environment.

This is not a very appealing conclusion when it comes to Martha Stewart, for reasons that Olberding makes clear. And yet, if we are to take seriously the idea that we can cultivate ourselves through transforming our surroundings in accordance with ritual practices, it is not easy to see how we could avoid the implication that I can become better with the help of Martha's Good Things. If it's true, as I think it is, that there are some objective standards for good taste and if the Martha Stewart aesthetic meets those standards, then it seems as though I have some reason to adopt it, although not decisive reason to do so. (Of course, there could be many aesthetics that meet that standard.) But what if I am not at ease in the Martha Stewart aesthetic, or even another equally tasteful one? Should I try to adapt myself so that I am at ease? Or can I embrace my lack of taste as an expression of my own values and personality, and ignore prevailing standards of taste?

I think there may be space to strike out a middle ground, a ground that I will illustrate by way of a personal example. I began my adult life with a strong preference for a subdued, tasteful approach to Christmas decorations—white lights, natural greens, subdued red accents. I think I still have such a preference, and yet at the time of writing, in the front yard of my house, there are two light-up dogs wearing Santa hats and scarves. My descent into kitschy Christmas madness began when my older daughter was a toddler and expressed a strong wish for what she regarded as pretty (read: colorful) Christmas lights. It seemed churlish to refuse, and so I gave in. In the intervening decade, our neighborhood has developed a rather strong aesthetic around

Christmas decorations and that aesthetic is definitely not going to end up in the pages of *Martha Stewart Living*. The next-door neighbors have singing candy canes, the people down the street have a pig dressed up in a Santa costume, and the folks around the corner have every inch of their house covered in lights. Participation is not limited to those who celebrate Christmas. This year, the neighbors behind us appear to have created a menorah out of the trees in their front yard, and I know of some Hindu families whose houses are ablaze with color. So our light-up canines—the brainchild of my younger, dog-loving daughter—fit in quite well.

I would not describe our neighborhood holiday light aesthetic as tasteful. In fact, I think it rather tacky. But I have also come to think that participating in the tackiness is a Good Thing, and for reasons that Olberding articulates. Although I still prefer white lights, I endorse the neighborhood aesthetic because it appeals to children (both mine and other people's children) and also because it reflects an unpretentiousness in my neighborhood that I value. Nearby there is a neighborhood of more expensive homes, none of which have inflatable snowmen on their porches. The décor there is lovely and tasteful. Probably that is how I would decorate if I lived there. But I don't live there, and to decorate my house as if I did could run the risk of expressing a dissatisfaction with my community's aesthetic and perhaps even coming off as snobbish. Since I do value the qualities of my community that produce the tacky Christmas decorations, it seems that I should adjust my attitudes and learn to be at ease with light-up dogs in the yard.

But I think I can do this while still maintaining the belief that the décor is tacky and that the tasteful holiday décor pictured on catalogs is a Good Thing. I suppose that one could argue that in my neighborhood, light-up dogs just are tasteful, but I don't want to be that much of a subjectivist about taste. Instead, I want to say that the decorations are tacky, but in this situation, I have good reason to reject the tasteful in favor of the tacky. I think that this may be a way that

I can avoid the alienation Olberding worries about. Because I acknowledge the decorations as tacky, I don't have to deny my continuing preference for the Martha Stewart look. I can identify with that aesthetic without having to act on it. And by putting up the tacky decorations anyway, I can express my valuing of my community's aesthetic and my children's preferences for festive decor. I don't have to identify fully with the light-up dogs in order for it to be non-alienating. Partial identification might be enough to get us where Olberding thinks we need to be.

I want (and I think Olberding does too) an account of hospitality that does not require us to take up a particular aesthetic, and certainly not one that is laden down with race, class, and gender issues. We should be free, within reason, to express our identity through our domestic arrangements, so as to be at home in our material surroundings. We get some say over what counts as a Good Thing for us. But, I suggested, we don't have complete dominion over this. There are times when we have reason to accede to outside standards and to adapt ourselves and our tastes to our surroundings, rather than seek to adapt our surroundings to our preexisting tastes. Toward the end of her comments, Olberding draws a very helpful analogy of the village worthy, suggesting that the person who adopts outside standards of taste without identifying with them is depriving her material surroundings of what gives them meaning. I think this is correct, but I would want to add the caveat that there are circumstances in which one should resolve the problem of meaningfulness by learning to identify, at least in part, with one's existing material surroundings. In the *Analects,* Kongzi describes Shao music as "perfectly beautiful, and also perfectly good." The contrast is with Wu music, which he calls "perfectly beautiful, but not perfectly good."[26] Perhaps sometimes it makes sense to let go of what one knows is perfectly good (or perfectly tasteful) in favor of allowing another sort of beauty to thrive.

[26] *Analects,* p. 28. Thanks are due to an anonymous referee for this reference.

By way of conclusion, I want to return to a question that Professor Van Norden posed in his comments, about whether I think that drunkenness is always degrading to humanity. This is certainly Kant's view, although he distinguishes between drinking (which he concedes can have a moral point insofar as it contributes to fellowship and good conversation) and drunkenness. It is only the latter to which he objects. I don't know that I share Kant's objection, but his reasons are interesting and perhaps compelling.

Essentially, Kant thinks that deliberately depriving yourself of the use of your rational powers is degrading because it makes it impossible for you to behave and be treated in a way that is fully compatible with your dignity. Others cannot treat you with full respect because you are immune to rational argument. Likewise, you cannot treat others fully respectfully when drunk. A drunk person is more likely to violate duties to others and moreover, cannot employ his or her full capacities in situations where assistance is required. Kant thinks that it is an affront to human dignity to be in such a state in the absence of a morally compelling reason. This is why it is a violation of a duty to humanity as such. (Regarding Li Bai, it is possible that Kant would agree that composing beautiful poetry is a morally compelling reason to be drunk.) We have, on Kant's view, a duty to all our fellow rational beings to comport ourselves in a way that reflects the dignity that Kant thinks we have. We should not deliberately turn ourselves into objects of amusement. To do so is, we might say, cause for shame. Now of course one might argue that there is nothing especially shameful about being drunk. Kant's claim to the contrary is obviously tied to the value that he places on the capacity to employ reason. But I would note that in the chapter titled, "Undoing Fixation" where Xunzi appears to be extolling the importance of being clear-sighted in one's observations, he uses the example of a drunk person's inability to judge the distance of a gorge to illustrate his point. I don't know whether this passage reflects Xunzi's

actual views about alcohol, but it fits rather well with Kant's opinions on the subject. It is important to be clear-sighted. Insofar as alcohol interferes with that, Kant thinks it is to be avoided. And yet, he also thinks that moderate drinking can be conducive to good conversation—a morally important activity for him.

Let me conclude by once again expressing my gratitude to Professors Cline, Olberding, and Van Norden for their insightful and thought-provoking comments on my book. I am even more grateful to them for showing me why those of us working in the Western tradition of ethics should be spending far more time reading Chinese philosophy.[27]

[27] I am of course grateful to Erin Cline, Amy Olberding, and Bryan van Norden for their exceptionally helpful and generous comments on my work. I am also grateful to Eric Hutton, who moderated the panel, and to the members of the audience for their thoughtful and constructive comments. Finally, I am grateful to the editor of Dao and to an anonymous referee for the journal, who provided extensive comments and pointed me toward additional sources that I would never have found on my own.