Dao
DOI 10.1007/s11712-014-9409-7

Olberding, Amy, ed., *Dao Companion to the* Analects

New York: Springer, 2014, vi + 369 pages

Bryan Van Norden

This anthology of essays is volume 4 in the series "Dao Companions to Chinese Philosophy." It includes an Introduction, 16 essays, an Index of names and subjects, and an Index Locorum of passages from the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. The essays are divided into three groups, but the division seemed fairly artificial to this reviewer, so no more about that. There are many very fine essays in this anthology, and anyone seriously interested in the *Analects* should consult this volume. There is space in this brief review to discuss only a few of the most interesting contributions.

In their masterful "History and Formation of the *Analects*," Kim Tae Hyun and Mark Csikszentmihalyi note that even early Chinese accounts (e.g., that of Ban Gu 班固 in the Han 漢 dynasty) suggest multiple sources for the *Analects* (viz., the notes of Confucius's various disciples), and identify at least three competing versions of the work then in existence. Later, beginning in China with the Ming 明 dynasty and in Japan with the Tokugawa 德川 era, text-critical studies focused on formal differences among books: Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁斎 argued that there was a division between the "lower" (1–10) and "upper" (11–20) sections, while Cui Shu 崔述 suggested books 16–20 were later than the rest. Recently excavated manuscripts indicate that "the text was widely circulated in something close to its present form in the 1st century BCE" (32). However, an excavated text of the 4th century BCE (now held at the Shanghai 上海 Museum) has versions of some *Analects* passages that vary substantially from the received text (32–33). All this evidence points toward the conclusion that the received *Analects* is a composite text of the Han dynasty and may only contain a few sayings (which we have little hope of definitively identifying) from the historical Confucius. Kim and Csikszentmihalyi conclude that the *Analects* cannot legitimately provide support "for those who wish to use the text to dig down to an original layer of Confucianism, or use it as a transparent window onto the identity of a major religious and philosophical founder" (35). However, they note that this conclusion "should have very little impact on readers interested in questions of historical reception of the *Analects* or those intent on using it constructively" (35). These latter tasks are what many of the other contributions to this anthology set out to do.

Bryan Van Norden (✉)
Philosophy Department, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY 12604, USA
e-mail: brvannorden@vassar.edu

Published online: 04 October 2014

The historical reception of the *Analects* is explored in "The Commentarial Tradition," by John B. Henderson and NG On-Cho. Part of the essay is an overview of the diverse commentaries on the *Analects*. This survey helps inoculate us against the notion that there is such a thing as *the* (unique) traditional reading of the *Analects*. However, this essay also illustrates Henderson's fascinating suggestion that commentarial traditions in diverse cultures share commitments to the comprehensiveness, coherence, and profundity of their canonical texts. (This view is developed in more detail in: John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991].)

Turning to constructive appropriations of the received *Analects*, Hagop Sarkissian, David Wong, and Stephen Angle show (in their respective essays) how the *Analects* can engage with contemporary trends in Western philosophy and psychology. In "Ritual and Rightness in the *Analects*," Sarkissian notes that contemporary psychological research shows that "[c]hildren first acquire emotions in concrete episodes during childhood," when "one is taught by one's family what is appropriate to feel in a wide range of specific roles" (97). This fact helps to both explain and justify the function of Confucian *li* 禮 ("rituals," "rites"), compliance with which "not only shapes the emotional life of the child but also instills habits of personal comportment that reflect exemplary forms of conduct" (98). In his "Cultivating the Self in Concert with Others," Wong cites empirical evidence that accounts for some of the ways in which cultural conditioning can guide emotions, even in adults: "Confucius … emphasizes the overriding importance of demeanor in serving one's parents (2.8). Interestingly, facial expressions have been shown not only to express emotion but also to induce the emotion they normally express…" (183). Wong acknowledges that there is a legitimate concern that the effort to regulate one's own emotions is impractical because of the empirical evidence that "the exercise of willpower drains a limited supply of mental and physical energy" (194). However, he explains that "more recent work has revealed that affirming a value that is important to oneself counteracts the depleting effects of activities that require self-control" (194). In other words, wholeheartedly affirming an ideal, such as the Confucian Way, can activate sources of motivational strength. (Wang's discussion of this point reminded me of Mencius's comments in 2A2 about the motivational power of the "floodlike *qi* 氣.")

Angle's "The *Analects* and Moral Theory" is a thoughtful and erudite overview of the debate over whether Confucianism is best understood as deontology, virtue ethics, or role ethics. Angle notes that interpreters appeal to one of four types of argument in defending their approach: that we find in the text an "explicit contradiction" of alternative views, that their approach offers the "best explanation" for the text as a whole, that it shows "interpretive fruitfulness" in suggesting intriguing issues and solutions, or that it manifests "dialogical fruitfulness" by encouraging constructive crosscultural discussion and debate (248–249).

The essays by Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee and Amy Olberding are also constructive appropriations of the *Analects*, but in a more "existential" manner. In "Why Care? A Feminist Re-appropriation of Confucian *Xiao*," Rosenlee writes movingly of her decision to look after her terminally ill mother-in-law, despite the "liberal social convention [that] I have no obligation, moral or otherwise," to do so (312). She explains, "…my eventual commitment to caring for my mother-in-law is, by and large, propelled by my understanding of Confucian *xiao* [孝, filial piety], a moral vision that sees human interdependency as a strength in, and not a distraction from, human

flourishing" (314). In the bulk of the essay, Rosenlee discusses how she reconciles her commitment to filial piety with her feminism. Along the way, she provides an excellent summary of the long-running debate over whether, and if so how, there can be Confucian feminism.

Olberding's "Perspectives on Moral Failure in the *Analects*" is, in my opinion, one of the highlights of this anthology. In the first part of this essay, Olberding examines the contrast between the *xiaoren* 小人 ("petty person") and the *junzi* 君子 ("gentleman"). She notes that the contrast between the two is drawn so simply and starkly that it runs the risk of the "cheap clarity of caricature" (204). The petty person is so "*reliably* and *characteristically* selfish" that we have no sense of how "becoming a *xiaoren* results from a failed effort to navigate the complexities of human experience" (203–204). Olberding insightfully suggests that the *xiaoren/junzi* contrast is "not explanatory but hortatory" (205). In other words, the distinction does not represent "cleanly defined types of people we encounter in experience" (207). Rather, it gives us ideals to avoid and to aspire to. The account of the *xiaoren* "links perils to which the learner may be prey to a type the learner cannot want to be like" (208). In the second half of the essay, Olberding examines the figure of Ran You 冉有. In contrast to the *xiaoren*, Ran You is a concrete example of a multifaceted individual and his moral failure. This basic narrative of Ran You is familiar to students of the *Analects*. Confucius describes Ran You as a promising disciple (6.8, 11.3). However, when Ran You takes office with the Ji 季 family of Lu 魯, he abets their rapacious (11.17) and militaristic (16.1) practices of governing. Ran You attempts to excuse his behavior, telling the Master, "It is not that I do not delight in your way, but that my strength is not enough." Confucius famously replies, "Those who do not have the strength for it collapse somewhere along the way. But you have marked your own line" (6.12; 212). Olberding's originality is in suggesting that Ran You wants "to serve two masters: to preserve his position with the Ji family and to keep Confucius' good opinion" (218). However, he cannot do both. Instead of recognizing that he "stands at forking paths" (219), Ran You continually "disavows his own agency" (218), by telling Confucius that there is nothing he can do about any of the actions of the Ji family. Ran You does have a choice: he could resign. This would involve giving up his position of wealth and prestige. However, he refuses to consider this as an option. "It is in this—in Ran You's refusal to entertain his choices *as choices*—that Ran You draws a line" (219). Olberding concludes, "[b]etter to feel self-doubt about one's capacity for courage and enduring losses in one's choices than to deny the existential reality of them and one's own agency" (220). Olberding's essay lacks the overt use of the first-person perspective found in Rosenlee's contribution. However, one sees (no, feels!) in Olberding's writing something that is unfortunately rare in contemporary academia: someone passionately, thoughtfully, and creatively engaging the *Analects* as a personal, existential quest for moral understanding.

Several essays attempt to reach a deeper understanding of particular aspects of the thought of Confucius as represented in the received text of the *Analects*. Loy Hui Chieh's "Language and Ethics in the *Analects*" is a carefully argued but very readable account of Confucius's suspicion of "glib talkers," and the role of "correcting names." Loy concludes that "the position of Confucius is a mean between Mohist confidence on the efficacy of *yan* [言, doctrines], on the one hand, and Daoist skepticism upon the same, on the other" (139). In "Religious Thought and Practice in the *Analects*," Erin M. Cline presents a nuanced argument challenging both those who have found Confucius's

views to be a comfortable and familiar form of Abrahamic theism and those who have tried to explain away the evidence that Confucius believed in spirits or the agency of *tian* 天 (Heaven). She notes that "those on both ends of the spectrum interpret Confucius in the *Analects* as a proponent of their own preferred view—be it monotheistic or a-theistic…" (288). However, both of these extreme views "seem oddly disconnected from the textual evidence" (288). Confucius, it seems, would have strained conversations with either Richard Dawkins or Pope Francis.

Bai Tongdong and Tan Sor-hoon are leading figures in contemporary Chinese discussions of the sociopolitical relevance of Confucianism. Bai's "The *Analects* and Forms of Government" is a valuable introduction to the view that Confucianism offers a meritocratic alternative to Western-style democracy. He argues that "[p]olicy issues should be left to the experts, i.e., those who hold certain offices. People's opinions, then, should only come in the form of 'do you feel better off or worse off than you were a certain time ago,' and nothing more" (304). He suggests that one institutional form to achieve this would be "a bicameral parliament that consists of a lower house that represents people's opinions and an upper house the members of which are meritocrats…" (308).

Tan's "Balancing Conservatism and Innovation: The Pragmatic *Analects*" is an excellent contribution to the Chinese debates over the role of Confucianism in innovation and traditionalism. Tan reminds us that "Confucius' conservatism does not include the belief that ancient conduct is necessarily superior by virtue of being ancient" (343). It "is guided by his pragmatic project of making the world a better place" (350). We value role models, practices, and texts not simply because they are old, but because they provide good models for transforming the present in positive ways. I wholeheartedly agree, and have suggested the phrase "revivalistic traditionalism" to describe this aspect of Confucian thought (Bryan Van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy* [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2011]: 22–24).

The essays I have discussed in this cursory review reflect several different styles of engaging not only with the *Analects* but with classic philosophical texts in general. These are by no means the only approaches one can use. In the spirit of methodological pluralism, we should acknowledge the legitimacy and value of a variety of academic styles other than our own.