

## CONFUCIAN AND ISLAMIC APPROACHES TO RITUALS AND MODERN LIFE

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The essays included in this special issue were first presented at an international conference held 8–9 November 2019 on the campus of Sungkyunkwan University, the historic heart of Korean Confucianism, and sponsored by the Sungkyun Institute of Confucian Studies and East Asian Philosophy (SICEP), Sungkyunkwan University, Korea.<sup>1</sup> After the conference, authors were asked to revise their work in light of the comments and suggestions received in the course of our meeting. They also received detailed comments from Professors Michael Puett and Philip J. Ivanhoe. After revising their contributions, they submitted them for blind review at the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. The results of this process are published here. The guest editors want to thank the authors and all participants in the conference and Professor Georg Gasser, for shepherding these essays through the process of revision, review, and publication.

The aim of the original conference, reflected in the essays in this special issue, was to bring together leading scholars from around the world to present their research and exchange ideas concerning the theory and practice of ritual in Confucianism and other major world traditions and explore the potential these might have for enhancing modern life. We seek to better understand the nature and potential worth of ritual practice and apply such understanding to further appreciate aspects of contemporary life that illustrate the values of ritual, identify examples of modern ritual practice that can be improved by reflecting on traditional forms of ritual, and uncover areas of modern life that lack and can perhaps be enhanced by adopting or adapting traditional forms of ritual.

Ritual practice has been conceived of and practiced in many ways, and one of the underlying motivations of the work presented here is to look for new ways to conceive of the nature and practice of ritual. In the West, ritual is widely understood in terms of one or more influential theories; prominent among these is the view of Émile Durkheim or, more recently, that of Clifford Geertz. Durkheim and Geertz offer complex and powerful theories of ritual; it is not possible to adequately summarize them here. Instead, in what follows, we focus on select features of their views in order to highlight the core character of their respective theories and prepare the way for a contrasting approach that informs several of the essays in this issue.

Like every ritual theorist, Durkheim believed that ritual is critical to the solidarity and cohesiveness of society.<sup>2</sup> Directly as well as indirectly, the fundamental shared beliefs, practices, and norms that hold society together and provide people with a sense of collective identity arise from and are sustained by ritual. This insight about the functional role of ritual is shared by all the theories we will discuss, but different theorists part company when it comes to offering explanations of how ritual achieves this end. For Durkheim, the key is understanding how certain types of choreographed, repetitive, often rhythmic human interactions can generate intense emotional arousal — what he refers to as “collective effervescence

1 Thanks to Mark Berkson, Karen L. Carr, and Michael R. Slater for very helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this preface.

2 For the classic statement of Durkheim’s view of ritual, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1995). (Original publication date 1912.) For a comprehensive collection of studies of his thought, see Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005).

” — that leads people to shed more self-centered, egoistical points of view and coalesce into distinct social entities that share a sense of identity and purpose. While Durkheim developed his approach based on untenable views about “primitive” human behavior, this mistaken genealogy is not a valid challenge to the basic claims of his theory. According to Durkheim, collective effervescence generates a sense not only of solidarity with others but also of something outside the self that is greater, mysterious, and powerful. In religious contexts this is the source of the sacred and it gets associated with the images, symbols, ideas, and scriptures of the group, which serve to reify and reinforce the numinous power of the sacred and its separation from the everyday, profane world.

Later in life, Durkheim suggested that the same kind of process can occur in purely secular contexts, though the beliefs, practices, and symbols in such secular contexts are still sacred for Durkheim. This is an especially important point in regard to the Confucian tradition, as it shows how the sacred can appear in a secular, non-theistic context, such as in the thought of the early Confucian philosopher Xunzi.<sup>3</sup> It is also important for understanding Durkheim’s concerns about the consequences of a society lacking cohesion-building and meaning-providing rituals, as shown in his study of the social forces that produce higher suicide rates<sup>4</sup> as a consequence of hyper-individualism and alienation.<sup>5</sup> A group of people can identify themselves as having a particular national identity and associate that identity with certain beliefs, practices, and symbols, which in turn help to strengthen and perpetuate the sense of identity. We see this idea expressed in the preamble to the Constitution of the United States when it declares “We the people of the United States...”; a declaration that brings into being a nation, that is associated with a particular set of values and ideals, a place, history, flag, etc., which in turn shape and strengthen a sense of being members of that particular nation. Rituals like reciting the pledge of allegiance or standing for the national anthem, in turn, are examples of the kind of choreographed, repetitive, rhythmic human actions that generate moments of “collective effervescence” that reinforce the sense of being part of the nation.

This much too brief description of Durkheim’s analysis of ritual and its function points to several other important and characteristic features of his general sociological theory. For example, it implies his tacit commitment to “social realism,” the idea that social realities exist independently of individual consciousness in objective social institutions, symbols, and relationships that he collectively refers to as “social facts.” Social facts exist apart from the individual’s perception of them and are constituted by both physical things, such as a national flag, and more ethereal entities, such as an oath or a sense of patriotism, that can and often do influence the behavior of the members of a given society. The force of social facts often operates on people without them feeling any sense of coercion because the facts are so commonplace, have been internalized by members of society, and are submerged in familiarity and routine. But when norms are violated, the power of social facts become salient and often dramatically so. We don’t normally feel we are being *forced* to obey traffic laws like driving on the right side of the road in North America, but if one strays out of one’s lane or in other ways violates the rules of the road, one will quickly become aware not only of one’s transgression but also that the rules are coercively enforced by institutions like the police and courts. Moreover, we transfer the idea of sticking to the right side of the road to the way we walk along the sidewalk and our orientation on stairs and escalators. This way of moving along roads and walkways just seems *natural* to us, even though it is merely conventional.

For our purposes, the key features of Durkheim’s theory concern how rituals foster a sense of social solidarity and cooperation; in other words, how ritual generates social cohesiveness and harmony resulting in critical forms of social capital. Durkheim’s account focuses on religious rituals that purportedly generate the collective effervescence that works to dissolve strong feelings of separation and individuality and bind people together. One can witness this kind of dynamic in a number of religious rituals and in

3 Herbert Fingarette argued that Kongzi (Confucius) also advocated a Way in which the secular was sacred. See his Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular As Sacred* (Harper and Row, 1998).

4 See Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* (The Free Press, 1951). Original publication in 1897.

5 This concern motivated a good deal of Robert Bellah’s work; for example, see Robert N. Bellah et al., eds., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Univ. of California Press, 1985). It is also seen in his idea of a Civil Religion. Thanks to Mark Berkson and Karen L. Carr for noting this connection and helping me to think through these issues.

modern phenomena such as rock concerts or professional sport competition where the audience takes part in group singing, chanting, cheering, and choreographed movement and individuals lose themselves in the crowd.<sup>6</sup> There is no doubt that this is one way that social groups or sub-groups can develop a sense of identity and common cause, but is it the only or primary way that rituals function to achieve such ends?

Clifford Geertz developed and defended a distinctive, semiotic approach to social phenomena that aimed to interpret cultural symbols as the way to reveal the underlying concepts through which people understood themselves, the world around them, and their place within it.<sup>7</sup> For Geertz, religious symbols and rituals were the surface manifestations and embodiments of deeper concepts and schema much in the way that speech reflects a more fundamental semantics and deep grammar that provide the key to the meaning being expressed. The shared public meaning depends upon the deeper, conceptual structure; we must drill down into and mine the latter in order to grasp the former. Culture is “a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.”<sup>8</sup> The systems of symbols that constitute different religions give rise to various sets of emotional and motivational resources that generate a sense of order and locate people within a comprehensive, universal scheme that they project onto reality. As Geertz puts it, “A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”<sup>9</sup>

Geertz’s approach to anthropology shares several features with the contemporary philosophy of his time. Like a number of philosophers, he thought that careful analysis of everyday speech, literature, and cultural practices was the way to uncover the hidden and motivating beliefs of individual cultures. One of his signature ideas — the need to produce “thick descriptions” of cultural phenomena — was adopted from the contemporary analytic philosopher Gilbert Ryle.<sup>10</sup> For Geertz religions are symbolic cultural systems that require “thick description”<sup>11</sup> and interpretation if we are to understand them, but, as noted above, they also have an important social function in human life, namely that of providing people with a worldview and ethos and a way of unifying or integrating those things into a single system that is viewed “realistically” by religious people. What anthropologists seek is to grasp a world view or map out a conceptual scheme by unpacking symbolic cultural systems. The aim of anthropology is not the search for objective truths or universal structures shared by all cultures but a quest for culturally — i.e. intersubjectively shared — networks or webs of meaning. As he put it, “I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.”<sup>12</sup>

According to Geertz, anthropologists must enter into and come to feel at home in foreign systems of meaning. In order to facilitate this process, they must first be aware of the contingent nature of their own symbolic system. For cultures are not about objective facts or natural laws but about ways of understanding and being in humanly constructed cultures, “Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.”<sup>13</sup> There is no ultimate foundation or solid bottom to be found as one pursues the

6 For a study of this range of phenomena, see Bruce D. Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan, eds., *Religions and Popular Culture in America* (Univ. of California Press, 2017).

7 For the classic statement of Geertz’s views, see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973). For a collection of essays exploring Geertz’s theoretical work, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, Philip Smith, and Matthew Norton, eds., *Interpreting Clifford Geertz: Cultural Investigation in the Social Sciences* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

8 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89.

9 *Ibid.*, 90–91.

10 The best description and illustration of Geertz’s use of this idea is found in his essay “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight” in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 412–54.

11 In addition to describing a particular act, behavior, or practice, thick description provides a more complete context and explores an agent’s concepts, aims, and motivations in order to aid understanding.

12 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

13 *Ibid.*, 6.

process of uncovering the deep structure of concepts underlying a given culture. People can continue to contrive additional explanations in support of the web of meaning; there is no metaphysical ground upon which one's spade is turned and "reality" uncovered. When pressed on this issue, Geertz appealed to his recollection of a story about the fundamental nature of the universe.

There is an Indian story — at least I heard it as an Indian story — about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked (perhaps he was an ethnographer; it is the way they behave), what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that turtle? "Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down."<sup>14</sup>

We can sum up Geertz's work by noting that he rejected Durkheim's broad comparative enterprise and its generalizing goal of uncovering the underlying structures that make ritual work and instead focused on the particularity of individual cultures. He offered a method that requires total immersion in a culture for a long period of time in order to gain the trust of people and crack the code of their symbol systems. The proper aim of anthropology is to develop thick descriptions of the cultural meaning systems of different cultures. These systems are schemes, maps, or webs that present different comprehensive understandings of the world and our place within it and uncovering, following, and coming to know our way around these is the way for us to understand and appreciate different forms of human life.

As noted above, Durkheim's account of ritual focused on certain types of choreographed, repetitive, often rhythmic human interactions that purportedly generate intense feelings that lead to collective effervescence, which in turn dissolves strong feelings of individuality and binds people together. Geertz claims that rituals are codes that point to deeper systems of shared meaning but these also function to produce "powerful moods and motivations" that work to bring people together in shared forms of life. We need to move from these surface signals or codes to the underlying concepts they represent in order to understand rituals and how they bind together, orient, and guide people in life. While both Durkheim and Geertz were interested in the power of ritual to bind people together, Geertz was also quite attuned to how factionalism, conflict, battles for status, etc. often are also at play in rituals.<sup>15</sup> This presents another contrast with Durkheim who was more exclusively interested in how rituals and the experience of collective effervescence work to efface strong individualism and unify people into harmonious social groups.

Recently, several scholars<sup>16</sup> have argued for a new and different conception of ritual. According to their view "ritual creates a subjunctive, an 'as if' or 'could be,' universe"<sup>17</sup> whose characteristic features "pervade many realms of human endeavor."<sup>18</sup> Contrary to most theories of ritual, including those of Durkheim and Geertz, they claim that ritual is not primarily concerned with shared beliefs or meanings, an approach they refer to as "sincere views"<sup>19</sup> and explicitly reject. Moreover, ritual is not concerned with bringing people into contact or communion with how the world *really is*; rather, it seeks to create an ideal imaginative social order that practitioners explicitly understand to be other than the world as it is. Put another way, "the subjunctive creates an order that is self-consciously distinct from other possible social worlds" and that recognizes "the incongruity between the world of enacted ritual and the participants' experience of lived reality."<sup>20</sup> In these respects, the temporary, subjunctive world brought into being through ritual is akin to the world of play that one can enjoy by engaging in this distinctive mode of human activity. But ritual play has a more serious therapeutic aim that also explains why we must continually engage in it; ritual addresses and

14 Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture", in *Contemporary Field Research: Perspectives and Formulations*, ed. Robert M. Emerson (Waveland Press, 2001), 73.

15 See, for example, Geertz, "Deep Play" in note #9 above.

16 Adam B. Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2008). See especially "Ritual and the Subjunctive" on pages 17–42 of this work.

17 *Ibid.*, 7.

18 *Ibid.*, 8.

19 Sincere views promise practitioners unity and wholeness and see fragmentation and incoherence as things that must be overcome. Such views entail beliefs about how the world really is — though such beliefs can be about natural or social facts. Ritual offers a way for people to make their "outer acts conform with inner beliefs" (Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 24).

20 Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 20.

ameliorates life in the all-too-and-ever-imperfect actual world. Ritual is based upon a view of the world “as fundamentally fractured and discontinuous...” and it enables us to cope with this highly unsatisfactory state of affairs by “creating temporary order through the construction of a performative, subjunctive world.”<sup>21</sup> Given the strain between the subjunctive and the real, “ritual...is an endless work of creating a subjunctive world in overt tension with the world of lived experience.”<sup>22</sup>

Such a view offers a stark contrast to a widespread tendency on the part of contemporary ritual theory to understand ritual as intimately connected with realizing some vision of universal harmony, either by “interpreting ritual according to a harmonious worldview or seeing the functioning of ritual as leading to harmony.”<sup>23</sup> There is a connection between many rituals and the search for harmony and good order, but the connection is not what traditional ritual theory describes. Rather “ritual actions involving order and harmony are only necessary among actors who see the world as inherently fractured and fragmented.”<sup>24</sup> The crooked and disjointed nature of the world is what calls forth and motivates the construction and embrace of the subjunctive world of ritual.

The “as if” subjunctive conception of ritual is not specifically focused upon but is thought to include ritual as religious activity. But, as noted above, it does not purport to offer access to a deeper and more meaningful reality — sacred or otherwise. In many cases, those who practice rituals explicitly refuse to explain their behavior in terms of meaning “but simply say that they perform rituals in certain ways because that is the tradition.”<sup>25</sup> Rituals do not point beyond themselves; what they offer is the experience of engaging in familiar, shared, and routinized actions that constitute the refuge and comfort of an imaginary world. These authors do not claim that the “interplay of ritual and sincere modes of understanding the world provides a full theory of religious or even just ritual experience” but do insist that it offers “a new and richer understanding of how ritual works.”<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, in light of this and other descriptions of their proposal, it is not always clear whose perspective — that of ritual practitioners or the theorists who describe them — the theory purports to capture or how general it is intended to be.

The “as if” view is dramatically different from the views of either Durkheim or Geertz. Unlike the former, it tends to focus more on everyday ritual practice, and its ability to inculcate shared orientations, dispositions, and habits — or more precisely styles of response — in practitioners achieves a number of the social ends that Durkheim described without appealing to the experience of collective effervescence. Instead of being a mechanism that gives rise to shared collective consciousness, ritual is a “subjunctively shared arena...not a place where individual entities dissolve into a collective oneness.”<sup>27</sup> Unlike Geertz’s view, the as if account does not regard rituals as codes that point to deeper systems of meaning. Rituals do not require interpretation that moves from surface behavior to the underlying concepts they represent; such underlying schemes are not what orient and guide people in life. The shared orientations and dispositions that rituals inculcate do all the heavy lifting, “The meaning of ritual is the meaning produced through the ritual action itself”<sup>28</sup> Rituals are not centrally concerned with beliefs or propositional knowledge more generally, they “include nondiscursive media like music or masks, and even language may be used in ways that defy discursive interpretation.”<sup>29</sup>

The “as if” or subjunctive approach to ritual advocated by the scholars noted above relies upon the common meaning of *as if*: an expression of what is imagined, wished for, or possible. We engage the

21 Ibid., 11.

22 Ibid., 28.

23 Ibid., 30.

24 Ibid., 31. It is important to note that in saying such actors see the world as “inherently fractured and fragmented” we mean they see this as the inevitable and persistent state of the world, i.e. that it is not correctable. Thinkers like Xunzi or Durkheim see the world as *threatened* by fracture and fragmentation, but believe ritual offers a way to mend and unify it. Thanks to Mark Berkson for pointing out this important point.

25 Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 4.

26 Ibid., 15.

27 Ibid., 26.

28 Ibid., 26. Frits Staal made a similar argument. See Frits Staal, “The Meaninglessness of Ritual”, *Numen* 26, no. 1 (1979).

29 Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 26.

world in this way, what I shall call the *as if mode*, when we go to the theater to watch a play or a movie or read a work of fiction; we suspend disbelief and allow ourselves to be taken up and away by the presentation. We know that what we are watching or reading is fictional and yet we give ourselves over to it and can be deeply moved by it. However, unlike rituals, viewing such performances or reading such works are often one-off events; they lack the shared, repetitive aspect of ritual and they seem much more bound up with discursive, often narrative, types of knowledge. Nevertheless, like the *as if* view of ritual claims, experiencing them does not normally involve having some comprehensive meaningful conception of the universe, nor are they necessarily concerned with a harmonious conception of the self or world. And yet, like rituals, we participate in them in the *as if* mode. They would not affect us unless we opened ourselves to them in this way.

The comparison with watching a play or a movie or reading a work of fiction raises some further questions about the *as if* view of ritual.<sup>30</sup> It is true that some watch a play or a movie or read a work of fiction simply to while away the hours or purely for entertainment, but others explicitly participate in such activities with the intention of learning something important from them and being changed by the experience. We sometimes recommend to our friends that they go to watch a certain play or a movie or read a certain work of fiction because we think it will enhance their lives; we offer personal testimonials to the effect that watching that play or movie or reading that book *changed my life*. In such cases the *as if* mode of engagement is thought to move us to a deeper, more meaningful, more authentic way of life. Such works are thought to express deep truths about humanity and have the power to move us toward more profound understanding and better ways of living.

If we think about performing rituals in much the same way as those who go to watch a certain play or movie or read a certain work of fiction with the expectation and hope that these will move them to a deeper, more meaningful, more authentic way of life, then we are led to a second, alternative version of the *as if* account. Like those who follow the original version, on this second account, ritual participants know, when engaged in ritual practice, that what they are doing is fictional, and yet they give themselves over to it with the expectation and hope that they will be deeply moved and eventually transformed by it. Like those who follow the original version but unlike those who watch plays or movies or read works of fiction, ritual participants regularly engage in ritual and the repeated, rhythmic nature of ritual — as Durkheim noted — is part of how it works its effect upon them. The fact that rituals are connected to enduring traditions of practice also can add an important dimension to ritual practice on either version of the *as if* view; when I repeat the steps of a ritual, embrace the signs and symbols associated with it, or recite the prayer or oath that is part of it, I join in a long line of people who have done so before me and who offer a reservoir of testimony to the power and efficacy of the ritual.

According to the second, alternative version — but not the original — by joining in the ritual, as Blaise Pascal said, immersing myself in it, I seek to transform myself in ways that bring me into alignment and connect me with some deeper truth.<sup>31</sup> This deeper truth can be a metaphysical truth or an underlying theory about the ultimate nature of the universe — a realist version of what Geertz believed — or it can be a psychological and anthropological set of truths about human beings and their societies and what kinds of things tend to make both of these successful, flourishing, and happy. In either case, I am not modifying my nature to fit a framework I know to be *ad hoc*, untrue, or merely conventional; quite to the contrary. Pascal was not a fictionalist in any robust sense. We practice rituals *as if* they were true in order to move ourselves toward how we believe the world *is* in some deep and hidden way. The second version of the *as if* view shares a number of similarities to Durkheim's theory. In particular, it shares his emphasis on the sacred, a dimension that lies behind all particular representations of it. Durkheim believed that society couldn't flourish without such "immaterial, spiritual" forces — and, as noted above, these need not be theistic — to sustain it.

30 Thanks to Francisca Cho and Becky Yang Hsu for interesting and helpful discussion of the similarities and differences between these other forms of fictional *as if* activity and ritual.

31 See part III, §233 of Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (E.P. Dutton & Company, 1958), 65–69.

Those who embrace the second version of the *as if* view might engage in a ritual of pausing each morning to reflect on the many blessings they enjoy in life *as if* they are thanking God for these good things and with the hope that eventually they will be led to generate the faith that will carry them to sincerely believe in and feel gratitude toward God.<sup>32</sup> They might also do so *as if* they are thanking God for these things without the aim of developing faith in and gratitude toward God but instead with the hope that this practice will not only lead them to more deeply appreciate the many good things they have that have come to them through luck and the natural lottery but also, in gratitude, to turn their thoughts and heart toward those who are not as fortunate and think about what they might do for them.<sup>33</sup> On either variation of the second version of *as if* ritual theory, it makes perfect sense to talk about rituals that support true visions of authentically good human lives and people who are moved by such rituals to sincerely embody such ideals. This is true whether we understand rituals as drawing upon, developing, and extending innate inclinations of human nature or whether we understand them to be imposing a regime of learning and practice that restrains, redirects, augments, and shapes an original, unruly, and recalcitrant nature.<sup>34</sup>

While the second version of the *as if* mode of ritual theory differs from the original version in a number of critical ways, we should not overlook what they share. For both versions, *as if* has the sense of “as though,” and we are giving an explanation or implying a justification for acting as we do. Both versions seek to orient and shape our dispositions in certain specific ways by regularly engaging in ritual. Through such practice we take on a second nature that stays with us and informs our perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behavior outside the setting of ritual practice. Ritual practice enables us to respond effectively and in novel situations; it does not inculcate blind habits but rather develops sensibilities, conceptions, and skills for responding in ways that accord with the spirit of the rituals. For example, on the original version, “if one spends one’s life doing rituals properly, then one gains a sense of how the subjunctive world constructed out of those rituals could be constructed in situations without a ritual precedent, or in situations where ritual obligations conflict.”<sup>35</sup> On both versions, ritual participants know that what they are doing is fictional, and yet they give themselves over to it with the expectation and hope that it will reform and reshape their basic nature to achieve a predetermined goal.<sup>36</sup> Unlike those who watch plays or movies or read works of fiction, ritual participants regularly engage in ritual and the repeated, rhythmic nature of ritual is part of how it works its effect upon them. The fact that rituals are connected to enduring traditions of practice also adds an important dimension to such participation that is not present in these other *as if* pursuits.

The primary difference between the two models is that according to the original version and unlike what the second *as if* model maintains, ritual participants do not seek to transform themselves in ways that bring them into alignment and connect them with some deeper metaphysical, psychological, or an-

32 John K. Nelson argues that that this is essentially how religion in Japan works today. A relatively small percentage of Japanese indicate a belief in *kami*, but virtually everyone does rituals that are oriented toward *kami*. These rituals shape people, connect them with their tradition and each other, and benefit the community. Nelson explicitly claims that for these people practice precedes belief and there is a sense that if one carries out the practice over time, belief might, but need not, follow. See John K. Nelson, *Enduring Identities: The Guise of Shinto in Contemporary Japan* (Univ. of Hawai’i Press, 2000).

33 Either the theistic or secular version of this version of the *as if* view is wholly compatible with various forms of moral pluralism; I can admire and recommend a way of life that I think honorable and admirable even without wanting it for myself or someone I love. However, the view in play is not consistent with moral relativity. It can’t be that anything goes and equally well; only some types of human life are good and warrant admiration.

34 These two alternatives represent the views of two early Confucians, respectively: Mengzi (372–289 BCE) and Xunzi (314–217 BCE). I refer to these as the development and reformation models of moral self-cultivation respectively. See Philip J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (Hackett Publishing, 2000). For a collection of essays on Xunzi’s views about ritual, see T. C. Kline and Justin Tiwald, eds., *Ritual and Religion in the Xunzi* (SUNY Press, 2015). See in particular the contribution by Mark Berkson, “Xunzi’s Reinterpretation of Ritual: A Hermeneutic Defense of the Confucian Way” (107–34), which brilliantly compares Xunzi’s ritual theory to that of Durkheim.

35 Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 35.

36 While the advocates of the original *as if* view highlight the noncognitive dimensions of ritual practice they at times appear to overstate this feature of their view. In order for practice to take place, a good deal of propositional knowledge must be in play, not only in regard to what constitutes proper practice but also and importantly in regard to the kinds of practical reasoning described above. Thanks to Michael R. Slater for raising this issue with me and helping me to see some of its implications.

thropological truth. They do not believe there are such truths, there are only different forms of life that one can take up and follow; there no turtles that support the form of life, much less turtles all the way down. On the original version, I am modifying my nature to fit a framework I know to be untrue but that stands on its own, without any justifying foundation beyond the fact that it is one of the available examples of human culture. And yet, when I successfully mold myself properly and inculcate the dispositions and ideals of my given cultural form of life,<sup>37</sup> it seems I would enjoy many of the functional benefits that ritual is widely recognized as providing: I have an identity, feel secure with my place in society, and enjoy the sense of being part of something greater than myself. I feel a sense of order that is not available in the fractured and discontinuous real world to which the imaginative ritual world stands in opposition and contrast. As noted earlier, on the original version of the as if view, there is no basis for talking about rituals that support true visions of authentically good human lives and people who are moved by such rituals to sincerely embody such ideals. One can discuss the success criteria for fully embodying a particular ritually prescribed set of dispositions, but there is no deeper justification for one set of dispositions over another.<sup>38</sup>

It is hoped that with these three approaches to ritual theory before them and with the two variations of the last model in hand, readers can more fully appreciate the nature, aims, and implications of the views presented by the six essays contained in this special issue of the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* and how they can help us to understand Confucian and Islamic approaches to Rituals and what these might contribute to modern life.



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37 It is not clear to what extent any of us choose our cultural ideas. The vast majority of people are raised within a culture and shaped by its rituals, symbols and ideals without choosing it at all. By the time we might come to regard it as untrue, in the sense of lacking foundational justification and being just one among many forms of life, we have already been shaped. Of course, we can always reject the cultural forms of our own community and seek to take up another, but just like trying to acquire a second language, it is very hard for most people. Thanks to Mark Berkson for bringing this point to my attention and articulating what it involves.

38 The original version of the as if model shares a number of similarities with the analysis of social interaction described by Erving Goffman in his classic work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (Anchor Books, 1956). One difference is that Goffman talks about front stage and back stage behaviors by social agents, the former being their public presentation of themselves to others and the latter being the behavior they engage in when they are relaxed and let their guard down. Backstage behavior reveals our spontaneous “true” or “authentic” self.



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