"Yu Jiyuan 余紀元 and Retrofitting 'Metaphysics' for Confucian Philosophy: Human 'Beings' or Human 'Becomings'?"

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Abstract

In past work on Chinese "cosmology", I have resisted using the term "metaphysics" because of the history of this term in classical Greek philosophy. Angus Graham has warned us of the equivocations that arise in eliding the distinction between Greek ontology and classical Chinese cosmology. In this essay, I have been inspired by my dear friend the late Yu Jiyuan's distinction between classical Greek "metaphysics" and "contemporary metaphysics with ambiguous edges" to adapt the term "metaphysics" for use within the classical Confucian corpus. In the language of Confucian "metaphysics", the ultimate goal of our philosophical inquiry is quite literally "to know one's way around things" (*zhidao* 知道) in the broadest possible sense of the term "things". In the application of Confucian metaphysics, "knowing" certainly begins from the cognitive understanding of a situation, but then goes on to include the creative and practical activity of "realizing a world" through *ars contextualis*—the art of contextualizing things. I apply the insight that "metaphysics" so understood in the Confucian context provides a warrant for establishing a useful contrast between a Greek conception of the "human being" and a Confucian conception of "human becomings".

Keywords: Confucian metaphysics, human becomings, Yu Jiyuan, vital relationality

»Yu Jiyuan 余紀元 in obnova ‚metafizike' za konfucijansko filozofijo: človeško ‚bitje' ali nastajanje ‚človeškosti'?«

Izvleček

V svojih preteklih delih, ki so obravnavala kitajsko »kozmologijo«, se je avtor izogibal rabi termina »metafizika«, kajti ta pojem ima v klasični grški filozofiji specifično zgodovino. Že Angus Graham je opozarjal na zmedo, ki lahko nastane, če ne upoštevamo razlik med grško ontologijo in klasično kitajsko kozmologijo. Za pisanje pričujočega članka je avtorja navdihnil njegov dober prijatelj, pokojni kitajski filozof Yu Jiyuan, ki je vzpostavil razliko med klasično grško »metafiziko« in »sodobno metafiziko z nejasnimi robovi«, da

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bi s tem omogočil rabo termina »metafizika« znotraj klasičnega kitajskega korpusa. V jeziku konfucijanske »metafizike« je najvišji cilj filozofskega raziskovanja v »spoznavanju poti, ki vodi k stvarem« (*zhidao* 知道), pri čemer se izraz »stvar« razumeva v najširšem možnem pomenu. V okviru konfucijanske metafizike »spoznanje« izvira predvsem iz kognitivnega razumevanja, a v naslednjih korakih vendarle vključuje tudi ustvarjalno in praktično aktivnost »uresničenja oziroma dojetja sveta« preko ars contextualis, tj. umetnosti kontekstualizacije stvari. Avtor izhaja iz predpostavke, da nam tovrstno razumevanje »metafizike« v kontekstu konfucijanstva omogoča vzpostavitev koristnega kontrasta med grško konceptualizacijo človeka kot »človeškega bitja« in konfucijansko konceptualizacijo človeka v smislu »nenehnega nastajanja človeškosti«.

Ključne besede: konfucijanska metafizika, nastajanje človeškosti, Yu Jiyuan, vitalna relacionalnost

An *Ametaphysic* Metaphysics

One assumption we might all agree upon is that a first step in reading pre-Qin Confucian philosophical texts that are decidedly distant from us in time and place is to try with imagination to locate them within their own interpretive context.[1] We might refer to the uncommon historical and intellectual assumptions that constitute such an interpretive context alternatively as "persistent yet always changing ways of thinking and living", or as "a different worldview", or as "a process cosmology", or as "an early Confucian metaphysics". While the language of "ways of thinking and living" and "worldview" would seem to be philosophically innocent and hence unproblematic, the terms "cosmology" and "metaphysics", given their distinctive and protean histories within our own Western cultural narrative, would certainly require substantial qualification. David Hall and I used "cosmology" as a preferred alternative to "metaphysics" in our earlier work with some considerable trepidation. As a consequence, we invented the rather awkward and decidedly unnatural neologism "acosmotic cosmology" (Hall and Ames 1998, 249).

If we are going to use the term "metaphysics" to discuss early Confucianism, then as with "cosmology" we will have to begin deliberately by distinguishing whatever we might conceive of as Confucian "metaphysics" from the classical Greek definition of this same term. The distinguished scholar of classical Greek philosophy, Yu Jiyuan, appeals to Aristotle to explain the Greek understanding of metaphysics as first and foremost the study of ontology—that is, as the science of "being" *qua* being:

1 A good example of how the interpretive context makes a difference is the recent work by scholars such as David Wong, Chris Fraser, James Behuniak, Dan Robbins, Hui-chieh Loy, Ben Wong, and so on, who have taken on the challenge of reinstating the *Mozi* as integral to the intellectual debates that flourished in the pre-Qin period. The *Zhongyong* can best be interpreted as a Confucian argument against a possible Mohist reading of the relationship between *tian* and the human world.

> The most important question of Greek metaphysics is the problem of being (ontology, which is usually synonymous with general metaphysics, means literally a theory [*logos*] about "*onto*", the participle stem of the Greek verb "to be"). Aristotle has explicitly stated that the problem of being is "indeed the question which, both now and of old, has always (*aei*) been raised, and always (*aei*) been the subject of doubt (*Meta*. 1028b2-4)." (Yu 2011, 144)

If "metaphysics" is understood in this Aristotelian sense as knowledge of the ultimate and unchanging character of being *per se*, Confucian philosophy is resolutely ametaphysical (dare we say "ametaphysic"). But Yu Jiyuan quite rightly insists that we are free to retrofit our philosophical categories, and further allows that "in contemporary philosophy 'metaphysics' becomes a term with ambiguous edges" (Yu 2011, 138). In the same spirit as Yu Jiyuan then, I would argue that perhaps an acceptable alternative and more inclusive understanding of metaphysics in our own time might be something both as simple and as complex as "experience in its broadest perspective". As Wilfrid Sellars has observed about the function of philosophy in general:

> The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term. Under "things in the broadest possible sense" I include such radically different items as not only "cabbages and kings", but numbers and duties, possibilities and finger snaps, aesthetic experience and death. To achieve success in Philosophy would be, to use a contemporary turn of phrase, to "know one's way around" with respect to all these things, not in that unreflective way in which the centipede of the story knew its way around before it faced the question, "how do I walk?", but in that reflective way which means that no intellectual holds are barred. (Sellars 1963, 1)

In this essay, I will first say something briefly about the interpretive context needed for reading pre-Qin Chinese philosophy, and then I want to then try to use Yu Jiyuan's distinction between classical Greek "metaphysics" and "contemporary metaphysics with ambiguous edges" to establish a contrast between a Greek conception of the "human being" and a Confucian conception of "human becomings". As we will find below, in the language of Confucian "metaphysics", the goal of our philosophical inquiry, like Sellars', will be quite literally "to know one's way around things'" (*zhidao* 知道) in the broadest possible sense of the term "things". But with respect to "knowing", the real challenge for us, lies in understanding that in Confucian metaphysics, "knowing" certainly begins from the cognitive

understanding of a situation, but then goes on to include the creative and practical activity of "realizing a world" through *ars contextualis*—the art of contextualizing things. With respect to how we should understand "things" then, the Confucian world constituted of the "myriad things" (*wanwu* 萬物) refers in fact to all of the interdependent, dynamic events that constitute our shared experience, a shared experience in which we ourselves are included as active participants. In this Confucian "metaphysics" then, when we ask the question "What does it mean to be human?" the answer is that human persons are best understood not as "things" but as "events in history", not as something that we "are" but something that we "do", not ontologically as "beings" *per se* but as human "becomings".

Where to Begin Our Inquiry: "Only Becoming Is"

Hegel in the introduction §17 to his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* observes that one of the most difficult problems for a philosophical investigation is the question of where to begin (Hegel 1991, 41). Indeed, early in the Western narrative, thinking about the order of things began with ontological questions such as "What kinds of things are there?" and "What is the nature (*physis*) of things?". One reason for the irrelevance of this kind of ontology for Confucian metaphysics is reflected in the classical Chinese language itself. Since the classical Chinese does not employ a copulative verb that connotes "existence" as essential being *per se*, the Chinese terms usually used to stand in for and translate the alien notions of "being" and "not-being" have been *you* 有 and *wu* 無. But in fact, *you* does not mean that something "is" (*esse* in Latin) in the sense that it exists in some essential way; it means rather "having present-to-hand" or "to be around". On the bronzes, *you* is depicted as the right hand holding sacrificial meat that is to be shared:  . "To be" is thus "to be available", "to be around, and to have to share". Likewise, *wu* does not mean "to not be", but rather means "to not be around, to not be available". The sense of "being" as expressed in the classical Chinese language overlaps with "having", disposing those who would employ the notions of *you* and *wu* to concern themselves with the presence or absence of concrete particular things and the effects of having or not having them at hand. *You* and *wu* thus describe the growth or diminution of eventful relations among things rather than essences that individuate discrete and independent things. In the classical Chinese language with the central importance it invests in analogical and correlative thinking, the correlation of presumed relationships to do the work of the copula has led Chris Fraser to propose the hypothesis that "the concept of similarity or sameness plays a theoretical role for classical Chinese theorists analogous to that of *to be* or the copula in European languages" (Fraser 2012, 13–14). Even in recent centuries, when the translating of Indo-European cultures required the Chinese language to

designate a term to do the work of the copula, the choice was the pronoun *shi* 是, meaning "this", indicating relational proximity and immediate availability rather than "existence" *per se*.

Why would the ultimate mystery of being *per se*—that is, the question of "Why is there something rather than nothing?"—not arise in classical Confucian metaphysics? The answer simply put is because "only becoming is". For Confucian metaphysics, there is no "being" and "not-being" dualism that would allow for the isolating of the determinate and the indeterminate aspects of things made possible by the aseity or self-sufficiency of being *per se*—that is, a notion of existence that originates from and has no source other than itself. Thus, "being" and "not-being" are not available as possibilities that would occur to these early thinkers. Said the another way, because the determinate and indeterminate—*you-wu* 有無—are always mutually entailing correlatives, there is no such thing as "not-being" as a gaping void or an absolute nothingness, and no such thing as "being" as something that is independently permanent and unchanging. *Wu* is a term that describes an emptiness within the bounds of determinate yet changing form captured in "empty" (*zhong* 盅) as in an empty vessel. *Wu* also describes an undulating, inchoate state of indeterminacy reflected in the term "surging" (*chong* 沖): the as-yet unformed penumbra that honeycombs each of the myriad things and that explains the emergence of novel determinacy in the ceaseless process of transformation.[2] *You* then describes a persistent yet always changing determinate pattern within the flux and flow of experience. We might want to describe *you* as the rhythm or cadence of change rather than as any kind of static form.

Indeed, rather than the ontological question of "Why is there something rather than nothing?" we find an alternative question that arises in Confucian metaphysics. As a question that sets the main thesis of cosmological texts such as the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) and *Focusing the Familiar* (*Zhongyong* 中庸), we might formulate it as: If only "becoming" is, how can human beings collaborate most effectively with the Heavens and the Earth to get the most out of our experience and at the same time, produce a flourishing world?[3] This assumption that "only becoming is" would explain the genealogical rather than the "metaphysical" character of classical Chinese cosmogony, a genealogy that has neither an initial beginning nor any anticipated end. Such a dedicated genealogical cosmology provides a warrant for sinologist Gudula Linck to use the seemingly oxymoronic term "continuous cosmogony" (*ununterbrochene Kosmogonie*) in her description of it (Linck 2001).

2 See *Daodejing* 4 in which the textual variants describe *dao* 道 itself in these terms.

3 Dewey's pragmatism embraces a similar process cosmology, leading him to describe this ultimate mystery in these temporal terms: "The mystery of time is thus the existence of real individuals. ... The mystery is that the world is as it is—a mystery that is the source of all joy and all sorrow, of all hope and fear, and the source of development both creative and degenerative." (Dewey 1998, 225)

That is, this notion of cosmogenesis, rather than appealing for explanation to a *creatio ex nihilo* intervention from some independent and external source of order, references a process of "birthing" associated with the female (*shi* 始) that continues unabated without beginning or end. On the bronzes, the character *shi* 始 is written as  indicating the breeding and reproduction of mammals. That is, the sense of "beginning" is *shi* 始—a female conception, a natal, foetal beginning associated with a foetus (*tai* 胎) that inherits a world "bequeathed" (*yi* 詒) to it and "passed on" (*yi* 貽) from progenitors who have come before. The language is pervasively genealogical and ancestral (*zong* 宗), including within this vocabulary rather vague expressions such as "lord" (*di* 帝) and the often anthropomorphic *tian* 天 that seem to straddle the human and the numinous realms—both ancestors and gods.[4]

A distinct difference between a genealogical and a metaphysical cosmogony is that where the latter entails the intervention of some external creative source that establishes a "One-behind-the-Many" idealistic and teleologically driven metaphysics, the genealogical cosmogony always entails two elements in the creative process that must collaborate in conception and procreation. And a second fundamental difference is that whereas metaphysical cosmogonies promise increased illumination as we move back to and understand the ultimate source, a genealogical cosmogony describes a birthing from an inchoate, incipient life-form that presupposes genealogy and progenitors rather than originative principles or divine design, and a pattern of always-situated and cultivated growth in significance rather than the linear actualization of some predetermined potential. Hence, unlike some traditional Western cosmogonies that usher us back to the source of an intelligibility that has deliberately overcome chaos and has established order, Chinese natural cosmogonies direct us back to what, from our present perspective, is a world wherein the further back we go in the birthing canal, the more dark, amorphous, and remote it becomes for us. Further, the cosmogonic narrative takes us back to an earlier set of conditions that, requiring its own terms of understanding, cannot be explained by the application of our present philosophical vocabulary. As the cosmos changes, so must the language of its explanation.

The Primacy of Vital Relationality in Confucian Metaphysics

While the substance ontology of early Greek metaphysics establishes a doctrine of external relations among discrete "things" that each have their essential integrity, the processual "metaphysics" as it is expressed in the "Great Tradition" commentary on the *Book of Changes* and as it is implicit in the early Confucian texts

4 See the distinction between genealogical and metaphysical cosmogony in Ames 2011, 225–31.

treats phenomena as conterminous events that are constituted by their internal relations. In envisioning this relational alternative to the "being" of substance ontology, Peter Hershock looks to a doctrine of intrinsic, constitutive relations that makes "objects" simply the product of a mental abstraction from lived relations. As Hershock observes:

> ... what we take to be objects existing independently of ourselves are, in actuality, simply a function of habitual patterns of relationships. ... This amounts to an ontological gestalt shift from taking independent and dependent actors to be first order realities and relations among them as second order, to seeing relationality as first order (or ultimate) reality and all individual actors as (conventionally) abstracted or derived from them. (Hershock 2006)

What something is, what it does, and what it means for other things, are no more than aspects of its continuing narrative. Things are what they are because of their place and function in respect of the wholeness of experience. As Joseph Needham has observed with respect to early Chinese cosmology:

> Things behaved in particular ways ... because their position in the ever-moving cyclical universe was such ... If they did not behave in those particular ways they would lose their relational position in the whole (which made them what they were), and turn into something other than themselves. They were thus parts in existential dependence upon the whole world-organism. (Needham 1956, 280–81)

Thus it is that Confucian metaphysics begins *in medias res*—that is, from in the middle of things rather than at their causal beginning or teleological end—and it does not presume essential features or antecedent, determining principles as transcendent sources of order. Confucian metaphysics appeals not to some single, necessary, and independent source or goal that "de-realizes" our phenomenal experience, but to the project of "excelling at life" (*de* 德) and thereby "optimizing the experience of everything present-to-hand" (*daode* 道德) within our empirical experience. And it is a metaphysics only in so far as it follows from or further explains concrete human experience with careful observation and description of, and abstraction from, the existential continuum.

Since the categories that we derive from and apply to experience are the result of historical processes, they are always subject to further revision and are provisional rather than necessary, even if we cannot imagine any other way of organizing the content of our lives. Further, these concepts are a mere verbalization and formalization that translate the much richer, more primordial lived experience—our

immediate feelings—and as such, can only ever be explanatory approximations rather than ontological categories. As each thing in our immediate experience is constituted by a particular, dynamic matrix of relations within "everything present-to-hand" (*wanwu* 萬物 or *wanyou* 萬有), the starting point of this Confucian metaphysics, then, is the primacy of felt, vital relationality.

It is because the practical function of Confucian metaphysics is to produce additional significance in the growth of meaningful relations rather than to search for meaning provided by the discovery of origins or ends that the best designation for the most general "science" of order in the Confucian tradition might be the *ars contextualis* described above as "the art of contextualizing". Confucian thinkers sought to understand order as a participatory process requiring the artful coordination and disposition of things. The art of contextualizing seeks to understand and appreciate the manner in which particular things present-to-hand are, or may be, most harmoniously correlated to optimize their creative possibilities in the totality of the lived effect. Classical Confucian thinkers located the energy of this transformative process within a world that is *ziran* 自然—autogenerative, or literally "self-so-ing"—and found the more or less harmonious relations that constitute the particular things around them to be the natural condition of things. Such things require no appeal to an external ordering principle or agency for explanation, and are available to human beings, the most outstanding of whom serve as co-creators within this dynamic cosmos, and who participate fully in the correlating and coordinating of all things to make the most of our lived experience.

With this brief account of the Confucian side of the looking-glass in hand, and encouraged by Yu Jiyuan's distinction between Aristotelian metaphysics and a contemporary understanding of metaphysics "with ambiguous edges", I want to turn in the second part of this paper to a perceived distinction between ontologically determined "human beings" and the cultivation of relationally determined "human becomings". Indeed, the reward for having the courage to use the word "metaphysics" for Confucian philosophy is that it gives us license to be bold in our stride and grand in our conjectures.

Aristotle before Hegel was also concerned about where the philosophical investigation begins. And in looking for this beginning, he took "What is a person?" as his very first question. That is, Aristotle's *Categories* is the first text of the *Organon* in the standard *Corpus Aristotelicum.* And Aristotle's initial project in the *Categories* is to identify the set of questions that must be asked to give a full account of what can be predicated of a subject, with his own concrete example of this subject being "the man in the market-place". In the several different versions of these categories found throughout his corpus, "What is a man?" is not only his first question, but is also his primary one. Its primacy lies in the fact that, in Aristotle's answer to this question, he introduces an ontological disparity by first identifying the necessary

essence or substance of the subject (Gk. *ousia*, L. *substantia*)—"What 'is' a man?" followed then by questions that distinguish this person's various secondary and contingent attributes: "What is 'in' a man?" Aristotle explains this ontological distinction between substance and attribute in the following terms:

> To give a rough idea, examples of substance are man, horse; of quantity: four-foot, five-foot; of qualification: white, grammatical; of a relative: double, half, larger; of where: in the Lyceum, in the market-place; of when: yesterday, last-year; of being-in-a-position: is-lying, is-sitting; of having: has-shoes-on, has-armour-on; of doing: cutting, burning; of being-affected: being-cut, being-burned. (Aristotle 1984, 1a25–2b4)

For Aristotle, the "What?" question has primacy because it provides us with the essential subject: that is, what identifies the underlying substance of what the man *is*. The various other questions that are prompted by the remaining secondary conditions—quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, and affection—seek to provide us with the full complement of attributes that are "in" a subject or can be said "of" a subject as contingent and conditional predicates, none of which can exist without supervening on this subject. In Aristotle's own language:

> All the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. ... So if the primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist. (Aristotle 1984, 2a35–2b5-6)

It is interesting and important to note that Aristotle's set of questions does not include "How?" or "Why?" because his substance ontology has causal and teleological entailments that already answer such questions. Aristotle thus assumes a complete propositional description does not require further explanation, an assumption that we will see is untenable in Chinese process cosmology where the first questions are going to be "Whence?" and "Whither?"—what are the shared narratives of persons and where are they going?

In reflecting on Aristotle's strategy for a complete description and what it reveals about his categories, Graham observes:

> Aristotle's procedure is to isolate one thing from others, treating even transitive verbs ("cuts", "burns") as objectless, and even the relative ("half", "bigger") as not relating two things but said of one with reference to the other (Graham 1990, 380).

We can say of the man in the market-place that "he-burns" or "he-cuts" as a predicate without need of stipulating the object of this action, and we can say "he-is-bigger" as a characteristic of him in reference to a second person rather than describing a relationship between the two.

Graham reflects on the extent to which this substance ontology individuates and decontextualizes the man by locating his potentialities as residing essentially within him:

> Aristotle's thinking is noun-centered; he starts with the substance identified as man, and before introducing any verb but "to be" can already ask "When was he in the market-place?" and "Where was he yesterday?" but not "Whence?" or "Whither?" (Graham 1990, 391)

Aristotle's ontology allows for a notion of simple location and of discrete individuality, and favours the noun form grammatically—the "man" in the marketplace—as the ground for the attributes that can then be ascribed to him. Importantly, the potential of the man's formal essence and his final *telos* as a man makes the explanatory questions of "Whence?" and "Whither?" moot.

In his work on social ontology, David Weissman describes Aristotle as asserting the kind of discrete identity that makes us into individuals and is the basis of external rather than internal relations:

> Things that have matter and form—primary substance—are freestanding. Each is self-sufficient ... Aristotle would have us believe that a thing's relations to other things—including spatial, temporal, and causal relations—are incidental to its identity. He reasoned that identity is established by form, so that relations to other things many only support, somewhat disguise, or threaten the thing. (Weissman 2000, 95)

One of the corollaries of an Aristotelian substance ontology that gives privilege to such an isolated, individual subject is the experience of the world as being populated by discrete things or objects, that "object" to us in standing off independent of us. And a second corollary of this ontology is the doctrine of external relations it assumes: that is, it construes these various independent objects each with its own essential integrity as first-order, discrete things—what they really are—and then any relations that might conjoin them as only second-order, contingent relations that they subsequently contract.

In the Confucian canons, by contrast, "human becomings" is necessarily plural in that if there is only one person, there are no persons. We need each other to become who we will be. And beyond each other, we are also taken to be integral

to and have a reflexive relationship within the creative cosmic process, and cannot extricate ourselves from it. It is the imminent, inchoate, and thus underdetermined penumbra of the emerging cosmic order that provides the opening and opportunity for those cultivated human "becomings" who in the process of becoming exemplary in their own persons collaborate symbiotically with the Heavens and Earth to be co-creators in achieving a flourishing world. Moreover, through the reflexive internalization and consolidation of this virtuosic conduct in their own persons, the entire cosmos becomes implicated in them in the process of them becoming consummately who they are. This is what the *Mencius* means when it says:

> 孟子曰：「萬物皆備於我矣。反身而誠，樂莫大焉。強恕而行，求仁莫近焉。」
>
> Mengzi said, "Is there any enjoyment greater than, with the myriad events of the world all implicated here in me, to turn personally inward and to achieve resolve (*cheng* 誠). Is there any way of seeking to become consummate in my person more immediate than making every effort to put myself in the place of others." (7A4)

In this passage, everything in the world is drawn into, implicated in, and brought into focus as one's habitual dispositions, making one "most intensive" (*zhigang* 至剛) in one's resolve. And these focused habits of conduct then extend outward through putting oneself in the place of other things, making one "most extensive" (*zhida* 至大) in one's reach and influence. Such is the result of nourishing one's "flood-like *qi*" (*haoranzhiqi* 浩然之氣).[5]

Indeed, the capacity of exemplary persons, through personal cultivation and an achieved inner intensity and resolve, to produce increased significance in all of the relations that constitute them and their world is illustrative of the Confucian assumption that creativity is always embedded and situated as *creatio in situ*. Given that Confucian morality is nothing more or less than deliberate growth in relations, these exemplars are thus able to achieve cosmic stature as a continuing source of moral meaning in their increasingly intimate relationship with their world. That is, any sense of the remoteness and externality of the cosmos gives way to an awareness of an increasingly mutual and indeed social coalescence with this world that is supported by feelings of deference, belonging, and trust.[6] It is

5 See also *Mencius* 2A2.

6 It is this sense of the inseparability of the human and the natural worlds that is inspiring the contemporary movement in the social sciences and humanities to herald an Antropocene epoch by challenging the nature/social dualism and embracing nature as a social category (see Gisli Palsson et al. 2013).

only through transforming the *tianren* 天人 correlative relationship into one of sociality and indeed of an evolving religiousness that these exemplary persons can make this profound difference. Such achieved harmony and clear resolution in our relationships is the very root from which the flourishing world order emerges, and contributes to the life force that guides it forward on its proper course. It is the human sense of felt worth and belonging within this dynamic cosmic life force that gives Confucian philosophy its profound religious significance.

I have suggested that metaphysics in the Confucian tradition might be best understood as "experience in broadest perspective", or perhaps more specifically, as "knowing one's way around the myriad things". In any case, it invariably includes both the human perspective and the human aspiration to live a consummate life. And the starting point for a philosophical investigation of this human experience must be the primacy of vital relations. Yu Jiyuan has challenged us to retrofit the term "metaphysics" in a way that will make it relevant to classical Confucian philosophy. I think the distinction between an Aristotelian "human being" and Confucian "human becomings" as a result of this challenge, can serve us well.

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