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## **Introduction: Levels of Perspectives in Kant and Chinese Philosophy**

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Stephen R. Palmquist

## INTRODUCTION: LEVELS OF PERSPECTIVES IN KANT AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

During the early planning stages for the “Kant in Asia: The Unity of Human Personhood” international conference that was held in Hong Kong on May 20–23, 2009, my colleague Professor Lauren Pfister kindly gave me a copy of the March 2006 issue of this journal, focusing on Kant’s philosophy. Seeing that groundbreaking thematic issue greatly encouraged me to believe that worldwide interest in questions relating to the relevance of Kant’s philosophy to (and in) China, and of Chinese philosophy to the various aspects of Kantian philosophy, would be sufficient to merit holding a major international conference. The subsequent support of the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* as a cosponsor, and of Professor Chung-ying Cheng as one of three keynote speakers, was crucial in making the conference a success.

With about 150 participants attending papers presented by nearly 100 scholars from over thirty different countries, the four-day event attracted an offer from Walter de Gruyter to publish the proceedings soon afterward. Having devoted much of the first half of 2010 to the task of selecting and editing sixty-seven of the best papers presented at the conference, I was grateful to see *Cultivating Personhood: Kant and Asian Philosophy* appear just eighteen months after the conference. A sense of urgency was evident in more participants than just me, as if a “message” were being conveyed by this recent trend in cultivating a deeper and richer dialogue between Chinese philosophy and Kant studies.

That sense of urgency persisted beyond the publication of the proceedings and is bearing further fruit in this second special thematic issue on Kant published by the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* in a period of less than six years. I am pleased to introduce a selection of papers presented at the 2009 conference that have each been developed further and are presented here in a fresh form. After a brief overview of these articles, I shall devote most of this introduction to proposing a specific model regarding a perspectival basis for the future development of the new dimensions of scholarship presented herein. The first article is based on the keynote lecture by Chung-ying Cheng that opened the Kant in Asia conference. Lecturing from a PowerPoint presentation, he summarized a written text that had all the makings of a book. The portions of that text that were published in *Cultivating Personhood* dealt mainly with Chinese philosophy and how it suggests a potential critique of Kantian ethics. Most of the remaining

sections of Cheng's original article, detailing his actual assessment of Kantian ethics as seen through the lens of contemporary Chinese philosophy, are published here in a revised form. There is virtually no overlap between this article and the one published in the proceedings, even though they both stem from Professor Cheng's keynote lecture. His thesis, in a nutshell, is that Kant's rigid distinction between four types of duty (perfect and imperfect, to oneself and to others) ought to be interpreted in a more flexible manner that takes into account the way our inclinations contextualize each ethical situation. Just as Chinese philosophy accomplishes this contextualization through the concept of *ren* 仁 (benevolence), Kantian ethics can accomplish this goal by recognizing benevolence as a "perfect duty" in some situations.

The notion of a "perspective" is, I believe, crucial to achieving genuine dialogical understanding between any opposing positions, but especially in the case of dialogue between East and West in general and between Chinese and Kantian philosophies in particular. Although this insight could be illustrated in different ways by referring to any article in this special thematic issue, I shall here expand on a point that was only briefly mentioned as a footnote in my article: namely, that the structure of the Kantian architectonic and that of the *Yijing*'s architectonic can be depicted as displaying one and the same logical form, provided we carefully distinguish between the *levels of perspective* employed in each.

The first level I have in mind is actually not reflected in either Kant's or the *Yijing*'s architectonic system because it represents in both cases the absolute unity of all that exists (or can be known to exist) in one ultimately unknowable reality. Kant calls this point of logical origin for all human knowledge "the thing in itself," while the *Yijing* calls it the *dao*. Kant treats it as the necessary starting point for his entire "transcendental perspective" (or "Copernican hypothesis"); for Daoism, it is the seed that generates all the patterns of interaction that we observe in nature. In both cases, this first perspectival level gives rise to the very possibility of having distinct human perspectives *on* our world.

The second and third levels can be regarded as structurally identical for Kant and the *Yijing*; this identity has heretofore gone unrecognized, however, for two reasons. First, the *Yijing*'s sixty-four *gua* are traditionally ordered as eight sets of eightfold distinctions. How can this  $8 \times 8 = 64$  pattern share a common logical structure with the architectonic plan of Kant's  $3 \times 4 = 12$  categories? The clue is provided by Hershock's alternative arrangement of the sixty-four *gua* as consisting of a fourfold core (*gua* numbers 1, 2, 63, and 64), with twelve secondary *gua* arising out of these (three from each of the basic four), and forty-eight outer *gua* (four from each of the previous twelve).<sup>2</sup> In both Kant and the *Yijing*, therefore, we can see a fourfold ( $2 \times 2$ ) distinction operating at the second perspectival level and a twelvefold ( $4 \times 3$ ) structure operating at the

third level.

A second common misunderstanding is that the four concepts constituting Kant's primary categorial distinction (quantity, quality, relation, and modality) are themselves four of the twelve categories. They are not. Rather, they serve only as *headings* in the twelvefold table; the table of categories comprises *twelve entirely new concepts*, with each heading expressing itself in three new terms. In Kant's Table of Categories, quantity becomes unity, plurality, and totality; quality becomes reality, negation, and limitation; relation becomes substantiality, causality, and reciprocity; and modality becomes possibility, actuality (or existence), and necessity. Once we recognize this two-level structure, it becomes clear that both architectonic systems present a fourfold initial level followed by a twelvefold derivative level. Thus, when we take together what I am here calling the second and third perspectival levels, we end up with *sixteen* basic concepts (4 + 12), not just twelve.

Incidentally, the fourfold distinction comprising the second level in both systems is itself derived from two twofold distinctions: in Kant, the mathematical–dynamical and the internal–external; in the *Yijing*, the primary *yin-yang* that forms the *tai chi* symbol and the secondary *yang-yin* that exists at the center of each. In both cases, however, these twofold distinctions do not constitute a distinct perspectival level because they cannot function independently.

Both Kant and the *Yijing* begin with a perspectiveless perspective, modulate to a set of four basic perspectives, and then move to a third level with twelve components. We can now see that the major structural difference between these systems is that Kant stops at this third level, whereas the *Yijing* goes on to exhibit how each of the twelve components can itself be manifested on a *fourth* level, as represented by the forty-eight (12 x 4) additional *gua*. The *Yijing*'s four-level architectonic (0 + 4 + 12 + [4 x 12] = 64), therefore, need not contradict Kant's three-level architectonic (0 + 4 + 12 = 16); it merely applies the basic (second-level, fourfold) categorial distinction one additional time.

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#### Endnotes

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1. I have argued elsewhere that Kant's architectonic plan is structured by his table of categories. See especially Appendix II of my book, *Kant's Critical Religion: Volume Two of Kant's System of Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), and my essay in the current collection.
2. Peter D. Hershock, "The Structure of Change in the *Yijing* 《易經》," in *Philosophy of the Yi 易: Unity and Dialectics*, Supplement to Volume 36 of *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (2009): 48–72.