

The Good Life, *Sebastian Purcell*

Study Questions

1. What do you think of Odysseus' choice? Would you make a similar decision? Why or why not?
2. The Aztecs' rooted life balanced the relationship among and within your body, psyche, and society. Their view of society, however, also included our natural environment, which they considered divine. Do you agree that a balanced life should include the ways you treat the natural environment? If so, what steps do you take to live in balance with nature on a regular basis? To be really Aztec, how could you improve?
3. One interesting commonality that the Aztec ethical view has with Indian philosophy is that treating your body well is part of being an ethically good person. Wellness is part of goodness. Do you agree? Is treating your body well an *ethical* matter, or is it just a medical one?
4. Another way of thinking about the rooted life for the Aztecs is that it is the meaningful or worthwhile life. But they had a sense of tradition that supported their idea of "meaningful." Do you think there is any way to be sure that our lives are meaningful without appeals to religion?
5. Beyond physical practices, the Aztec school required children and young adults to try out practices to build their will power (moderation). Examples include the following: getting up early, staying up late, carrying heavy wood, taking cold baths, taking hot baths, and repeated careful exposure to what might be frightening. Do you think this would work to build a person's habits, especially their will power?

Further Reading Suggestions

- León-Portilla, M., (1990), *Aztec Thought and Culture*. Translated by Jack Davis. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.
- León-Portilla, M., and Shorris, E., (2002), *In the Language of Kings: An Anthology of Mesoamerican Literature Pre-Columbian to the Present*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2002.
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edited by Sarah Flavel and Chiara Robbiano

- Purcell, S., (2017), "Eudaimonia and Neltiliztli: Aristotle and the Aztecs on the Good Life," *Hispanic/Latino Issues in Philosophy: APA Newsletter*, volume 16, 10–21
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***Wu wei*, Douglas L. Berger and Yuan Zhang**

Study Questions

1. We have seen in the case of *wu wei* how a merely literal translation of an expression with a technical meaning into other languages or philosophical frameworks may fail to communicate its meaning. Give some other examples of this, where just literally translating the expression of an idea from one language or tradition into another might not capture its various meanings? What lesson does this hold for someone doing intercultural philosophy?
2. Instead of giving abstract arguments to recommend *wu wei* in conduct, the *Dao De Jing* offers examples and illustrations of them. For instance, preventing problems is illustrated by comparing what happens when handling “brittle” with “minute” things. Restraint in imposing values on others is talked about by pointing to how opposites like “difficult” and “easy” become one another. What might be the advantages and disadvantages of articulating general philosophical principles or advice by using examples instead of arguments as the *Dao De Jing* often seems to do?
3. In chapters 2 and 3 of the *Dao De Jing* quoted in this essay, the authors discourage things like the creation of ideals (“beauty” or “goodness”) in a society, and also advises that societies should not idealize wealth or make displays of precious goods. But these two chapters provide distinct reasons for why the creation of ideals (ch. 2) and the exhibition of wealth (ch. 3) lead to misfortune. Why are ideals dangerous to create, and why is wealth perilous for societies? How does the practice of *wu wei* avoid these dangers? Do you think these two chapters make a good case, and why or why not?
4. Chapters 63 and 64 of the *Dao De Jing* discussed in this essay present *wu wei* as handling problems when they are small instead of large and complicated. Do you think these conceptions of *wu wei* are sound advice for human conduct in general, as well as for governing a whole society? For instance, is it always easy to thoroughly plan complicated tasks at the beginning and foresee every problem that might arise? Why do you think ch. 64 claims that good planning is marked by lack of obsessions, while reacting when things develop betrays obsessiveness?

5. Chapters 37 and 43 of the *Dao De Jing* quoted in this essay characterize the natural states of things and people in peculiar ways. Ch. 37 appears to claim that providing the people with only the “raw materials” for their survival will leave them without desire because creatures being natural don’t really desire. Ch. 43 says that soft things overcome hard things in nature because, even when something has an impenetrable surface, it can be penetrated by another thing which has no material substance. Do you think natural creatures don’t desire, which would seem to make desire a social construction? Do you think the formless overcomes forms in nature? Why or why not?

Further Reading Suggestions

- Chan, Alan K.L. (1991), *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and Ho-shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-Tzu*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mark, and Ivanhoe Phillip J. eds. (1999), *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Moeller, Hans-Georg (2006), *The Philosophy of the Daodejing*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Xu Kangsheng (1999), *A Study of Laozi*, Taipei, Buffalo Press (许抗生：老子研究，台北：水牛出版社).

Duḥkha (suffering), Stephen E. Harris

Study Questions

1. Reread the list of drawbacks to pleasure given in the Buddhist account of the suffering of change. Compare this to your own experiences of pleasure. Are Buddhists right that experiencing pleasure often decreases happiness?
2. Are Buddhists pessimistic in their claim that various kinds of suffering contaminate much of our experience?
3. Buddhists claim that recognizing suffering helps us more effectively eliminate it, and develops compassion. Are there other positive results from contemplating the various types of suffering and dissatisfaction that we experience?
4. In his account of conditioned suffering, Tsongkhapa claims that negative emotions like hatred and craving arise continually in our minds. Do you think emotions like these always cause suffering? Would we be better off if we completely eliminated hatred and craving?
5. Do the Buddhist ideas about suffering and pleasure presented in this chapter relate to any of the other philosophical ideas you are studying?

Further Reading Suggestions

- Breyer, D. (2015), 'The cessation of suffering and Buddhist axiology', *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 22: 533–560.
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- Harris, S. (2014), 'Suffering and the shape of well-being in Buddhist ethics', *Asian Philosophy*, 24:3, 242–259.
- Sumanacara, A. (2019), "The Experience of Dukkha and Domanassa among Puthujjanas," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 26: 109–138.
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Moral Responsiveness, Jay L. Garfield

Study Questions

1. Why do we take ourselves to be capable of uncaused action? How do we understand our agency in the context of determinism?
2. Does the Buddhist approach to cultivating moral experience provide us with enough ethical guidance? Does proper experience inevitably lead to moral decency?
3. Are the four *brahmavihāras* the right set of moral attitudes to cultivate? Do they make sense in contemporary society? Do other attitudes belong on that list?
4. Is the Buddhist approach to moral cultivation completely different from the principal western approaches to ethics, or could it be understood as an instance of one of them, or as a blend?
5. Is universal suffering really the fundamental moral problem to solve? Or is there a better way to think about the basis of morality?

Further Reading Suggestions

- Āryadeva. (2008). *Āryadeva's 400 Stanzas on the Middle Way with Commentary by Gyel-Tsap*. (R. Sonam and Sonam Rinchen, trans.). Ithaca: Snow Lion.
- Duckworth, D. and J. Gold. (2019). *Readings of Śāntideva's Guide to Bodhisattva Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Heim, M. (2020). *Buddhist Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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Xin (Heart-mind), Dascha Düring

Study Questions

1. Can you think of concrete examples of how we may train our moral abilities, our *xin*, in the context of our everyday lives in the modern world?
2. What, on Mengzi's view, would moral failure consist in? How can we describe the "small" or petty person?
3. Is it plausible to assume that human beings have an innate emotional proclivity toward goodness? What kind of arguments or evidence could prove Mengzi right or wrong here?
4. When Mengzi states that the senses can easily be obscured and cannot by themselves enable apprehension, what do you think that he means precisely? What is the function of the senses, and what lies beyond their capacities?
5. By understanding *xin* as both physical organ and an invisible force, as having both cognitive and affective dimensions, Mengzi's position is often contrasted with those found in western epistemology and ethics. Can you think of a western philosophical thinker or tradition that shows convergence with Mengzi's philosophical position?

Further Reading Suggestions

- Chan, Alan K. L., ed. (2002), *Mencius: Contexts and Interpretations*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Liu, X, and P.J. Ivanhoe eds. (2002), *Essays on the Moral Philosophy of Mengzi*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
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- Sung, W. (2016), 'Mencius and Xunzi on Xing (Human Nature)', *Philosophy Compass* 11 (1): 632–41.

Double movement, *Evgenia Ilieva*

Study Questions

1. How do individuals and collectivities respond to the encounter with *difference*?
2. What is the “double movement”?
3. Can we disrupt the logic of the double movement? If so, how?
4. What consequences follow from the failure to move beyond the possibilities suggested by the double movement?
5. Can you point to contemporary examples where we can see the double movement at play?

Further Readings Suggestions

- Inayatullah, N. and D. Blaney (2004), “Intimate Indians,” in *International Relations and the Problem of Difference*. New York and London: Routledge. pp. 42–83.
- Nandy, A. (1987), “Evaluating Utopias: Considerations for a Dialogue of Cultures and Faiths” and “Towards a Third World Utopia,” in *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias: Essays in The Politics of Awareness*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. pp. 1–55.
- Pagden, A. (1987), *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Todorov, T. (1984), *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Williams, R. A. (1992), *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University.

I-Thou Relation, *Michiko Yusa*

Study Questions:

1. In what circumstances do you find yourself having a meaningful personal relationship with a friend? (What Buber calls the “I” of the “I-Thou”)
2. In what circumstances do you find yourself having a superficial relationship with a “friend”? (What Buber calls the “I” of the “I-It”)
3. Do you think we can strengthen the I-Thou awareness in today’s high-tech driven virtual world? If yes, in what way can we strengthen this I-Thou awareness?
4. What would be the merit of cultivating the I-Thou awareness?
5. Nishitani’s philosophy clearly indicates the more comprehensive direction of “I-Thou-It” than Buber’s “I-Thou” and “I-It.” Do you think Nishitani’s approach can more successfully address the climate crisis?

Ubuntu/Botho, Michael Onyebuchi Eze

Study Questions

1. What are the two dominant ways of reading or studying ubuntu according to the text?
2. What is the difference between “I am because we are” and “I am because you are”?
3. What is the purpose of ubuntu dialogue in times of conflict?
4. Why should we have coffee with someone we do not like?
5. What is the difference between performative and essentialist understanding of ubuntu?

Further Reading Suggestions

- Battle, M. (2007). *Reconciliation: The ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu*. Pilgrim Press.
- Eze, M.O. (2008). What is African Communitarianism? Against Consensus as a regulative ideal. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 27(4), 386–399.
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- Quest: an African Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XV No. 1–2, 200: *Special Issue*, “African Renaissance and Ubuntu Philosophy”
- Ramose, M.B. (2003). “The Philosophy of ubuntu and ubuntu as a Philosophy.” in P.H. Coetzee & A.P.J. Roux (eds), *The African Philosophy Reader* (2nd ed.) New York: Routledge, 230–238
- Shutte, A. (2001). *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa*. Cluster Publications.

Nepantla, James Maffie

Study Questions

1. What is the indigenous Mexica understanding of nepantla?
2. What is the European-grounded interpretation of nepantla as liminality defended by Durán and León-Portilla?
3. How does nepantla differ from liminality?
4. How does the indigenous understanding of crossroads differ from the European understanding of crossroads?
5. How is nepantla simultaneously both positive and negative, both creative and destructive? Explain using the example of weaving. How do nepantla-defined processes create a tertium quid that simultaneously is a unified duality and a dual unity? Explain using the example of weaving or heterosexual intercourse.

Further Reading Suggestions

- Anzaldúa, G. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Durán, D. (1971). *Book of the Gods and Rites and The Ancient Calendar*, trans. And eds. F. Horcasitas and D. Heyden, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.
- León-Portilla, M. (1990). *Endangered Cultures*, trans. J. Goodson-Lawes, Dallas: Southern Methodists University Press.
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Self-Cultivation and Political Power, Leah Kalmanson

Study Questions

1. What is your own understanding of the phrase “the personal is political”? Can you think of ways you might interpret that phrase differently than how it has been presented here?
2. Research and discuss other political movements or forms of political activism that have relied on self-cultivation. The practice of nonviolent resistance, as taught by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would be one good example.
3. What do you think of the understanding of mental energies discussed in Ruist thought? Can you think of situations in which you felt like you were affected by the mental energies of others around you?
4. What are some of your own strategies for calming your mind? Do you meditate? Or listen to music?
5. Research the history of feminist consciousness-raising groups. Can you think of contemporary manifestations of such practices today?

Further Reading Suggestions

- Ames, Roger T., and David L. Hall, trans. (2001), *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Angle, Stephen C. (2009), *Sagehood: The Contemporary Significance of Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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Ujamaa, Edwin Etieyibo

Study Questions

1. In what way is African socialism different from scientific socialism and Marxism?
2. Why can it be said that *Ujamaa* is a hypothetical and linguistic device?
3. If *Ujamaa* is a symbol or metaphor, what is it a metaphor and symbol of?
4. Explain the sense in which *Ujamaa* is similar to and different from *Ubuntu*.
5. What will *Ujamaa* require of the hosts and guests in a traditional or communal setting?

Further Reading Suggestions

- Duggan, W., R. and Civile, J.R. (1976), *Tanzania and Nyerere: A Study of Ujamaa and Nationhood*, New York: Orbis Books.
- Nyerere, J. K. (1967), *Freedom and Unity/Uhuru na Umoja: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1952–1965*: Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press.
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- Nyerere, J. K. (1987), 'Ujamma – The Basis of African Socialism,' *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 1(1):4–11.

Equality, *Hadeer Aboelnagah*

Study Questions

1. What is the purpose of creation according to the Quran? Give example from one of its Ayahs
2. Do men and women have equal religious responsibilities?
3. How does the Islamic legislation respect gender differences? Give an example of what is regarded as equity in the Quran.
4. One of the titles of the Surahs in the Quran is *Al Nisa*, can this be used as evidence on the Quran's perspective to women? Elaborate
5. In what way the prophetic teachings support the Quran in respecting women equality? Give an example.

Further Reading Suggestions

- Abugideiri, H. (2010), 'Revisiting The Islamic Past, Deconstructing Male Authority: The Project of Islamic Feminism' in *Literary Criticism A Special Issue of Religion and Literature*. Vol. 42.
- Ahmed, L. (1993). *Women & Gender in Islam*, New Haven & London, Yale University press.
- Doorn-Harder, P. (2006). *Women Shaping Islam; Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.