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COMPARING GREEK AND CHINESE
POLITICAL THOUGHT: THE CASE OF
PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

According to Mencius, “. . . even if the tyrant had a terrace and pond, birds and beasts, could he have enjoyed them all by himself?”¹ For Plato, “someone with a tyrannical nature lives his whole life without being friends with anyone, always a master to one man or a slave to another and never getting a taste of either freedom or true friendship.”² At first glance these two statements appear strikingly similar: Both deplore the isolation of the tyrant (though we would need to inquire further into the semantic field of that word in their respective languages). And indeed, both authors are concerned more broadly to oppose the tyrant to a good ruler. In the *Republic*, the good rulers are termed “guards,” often translated “guardians” (singular, *phulax*); Mencius implicitly elsewhere contrasts the isolated tyrant with the “true King,” declaring that “if you shared your enjoyment with the people, you would be a true King.”³ (And elsewhere in Plato, in the *Statesman*, the terms “statesman” and “king” for the good ruler are at times used interchangeably.) So far, so seemingly parallel.

But so far as I understand the *Mencius*, it seems to me that the statements are in fact crucially different as speech acts—Mencius’s is practical advice; Plato’s is analytical diagnosis—and this difference reflects fundamentally differing analyses of how the behavior in question is determined, and so how far it might be changed. Mencius’s *advice* is about a piece of behavior which it is within the immediate power of a ruler to alter: Rather than be selfish, share your enjoyments with the people; then you will be judged not a tyrant but a true king. The modality is one of *possibility*: A ruler can choose to share his enjoyments with the people, or not, and if he does not do so, advice from a sage may induce him to do so. Plato’s *diagnosis* by contrast issues from his analysis of the tyrant in *Republic IX*,⁴ which is the culmination of a line of argument beginning in *Republic II*.⁵ The modality is one of *necessity*: The tyrant is *necessarily* friendless and isolated, because he is

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tyrannized over internally by lawless desires so powerful as to drive him to override all social bonds, of kinship as well as friendship. Plato can also be read as engaging in a speech act of advice to his readers—do not become a tyrant—but his view is that the tyrant as a pure case is irredeemable because tyranny destroys and undermines the rational capacities on which true kingship would depend.

This example leads me to pursue three interrelated projects in this paper, all of which relate to the volume's overall focus on modes of argumentation. First, I will explore its ramifications for the position taken by Jiyuan Yu and Nicholas Bunnin against Geoffrey Lloyd, about the way in which one should pursue cross-cultural comparative philosophy. I will argue that the focus on speech acts employed in my analysis of the above example, derived from methods developed in the context of history of (Western) political thought, must play a crucial part in understanding any given text, but thereby complicates the process of comparison and the results which might be expected from it. Second, turning to the mode of argumentation used by Plato himself, I question the standard contrast between Plato and Aristotle on method on which the Yu and Bunnin paper relies, arguing that Plato in the *Republic* develops his counterintuitive and radically revisionary views in the service precisely of “saving the phenomena” of ordinary acts of justice. Third, I return to the question posed by the figure of the tyrant in the *Republic*, to show how this mode of argumentation relates to the contrast between reason, emotion, and desire (as we must divide “feeling” in the case of the *Republic*), and with it the understanding there of the relationship between nature and artifice.

I. MODES OF ARGUMENTATION IN COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

The Yu and Bunnin method of “saving the phenomena” in comparative philosophy identifies three steps:

1. “Bring together what is said or believed in different philosophical traditions if these beliefs appear to share similar theoretical or practical concerns”;⁶ later they explain that the “similarity” in question is not to be assumed as a “presupposition,” but rather that “apparently comparable phenomena raise questions and invite study, rather than being the naïve basis for piecemeal comparison.”⁷
2. Show why each phenomenon answers the question and look at the question from the perspective of each phenomenon and its tradition, that is, we work out their similarities and differences.⁸
3. The method then moves beyond meta-philosophy to become “a first-order study: philosophy in its own right”;⁹ we seek to “show

how each perspective could be modified to achieve a new theory that can save and reconcile the partial truths contained in the phenomena of different traditions.”¹⁰

My challenge to this method is based on what step 2 is understood to involve and its positioning within the method—I will argue that step 2 would already have been accomplished for any philosophical text *before* a cross-cultural comparison would get underway. I turn next to the implications of the above points for the method and for the debate between Yu and Bunnin and Geoffrey Lloyd, in which I will broadly side with Lloyd, and for the conception of the final goal of what philosophical argument is meant to achieve. In developing this challenge, however, I begin by sharing and endorsing a different point made by Yu and Bunnin: that issues of comparison arise *within* whatever is taken to be a “tradition” of thought as well as *between* such traditions. As they write:

... all of the problems which are posed for comparative philosophy arise within the complex of traditions in Western philosophy. Western philosophers have differed radically in fundamental aims, assumptions, problems, methods, theories, vocabularies, doctrines and self-understanding as philosophers. The very real problems of understanding and assessing phenomena drawn from non-Western traditions can all be found within the West as well.¹¹

It seems consonant with this well-taken point to view the differences between philosophical cultural traditions as different only in degree, rather than in kind, from the differences among the philosophical texts and languages within any one of those traditions (assuming that “traditions” can be so neatly enumerated, which is itself doubtful). Greek and Chinese written philosophical texts, after all, would look much more similar than different if one compared both of them to the oral traditions of Australian Aboriginal songlines. Therefore, we can learn a great deal from the methods which have actually been developed within Western philosophy to deal with such differences (it would be interesting to learn more about such methods developed within other traditions as well). That is, just how is step 2 best understood within Western philosophy?

II. “STEP 2” IN LIGHT OF THE METHODOLOGICAL DEBATE WITHIN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

An analogue of the “universalism versus relativism” debate in cultural comparative philosophy has long ago been had in the “universalism versus contextualism” debate in the history of philosophy, and spe-

cifically the history of political thought, in English language philosophy. Quentin Skinner's methodological interventions established the position in this debate which I would broadly defend. Against the "timeless elements" in a "dateless wisdom" with "universal application" approach to texts in the history of political thought, in which great texts were lined up according to their accounts of "the state," "justice," and so on, Skinner argued that each text must be understood as a certain type of speech act within a certain political and linguistic context or set of contexts.¹² The question of the meaning of a text must include the question of what it is doing, which is to say, the question or challenge or intervention which it is raising.

In this emphasis on what a text is doing, Skinner was drawing on a de-idealized version of the thought of Robin George Collingwood, who had brought his expertise as an archaeologist of Roman Britain to bear on his work in the history of philosophy. Reflecting on the practice of archaeology, Collingwood realized that one learns nothing from a dig simply by apprehending or contemplating it. Rather one has to pose a question, and what one is able to learn or understand depends entirely on the question posed. Collingwood generalized this point from his own knowledge of the Roman past to the knowledge of objects and features of any kind of human practice. As he counseled, to understand what someone means, it is not enough simply to read his statements: "[Y]ou must also know what the question was . . . to which the thing he has said or written was meant as an answer."¹³ To understand what Plato or Mencius wrote, or indeed even to understand what our neighbor meant by what she said a moment ago, involves a kind of historical skill in discovering the question which the writer or speaker intended to answer in saying what he or she did. This also means that we cannot presume and would not expect to find that two distinct texts are indeed answering the same question: "Plato's *Republic* is an attempt at a theory of one thing; Hobbes's *Leviathan* an attempt at a theory of something else."¹⁴

Collingwood remarks that the project of understanding a statement, text or object in these terms is all the more necessary, and difficult, when the item in question was made in the distant past. Most people, when writing, assume that their contemporaries share their interests and concerns, and "consequently a writer very seldom explains what the question is that he is trying to answer,"¹⁵ though this question may well have been since forgotten. The interpretation of a writer who has become a "classic" is the most difficult of all, since his or her answer to the question may have succeeded in reorienting subsequent generations to ask new questions, so that the original question answered by the "classic text" becomes difficult to uncover.

Whereas Collingwood had elided the text with the mind of the author, so posing his notorious challenge to the historian of ideas to think Nelson's or Caesar's thoughts as he himself had thought them, Skinner has rejected this sort of idealism in light of the Wittgensteinian revolution in the philosophy of language and mind. Instead, he insists that the only sort of intentionality in which he is interested is that manifest in the speech act of the text itself. The notion of a speech act draws on the work of John Langshaw Austin, who in his *How to Do Things with Words*¹⁶ explained that language could be used not simply to describe or affirm, but also to have effects on others (e.g., to persuade) and to perform actions (e.g., to marry by saying "I do"). An author's performative intentions—his or her intentions of what a text or utterance was being enacted to do—had to have been publicly manifested to contemporaries in the text in order to have (the chance to) achieve those very aims. Therefore, they must be publicly available to the historian who is skilled and sensitive enough to understand them in light of the political and intellectual contexts in which they would have made sense.¹⁷

Thus even two works written by Englishmen within a span of thirty-odd years, and often treated as classics on the nature of the state on a par with one another, turn out when contextualized to be attempting to answer very different questions and to be attempting to do very different things in answering them. Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*¹⁸ (1651) and John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*¹⁹ (published 1689; written probably in 1683) differ dramatically in the contexts in which they were intervening, the opponents they were most directly seeking to refute, and the scientific and/or theological perspectives which they chose as a framework for developing their interventions. Hobbes was arguing against both conventional monarchists and radical republicans, whereas Locke was arguing against Filmer's patriarchalism and in the context of early 1680s polemics and political projects; Hobbes was seeking to establish a basis for supporting the post-Civil War institutional settlement, whereas Locke (if writing in early 1680s as Laslett has conjectured) was seeking to justify the exclusion of the Catholic James II (as he would later be) from the British succession; Hobbes was articulating a mechanical science of nature informed by Marin Mersenne and René Descartes and tailoring his presentation of Christianity to fit what that would allow and require, whereas Locke was articulating a specific form of Anglicanism which presents natural man already infused with moral purposes.

It might be objected that surely Hobbes and Locke shared certain common assumptions and concepts which would have been alien to a Chinese writer of the same period (though it has been recently remarked how much Hobbes drew from an Ottoman Muslim reflec-

tion on political toleration of the same period). One way to articulate this position would be to draw on the concept of differing “languages” of political thought. On this view, even if authors and texts are aiming at very different practical purposes, they may still speak in terms that resonate in certain constellations of argument. John Pocock, for example, has stressed the variously constraining and enabling constellations of vocabulary, assumptions and preoccupations afforded to authors by the “languages” or, in his later work, the “paradigms” (borrowing the term from the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn), which writers argue through, within, and with in making their points.²⁰

Yet the sharing of languages is again a matter of degree, and languages themselves come at different levels of specificity. Arguably, the more specific the language, the more deeply it marks the text: So it will be more helpful to speak of Rousseau’s Deism versus Paine’s rational dissent theology than to speak of them both as “Christian” thinkers. Thus in comparing across cultures, comparing Christianity with Confucianism (say) is likely to offer little real illumination into the understanding of any actual philosophical text.

This excursus into the method of doing the history of political thought, or of philosophy more generally, teaches that approaching a text as a given surface “phenomenon” is liable to mislead. Any interpreter who knows enough about a text to be able to engage in cross-cultural comparison will already have clarified these deeper issues of the question raised and speech act intended through contextual and textual study. And once this X-ray structure of a text, as it were, has been detected through its surface markings, it cannot be forgotten in an attempt to line up a text as a phenomenon. In other words, any scholar able to participate in comparative philosophy will already bring to the starting line a “step 2” understanding of a text: What will be available for comparison will not be the surfaces of the phenomena, but rather texts understood as embodying constellations of “language,” question, and speech act.

III. THE SEQUENCE OF STEPS IN COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

This claim in turn bears on the issue of the sequence of steps in comparative philosophy. The critique which Yu and Bunnin launch of Lloyd focuses in large part on the question of the appropriate sequence of steps. Yu and Bunnin insist that comparative philosophy start with the “comparable phenomena” in terms of “what is said.”²¹ They direct this point against Lloyd, who had argued that:

We should not begin with a comparison between the answers or results: we should ask first what the questions were to which the

answers were thought to be the right answers. I have insisted that we cannot assume that the theories or concepts were addressed to the same questions. So it follows that we must problematise the questions.²²

There is a clear affinity between Lloyd's injunction and the strictures of Collingwood and Skinner (an assertion I make based on having reconstructed the questions which each was trying to address, done in part above). And I would argue that it must be applied by each interpreter of a text within (whatever is taken to be) its own tradition, interpretation which will already have been accomplished at length *before* any comparative philosophy is undertaken.

In other words, the phenomena available to comparative philosophy are always already *interpreted* phenomena, already understood as complex constellations marked by the questions they are asking and the purposes which they portend. If understanding what the text means itself is a matter of reconstructing the question which it is answering (or more broadly, what it is doing), then this reconstructed question is as much an indispensable part of the phenomenon *confronting the interpreter* as are the black marks on the page. Once having understood a text in this light, we cannot and should not retreat to a state of confronting it as if it were an as yet uninterpreted phenomenon.

IV. THE GOAL OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Given this, what then can comparative philosophy hope to accomplish? Yu and Bunnin imply that steps 1 and 2 are metaphilosophy, whereas step 3 is "first-order philosophy." My argument suggests the reverse: That steps 1 and 2 must involve philosophical and historical analysis which is what we do when we do first-order philosophy, whereas step 3 is then a second-order comparison of what has already been understood (the complex constellations outlined above) at the first-order level. It is likely that these constellations of thought will be interesting to compare to each other, and that the comparison will indeed (as Yu and Bunnin hope) throw light on the structure and finesse of each text in ways which help us to appreciate it more fully and more subtly. But to expect that "truth" will emerge from a comparative sifting and stimulating exercise seems to me to underplay the extent to which each philosophical work rests on a complex of its assumptions, questions, and orientation, which cannot be taken apart without losing the value and point of that work. At least in respect of ancient philosophy, political philosophy and theories of ethics, one seeks truth in the depth and resonance of each particular perspective, rather than in a lowest—or even a highest—common denominator.

That is, philosophies (or again, at least ancient, political, and moral philosophies) are more like religions than like competing accounts of symbolic logic. To compare Judaism and Christianity, or Judaism and Confucianism, will undoubtedly shed light on each of the comparators. But would we expect, or value, a new religion to emerge on the basis of that comparison, which claimed somehow to incorporate what had been best in each? Such ersatz spiritual Esperanto would have little purchase on us religiously. It seems to me that the same is likely to be true philosophically. We can learn from and with each other, but only by beginning with our most sophisticated understandings (not a pre-contextual textual surface), and without expecting that the texts we study will turn out to have been addressing the same questions in such a way that a bricolage of philosophical reflection will be either possible or illuminating.

V. MODES OF ARGUMENTATION IN PLATO VERSUS ARISTOTLE

Let us apply the need to avoid presuppositions to the interpretation of Plato's mode of argumentation in the *Republic*. Yu and Bunnin adopt the standard view of the contrast between Plato's and Aristotle's philosophical methods, positing that for Plato the *phainomena* (appearances, often transliterated and translated as English "phenomena") or *doxa* (opinions or beliefs) *conceal* the truth, whereas for Aristotle they constitute the essential starting point to its identification by sifting them for their truth. This view of Plato is presented as based on, or identical with, the metaphysical distinction drawn in the *Republic* (above all) between Forms and particulars. They write:

Plato distinguished between two worlds and claimed that whereas the world of ideas is stable and the real object of truth and knowledge, the sensible world is transient and the object of opinion. Both Parmenides and Plato contrasted *doxa* (opinion or belief) and knowledge and held that *doxa* conceals truth (in Greek, *aletheia*: *a*, not + *letheia*, cover, literally, what is uncovered).²³

This standard otherworldly reading of Plato's metaphysics and philosophical method emphasizes the ontological gulf between Forms and particulars, and the fact that in *Republic* V,²⁴ knowledge and *doxa* seem to be ascribed divergent objects (Forms and particulars respectively), so that the cognitive condition of belief cannot be converted into the cognitive condition of knowledge by adding, for example, a *logos* or explanation (as will be explored in the *Theaetetus*).²⁵ Yet this reading neglects the fact that even in the *Republic*, one sees the

particulars in light of the Form, and in the *Symposium*,²⁶ love of beautiful particulars is a path toward appreciation of the Form of Beauty—although the objects change, the condition of belief is a sort of clue or intimation of the Form which then attracts one’s mind to knowledge. How could it be that the beautiful particulars *conceal* the Form of Beauty, when it shines forth in them?

In my view the otherworldly interpretation, and the Yu and Bunnin formulation of it misstate Plato’s ontology and so also his view of the method of epistemological progress.²⁷ But I wish here to focus not on this aspect of Plato’s method, which has been thoroughly debated, but rather on a much less studied aspect of the *Republic*. It is as much a commonplace as the otherworldly metaphysical reading, and linked to it in spirit at least, to claim that Socrates (Plato in his use of the character of Socrates) performs a bait-and-switch in his account of justice. Having undertaken to show Glaucon and Adeimantus that justice is good in itself apart from its consequences, he switches his focus from everyday interpersonal justice (such as not stealing) to an intrapersonal account of justice as the appropriate hierarchy of the soul. As shorthand this has been called the switch from “ordinary justice” to “Platonic justice,” or for some interpreters, “O-justice” to “P-justice.”²⁸

The details of this challenge have been resolved by its being noted that, as Nickolas Pappas puts it, Plato does argue at *Republic* 442e–443b²⁹ that “the person with a P-just soul will refrain from acts of O-injustice.”³⁰ Socrates here asks rhetorically whether such a person would be more likely to embezzle than someone who is not P-just, and whether such a person would have anything to do with “temple-robberies, thefts, betrayals”; emboldened, he then asserts that such a person would “be in no way untrustworthy in keeping an oath or other agreement” and would be the last person one would expect to find committing “adultery, disrespect for parents, and neglect of the gods.”³¹ As Pappas explains, these are not to be understood as mere assertions, as the text has implied an explanation, that is, that “P-justice entails self-control, and the more self-control that people enjoy, the less likely they are to surrender to their desires. Most ordinary misdeeds may be traced back to such temptations. . . .”

What has not been sufficiently appreciated however by Pappas or others is the significance of this move for the overall mode of argumentation of the dialogue. The test against ordinary standards of justice is introduced in order to confirm the identification of justice in the individual and the fact that this appears identical to the justice previously identified in the city.³² It is in order to put this beyond any possible dispute that, Socrates says, “we can appeal to everyday

life for final confirmation.”³³ In other words, while the *Republic* is undoubtedly an assault on a number of crucial political conventions (such as the political salience of gender; the sanctity of the family; and the institution of property, in each case attacked in its application to the guardian class only) and conventional ways of viewing the world, it is also in a key respect wedded to a method of preserving the conventional, in taking conventional acts of justice to be the standard of justice throughout his argument.³⁴ Thus, while the *Republic* may be said with Danielle Allen to refashion its characters’ and its readers’ “topographies of the imaginary,” it is not effecting “a comprehensive revision of the principles underlying Athenian politics”³⁵: Some of those principles remain inviolate as both starting and ending points for the investigation.

Thus the *doxa*, or in Aristotelian parlance *endoxa*, of everyday life—the belief that not stealing and keeping oaths is just—is retained in the *Republic* as the touchstone against which the revisionary account of the soul and its virtues, and the city and its virtues, is to be measured. Yet to assert that the *Republic* is a work designed to uphold the conventional view of justice would be entirely to miss its deeper point. The *Republic* develops a revisionary metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, and aesthetics in order to uphold this conventional standard. Its method at once saves the phenomena (at least some of them) and insists that we will never reach the truth just by considering them. In order to understand them, one must go far beyond them to places that the ordinary *endoxa* has never reached, erecting new philosophical structures in the light of which the *endoxa* can for the first time be properly understood.

VI. PLATO ON DESIRES, EMOTIONS, AND THE NATURE/ARTIFICE DISTINCTION

We turn now to some of those philosophical structures, in particular the relationship between reason and feeling and ethics in the *Republic*. In the compass of this paper it is not possible to treat all issues relating to reason and feeling—a term which must be divided into desires, on the one hand, and emotions such as pride and anger, on the other, in order to relate to the text of the *Republic*—in Plato or even in the *Republic*. Because this special issue focuses on “reason and feeling” as a way of approaching a comparative view of political philosophy, I will frame my discussion of reason and feeling issue by reference to political questions. Thus I will begin by reflecting further on the tyrant; turn to the distinction between brute desires and intentional desires, and then the education and natural-

ness of the desires and emotions; and conclude by reflecting on nature and artifice in the *Republic's* approach to ordering the parts of the soul including reason, the spirited part (one variant of emotion), and the desiring part, and the corresponding parts of the city.

In outline, for those not familiar with it, the question of why the tyrant will not be happy arises in the *Republic* as a challenge to Socrates raised by two of Plato's young brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus. Socrates has already been challenged to argue that being just will make you happy; the brothers intervene to sharpen this challenge, by giving the example of someone who, if they could become a tyrant with impunity, would seem to be supremely happy in doing so as they would be able to satisfy their desires whether licit or illicit. Socrates accepts the challenge of proving that justice is beneficial in itself, even when shorn of its usual consequences of good reputation, and conversely, that injustice will make one unhappy, even when it too is shorn of its usual consequences of bad reputation and punishment. He proceeds to try to identify what justice is, doing so by introducing the famous analogy between the city and the soul, dividing each into three parts (a reasoning part, a spirited part, and an appetitive part), and then identifying the four virtues in relation to these parts: wisdom as the virtue of the reasoning part; courage as the virtue of the spirited part; and justice and moderation both as virtues of the relation among the parts (moderation is defined as the agreement that reason should rule; justice is defined as each part doing its own task).

The question then is how to establish the voluntary hierarchy and task specialization between the reasoning, spirited, and appetitive parts. As recent scholarship has established, each of these parts must be understood to have its own characteristic desires: Reason desires goodness; spirit desires honor; and appetite desires various forms of sensory satisfaction.³⁶ Key to establishing the right sort of voluntary hierarchy is the acceptance by the other parts that reason should determine the overall goals of the individual, and so that what each of the other parts pursues should be informed by reason. Spirit will go on seeking honor, but in a well-ordered soul or city it will seek honor in doing what is good, and so ally itself with reason. Appetite will go on seeking sensory satisfaction, but these satisfactions will be pursued within bounds set by the good so that "bad" satisfactions such as adultery and rape will be excluded. (One reason that spirit, but not appetite, is said to become the "ally" of reason may be that spirit's goals are to be infused with goodness from within, whereas appetite is to be confined within externally set boundaries but not otherwise infused with goodness.)

In order for these divisions to make sense, Plato has to draw a sharp distinction within the concept of desire, between what I will call brute appetites and intentional goals. Appetite by itself has no concept of goodness: Thirst “itself” is “in its nature only for drink itself,” not for “a particular kind of drink,” whether good or bad, much or little.³⁷ As has been observed,³⁸ Plato himself remarks a *prima facie* tension between this claim and the claim of the aporetic Socratic dialogues, which will be echoed in a key later passage of the *Republic* itself, that all people desire the good: “Every soul pursues the good and does whatever it does for its sake.”³⁹ How, if all desire is for the good, can Plato be arguing earlier in the same work that some desires (the sensual appetites) take no account of goodness in seeking satisfaction?

Plato draws this distinction between brute appetites and intentional goals as part of establishing that not all human behavior is teleological; or, we might say in line with a sometime philosophical usage of “action” as intrinsically teleological, that he wishes to distinguish between instinctive behavior and intentional action (not using “instinct” in a technical sense).⁴⁰ That is, some desires—the brute appetites, including that which “drives [the soul] like an animal to drink”⁴¹—instinctively move us to seek their satisfaction. In doing so we need have no conception of a *telos* or valuable purpose; we may have no conception at all, other than a sort of animal instinct by which thirst identifies drink as opposed to food. Such brute appetite is not part of the story of human intentional action. (Compare the way that the “likely story” [reasonable account] of the universe in Plato’s *Timaeus* is divided between those aspects which are due to matter, and so are brute facts of which there can be no teleological explanation, and those aspects due to Form which are intelligible in teleological terms.)⁴²

It is reason which is to supply knowledge of the good, as emerges fully in book VI of the *Republic*.⁴³ Reason’s place in ruling in a just soul (where just this is its own special task) explains how people can come to be directed toward the good even though their appetites are not intrinsically directed at the good. Indeed, the discussion of thirst “itself,” or as such, was made in the context of trying to distinguish appetite from reason as elements of the soul: Because appetite is brutish, without intentionality or a conception of its object, any element in our motivation which directs us selectively—to this or that satisfier of appetite as better or worse—must be a distinct element which Plato names reason. For its part, emotion lies between instinct and reason. It has a teleological conception of its objects, but it can make a mistake in its conception of what is good, so that honor could be pursued even in contexts where doing so is not good (as it might be, in an endless cycle of vendetta).

According to the *Republic*, it is natural, in the sense of teleologically best, that reason should rule in the soul. Thus politics within the soul is natural: One (part) must rule another. How then does politics proper—one person ruling another—enter the picture? It does so in order to resolve an inadequacy in the souls of most people. For the majority of people are not capable of putting their souls in this sort of order by themselves. They are not capable of cultivating their reason sufficiently to know the true good, which as explained above is the precondition for their being able to establish the appropriate hierarchy. For them, the only way to establish the naturally (teleologically) best order in their souls is for them to be subjected to the rule of someone else:

[Socrates]: It is better for everyone to be ruled by divine reason, preferably within himself and his own, otherwise imposed from without, so that as far as possible all will be alike and friends, governed by the same thing.⁴⁴

Political rule is thus artificial, not natural. It is a substitute for natural ordering within one's soul; it does not itself come about naturally, but has to be established in order to make up for a failing to develop what is naturally best within the individual herself. Politics in the interpersonal sense is an artifice designed to establish the correct relationship between reason, emotion, and desire in those who are incapable of achieving this naturally best relationship for themselves. Defined as the rule of one over another, politics is natural within the soul, in that it is teleologically best that reason rules. But it is not natural that one person should have to rule another; this is necessary only because of the weakness, perversion or failure of reason in the person needing to be ruled. Instead, the natural relationship between souls is that of friendship: which is not an appetite or desire, as Pappas has mistakenly suggested,⁴⁵ but rather a natural affinity between those equally commanded by reason and virtue.

VII. CONCLUSION: REASON, FEELING, AND HUMAN NATURE

How, if at all, might the complex account of the *Republic* be compared to the debate reported by Torbjörn Lodén as to whether human nature is naturally good (Mencius) or naturally bad (Xunzi)—or indeed to a third alternative from the Chinese tradition: that human nature is naturally indifferent (Gaozi).⁴⁶ On the one hand, the capacity for reason is inborn in humans, as we learn in the *Meno*⁴⁷ as well as in the central books of the *Republic*. On the other hand, the desires with their anarchic brute structure are also inborn. Does the

teleological nature of Plato's theory incline him to a view like that of Mencius, as arguably does the teleological theory of Aristotle, for whom the claim that man is by nature a political animal means that we are such as to develop to this end so long as enabling conditions are there and no deforming force intervenes?

It seems to me that actually Plato's theory is not teleological in the same sense as that of Aristotle. For Plato, it is natural in the sense of best that reason should rule, but this does not mean that left unattended, reason *will* come to rule. Nature is not a cause in the modern sense for Plato, nor is it even an Aristotelian efficient cause, in that there is no impetus from a progenitor's form of the human for a child's sense of human reason to tend to develop. We can perhaps understand the contrast by reference to an image of a garden. Aristotle's conception of nature focuses on the nature of the individual seed or plant: An acorn will become an oak given the proper growing conditions and absence of untoward interference. For humans, such proper growing conditions will include education (which also serves a crucial pruning function), but it is still the case that a natural potential for virtue and knowledge will tend to unfold given this condition and the absence of untoward interference. By contrast, Plato's focus on the relationships among parts of the soul and among people in the city is a focus not on the individual seed or plant, but on the garden as a whole. Looked at collectively, a collection of sown seeds in a plot of earth has the potential to develop into a well-shaped garden, but this is not a potential that will be realized without external intervention because the potential of the majority of the seeds is inherently such as not to be realized fully. There is therefore no natural teleological potential of this collection of plants to become a harmonious garden.

This does not map easily onto any of the Chinese views enumerated above: It shares with Gaozi the idea of potential which may not naturally unfold, but shares with Mencius the idea of a *telos* which is best (I am not able to judge whether Gaozi also shares the latter view). It is best for the appetites to be governed by a rational understanding of the good, but this will not happen spontaneously for most people. While Plato does lay out the path to achieving an internally just soul for those capable of achieving it (early education must be tailored so that it does not awaken extremes of spirit or appetite, but instead makes them amenable to recognizing the good; and the three parts of the soul have then to make a voluntary agreement that reason should rule, with each content to play its own part in the resulting hierarchy), he also lays out a political path necessary for the majority for whom traveling the ethical path alone is doomed to fail. The correct relation between reason and feeling (desire and emotion) in

the *Republic* is one which artifice must construct where nature fails to do so.

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ENDNOTES

The writer thanks Dr. Nicholas Bunnin for the encouragement and opportunity to write this article, and Professor Chung-ying Cheng for his thoughtful comments on the version submitted, though to take full account of his suggestions would require another article.

1. Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 1A:2, 50, translation modified by Torbjörn Lodén.
2. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. trans. C. D. C. Reeve, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper with D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1997), Bk IX, 1184 (576a). For the reader's convenience, all translations of Plato are taken from this same volume, which has become the standard one-volume English translation. The page numbers referring to specific passages (or, where a general reference is intended, the page numbers for the work as a whole) are followed by the standard line numbers referring to the Greek text.
3. *Ibid.*, Bk II, 1013 (374e) and *passim*; Mencius, *Mencius*, 1B:1, 61.
4. *Ibid.*, Bk IX, 1180–88 (571a–580c).
5. *Ibid.*, Bk II, 998–1007 (357a–367e).
6. Jiyuan Yu and Nicholas Bunnin, "Saving the Phenomena: An Aristotelian Method in Comparative Philosophy," in *Two Roads to Wisdom? Chinese and Analytic Philosophical Traditions*, ed. Bo Mou (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 295.
7. *Ibid.*, 304.
8. *Ibid.*, 306.
9. *Ibid.*, 311.
10. *Ibid.*, 311.
11. *Ibid.*, 301–2.
12. Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3–53, as reprinted in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 29–67, quoting at 30 from works by Peter H. Merkl, G. E. C. Catlin, and Andrew Hacker.
13. Robin George Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 31.
14. *Ibid.*, 62.
15. *Ibid.*, 39.
16. John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), originally given as lectures in 1955.
17. The bulk of the preceding three paragraphs, and scattered remarks elsewhere in the present article, is adapted from Melissa Lane, "Interpreting Political Thought—Then and Now," in *Contemporary Political Philosophy: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Alan Finlayson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 69–79.
18. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
19. John Locke, "Second Treatise of Government," in *Two Treatises on Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
20. See John Greville Agard Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); for further use of the "languages" approach, see *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
21. Yu and Bunnin, "Saving the Phenomena," 305.

22. Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, *Adversaries and Authorities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9, quoted in Yu and Bunnin, "Saving the Phenomena," 305.
23. Yu and Bunnin, "Saving the Phenomena," 300.
24. Plato, *Republic*, Bk V, 1102–7 (475e–480a).
25. Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. M. J. Levett, rev. trans. Myles Burnyeat, in Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, 223–34 (201d–210d). For a challenge to the two-world reading of the *Republic*'s epistemology, see the work of Gail Fine, including "Separation" and "Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V–VII," both in *Plato: Critical Assessments*, ed. Nicholas D. Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), 161–206 and 236–65, respectively.
26. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, 492–94 (210a–212b).
27. I have explored immanentist readings of Plato in Melissa Lane, *Plato's Progeny: How Socrates and Plato Still Captivate the Modern Mind* (London: Duckworth, 2001).
28. The classic article arguing for the bait-and-switch is David Sachs, "A Fallacy in Plato's *Republic*," *Philosophical Review* 72, no. 1 (1963): 141–58.
29. Plato, *Republic*, Bk IV, 1074 (442e–443b).
30. Nickolas Pappas, *The Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Plato and the Republic*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005), 97 for both this and the subsequent quotation.
31. Plato, *Republic*, Bk IV, 1074 (442e–443a).
32. *Ibid.* (442d).
33. *Ibid.* (442e).
34. I adopt David Sedley's view of the philosophical significance of the dialogue form in Plato as "Plato thinking aloud" in David Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1. That is, some aspects of the dialogues can be more plausibly ascribed to Plato's own contention than others, but his contentions are always exploratory and provisional and relative to a given dialogue topic and drama. Socrates's interventions are among the most plausible candidates for being thoughts which Plato took seriously, though, of course, some of them are posed ironically or for the sake of *reductio* arguments, or are put forward in one dialogue only to be challenged in another.
35. Danielle S. Allen, *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), 272 and 269, respectively.
36. See, for example, Hendrik Lorenz, "Desire and Reason in Plato's *Republic*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004): 83–116, and his "The Analysis of the Soul in Plato's *Republic*," in *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, ed. Gerasimos Santas (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 146–65, as well as, more generally, his *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).
37. Plato, *Republic*, Bk IV, 1070 (439a).
38. See, for example, Marina Anagnostopoulos, "The Divided Soul and the Desire for Good in Plato's *Republic*," in *Blackwell Guide* (see note 36), 166–88. However, Anagnostopoulos's terminology of "executive" versus "simple" desires seems to me to cause confusion; it is related to a problem perceived by her and by Penner and Irwin about how simple desires motivate reaching out to specific objects, which I think is not there in the text, as the point is that a thirsty person will in terms of thirst alone reach out to any liquid (perhaps an instinctive recognition of what a liquid is) that is to hand. I have therefore preferred my own terminology of "brute appetite" versus "intentional goals." The latter comprise goals held by reason (the good), by spirit (the honorable), and by appetite (the pleasant), but all insofar as they are infused or shaped by a conception of the good deriving from reason.
39. Plato, *Republic*, Bk VI, 1126 (505e).
40. On intentional action, see the classic work by Gertrude Elisabeth Margaret Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed. (London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). This edition, first published in 1963, revised the first edition published 1957.
41. Plato, *Republic*, Bk IV, 1070 (439b).

42. Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, 1235–36 (29b–d), and *passim*.
43. Plato, *Republic*, 1125–30 (505a–509c).
44. *Ibid.*, Bk IX, 1198 (590d).
45. Pappas, *The Routledge Philosophy*, 93. The resolution of the problems worrying Pappas—that friendship, like pity, may conflict with anger or with reason (the latter e.g., in the case where a friend has broken a serious law, and one’s loyalty out of friendship conflicts with the requirements of virtue)—is that one can only have true friendship between two persons of moral goodness and rational authority. As the Stoics would say, only the sage can be a friend.
46. This third alternative is mentioned by Lloyd, *Adversaries and Authorities*, 77.
47. Plato, *Meno*, trans. Grube, in Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, 880–86 (81a–86c).

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