

CONFUCIANISM  
IN DIALOGUE TODAY

West, Christianity, and Judaism

Edited by

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## PREFACE

Two of the largest blocks of humanity are those profoundly influenced by Confucianism on the one hand and the Judeo-Christian tradition on the other. Both Judaism and Christianity have wrestled, and more or less come to terms, with Modernity—characterized by freedom, democracy, and scientific and historical thinking—since its emergence in the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution, and especially in the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment (in fact, in German historiography, the period inaugurated by the Enlightenment is referred to as the New Age, *die Neuzeit*).

The dominance of Confucianism in its homeland in China crashed early in the twentieth century, and it too shortly thereafter began its engagement with Modernity. Already Japan, with a Confucian cultural base, was shocked into Modernity starting in the middle of the nineteenth century by the appearance of U.S. Commodore Perry's warships in Yokohama Bay. Japan responded with the 1868 Meiji Revolution, which catapulted Japan into Modernity even before the end of the nineteenth century, signaled by the overwhelming Japanese defeat of the Russian Asian fleet in 1895.

It was from China, however, that the effort to bring Confucianism to engage Modernity seriously was launched, starting in the second quarter of the twentieth century and continuing to today. That dialogue (and consequent change of behavior) has moved from its early attempt to bring the ancient Confucian tradition up to date, while still maintaining its claim that Confucianism was *the* best religion-philosophy for the whole world, to the present commitment to an egalitarian dialogue with the rest of the religions-philosophies-cultures of the world.

The essays in this collection come primarily from the English-language papers delivered at a conference sponsored by the Academia Sinica of Taiwan, January 15-17, 2003. They are briefly detailed in the following introductory essay. To them are added a pair of essays that help to broaden the dialogue with Confucianism by including Judaism.

The first of these two is by Professor Wan-Li Ho, who outlines the long history of the presence of Judaism in the heartland of Confucianism, China. The second essay is by Professor Galia Patt-Shamir, who presents the argument that a foundation for the dialogue between Confucianism and Judaism can be found in the central role that learning plays in both Confucianism and Judaism.

Given the foundational role Judaism has played in Christianity and Western Civilization, and Confucianism in Asian culture, the expansion of the dialogue between East and West to include Judaism, which long has been in dialogue with Christianity, Western Civilization, and Modernity, is most welcome.

*Leonard Swidler*

kind of filter; consequently, he portrayed an “entirely enlightened Confucius” by ignoring “numerous characteristics of his teaching.”<sup>57</sup> Lackner gave a few concrete examples. On the whole, he is quite convincing, though I think the matter needs a comprehensive examination, because, as Lackner himself pointed out, Wilhelm’s influence had been so widespread, especially in the case of the *I Ching*, Wilhelm’s German translation of which appeared in 1924. On this translation, Lackner commented that

through his translation of the *Classic of Changes*, the *Yijing* . . . which was further translated into English and French, he exerted a greater influence on China’s image in the West than all of his contemporary German and many later, more “professional” colleagues. His version of the *Yijing* is still among the most often consulted by the numerous users of the oracle. Until today, no one has reached the same degree of popularity in the vulgarization of the *Yijing*.<sup>58</sup>

We can confirm the popularity of Wilhelm’s *I Ching*, especially in the U.S.A. with its relatively huge population. The only home page on Wilhelm is prepared by the School of Wisdom, which considers itself the continuation of Count Hermann Keyserling’s *Schule der Weisheit*, founded in 1921. Thus, Wilhelm has become a guru of the New Age. The home page describes him as “the *Marco Polo* of the inner world of China. He, more than any other, is responsible for opening up to the West the vast spiritual heritage of China . . . To this day, among the dozens of translations of the *I Ching* now available, his 1923 translation stands head and shoulders above the rest.”<sup>59</sup> But is popularization, which is always suspicious to academics, really equivalent to “vulgarization”? In view of Wilhelm’s vast amount of translation and his own writings and their deep penetration into the cultural circles of all levels in Germany and also in the Anglo-Saxon world, he deserves to be studied with care before being judged one way or the other. The first steps have been made: a symposium has been held, Lydia Gerber’s doctoral dissertation on him has just been published,<sup>60</sup> and Ursula Ballin is completing the first biography of Wilhelm. Moreover, various theses seem to be in preparation. Until the time when we have certain clarity of the matter, we can, I think, safely assume that Wilhelm’s interpretation or construct of Confucianism and the Chinese cultural world is a healthy antidote to christocentric ones we have seen above and to other eurocentric constructs.<sup>61</sup> However, Lackner is right in the sense that one should never allow “eternal truths” to be an “escape from a dreaded modernity.”<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>59</sup>See <http://www.schoolofwisdom.com/wilhelm.html>.

<sup>60</sup>Gerber, Von Voskamps “heidnischem Treiben” und Wilhelm’s “höherem China.”

<sup>61</sup>See Adrian Hsia, *Chinesia: The European Construction of China in the Literature of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998), and my subsequent essays on Protestant and other theistic German philosophers.

<sup>62</sup>Lackner, “Richard Wilhelm,” p. 96.

## ALBERT SCHWEITZER ON CHINESE THOUGHT AND CONFUCIAN ETHICS

Heiner Roetz

PRECIS

Albert Schweitzer’s literary corpus contains voluminous manuscripts on the history of Chinese and Indian thought. Written in Lambarene, Africa, between 1937 and 1940, they have only recently been published. The main focus of Schweitzer’s manuscripts is on China, especially on classical Confucianism and Daoism. What makes his interpretation remarkable (in spite of a number of misunderstandings), is its originality and conceptual strength and the cosmopolitan spirit in which it was written. According to Schweitzer, Chinese thought represented the same kind of ethical rationality that characterized European Enlightenment. He even thought that China might help the West regain this rationality that had been lost because of irrational trends in Western thought. With a special focus on the relationship of ethics and nature, Schweitzer’s analysis can still help to clarify fundamental characteristics of Chinese philosophy today.

There are not many contributions to the history of Chinese thought from the side of Western philosophy. Among the important authors, I would count Max Weber with his study on “Confucianism and Taoism,” Karl Jasper with his interpretation of Confucius and Laozi in his “The Great Philosophers” and his treatment of China in “Origin and Goal of History” (*Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte*), and, at least as substantial in his analysis as Jaspers and far more open-minded than Weber, Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965) with his recently published manuscripts on Chinese thought.<sup>1</sup>

### *I. China’s Importance for Schweitzer’s Ethics*

In his ethics, Schweitzer stood against the spirit of his time, “consciously and deliberately ‘out of date,’” in the tradition of the European Enlightenment. He decidedly joined hands with eighteenth-century rationalism. This almost automatically brought him into contact with Chinese thought, since Confucius had been the crown witness of the Enlightenment for the possibility of a “natural morality” out of reason alone without any tutelage by another authority. There has certainly been no other Western philosopher from the time of the Enlightenment till today who would have taken China as seriously as Schweitzer did in an ethical program dedicated to reason.

<sup>1</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *Geschichte des Chinesischen Denkens: Werke aus dem Nachlass*, ed. Bernhard Kaempf and Johann Zuercher (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2002).

It is true that many intellectuals of his time had a predilection for China. However, when Europe turned its attention to the East, it was normally looking for a "culture of the soul" and of "life," for a "spiritual" alternative to modern civilization based on reason. The East itself responded to this romantic yearning—one need only think of Zhang Junmai in China or Rabîndranâth Tagore in India. For Schweitzer, however, this meant handing oneself over to irrationalism and the abdication of thinking. According to him, the destructive development of European culture was due to abandoning the ideal of reason of the Enlightenment, not due to this ideal itself.

So, Schweitzer's interest in China was from the beginning based on an unambiguous confession of loyalty to "Western" rationality. This makes him immune from interpreting Chinese philosophy in terms of philosophy of life, and thus in terms of the concrete, the situational, and the sensually perceptible. He even hoped that China might bring Europe back to the ethical convictions of the Age of Enlightenment, away from fashionable irrationalism. Schweitzer's insistence on the standards of the Enlightenment may have fostered some ethnocentric prejudice against other cultures—for example, the African cultures—but it surely led to a congenial interpretation of China.

Like the eighteenth century, what Schweitzer appreciated with China was the "elementary," the "natural" undestroyed by speculation, which was at the same time the reasonable. Like the eighteenth century, he also sided with Confucianism, which, as he said, in its "belief in the power of mind" (*die Macht des Geistes*) stimulates the human being to "reflect on itself" (*Nachdenken über sich selbst*). The romantic critique of civilization after World War I, by contrast, found its source of inspiration in Daoism. Again like the eighteenth century, China, for Schweitzer, was not primarily a subject of scientific inquiry but of a moral endeavor—the search for the foundations of an "ethical culture." These foundations should at the same time stand the test of reason, give "energy" to our practical will, and thus give rise to a new movement of progress.

Since Schweitzer himself attributed a practical and not primarily academic importance to philosophical ethics, it would not occur to his mind to downgrade Chinese thinkers for their interest in practical questions. His ethics represents what Kant has called the "world concept of philosophy" (*Weltbegriff der Philosophie*) as against the "school concept," and it is exactly in these terms that he also read the works of the Chinese philosophers. He called their thought "elementary," not in the sense of "primitive" but in the sense of focusing on the crucial problems of human life.

In order to achieve "energy for true progress" (*Energie zum wahren Fortschritt*), ethics according to Schweitzer has to start with an "inventory" of everything that has already been developed in the course of human history. Contrary to most Western philosophers (not only of his time), there is no question for Schweitzer but that the ideas of the non-European, Oriental traditions are part of this inventory. As a man of practice and not a mere theorist, he very early recognized the global dimension of the modern ethical challenges, which surpasses the competence of only a single cultural tradition. What is necessary is an "orientation toward world thinking" (*orientation dans la pensée mondiale*) and the overcoming of European parochialism. Schweitzer accused the main directions of

contemporary European philosophy of failing in this respect. They persist in contempt against "world philosophy" and do not recognize that "our occidental philosophy is much more naive than we admit."

## II. The Manuscripts of 1937 and 1939/40

Schweitzer dealt with the non-Western philosophical traditions, above all with Indian and Chinese philosophy, even before 1920. After that, China was an occasional topic in several of his writings, as in *Kultur und Ethik*, mainly in comparative passages. It was in 1937 at his hospital in Lambarene in the Congo, then, that he wrote a very comprehensive manuscript on "Chinese thought" (*Das chinesische Denken*), which comprises several outlines and sketches and, in printed form, is about 300 pages in length. Two years later, in 1939/40, he revised all of these texts. The result was a new manuscript of about 200 pages in printed form, "History of Indian and Chinese Thought" (*Geschichte des indischen und chinesischen Denkens*), which, despite the title, mainly deals with China. Schweitzer had dealt with India already in a separate monograph, "The Worldview of Indian Thinkers" (*Die Weltanschauung der indischen Denker*), published in Munich in 1935. All of this work was done on the basis of handwritten excerpts from sinological literature (monographs as well as translations) that he had taken with him to Africa, "far away from all libraries," as he said in a 1937 letter to the Swiss sinologist Eduard von Tscherner.

In these manuscripts, Schweitzer outlined the basic development of Chinese philosophy till the twentieth century that, not only in quantity but also in quality and conceptual penetration, outweighed all he had written on China before. Schweitzer's main focus was the classical period from the sixth to the third century B.C.E. He sympathized above all with what he called the "ethical affirmation of life and world" (*ethische Lebens- und Weltbejahung*) of early Confucianism. It was this affirmation of life that in his eyes made China superior to India as well as to Greece and that led it earlier than other cultures on the single right path of ethics. "What Chinese ethics has achieved in educating the individuals and the peoples, is magnificent," Schweitzer wrote. "Nowhere else in the world has there been a culture based on ethical ideas that could be compared to the one that exists on the soil of China."

Schweitzer's manuscripts lack a final editing and, except for a Norwegian partial edition (Oslo, 1972), remained unpublished for over sixty years, till 2002 when they were published in a really excellent and careful edition by the Beck publishing house in Munich, which, since 1995, has published Schweitzer's literary output collected in the Schweitzer archive in Günsbach. That there was no publication during Schweitzer's lifetime indicates that he was not really content with what he had written, and the manuscripts still contain unclear and contradictory passages. In a letter of 1962, he excused his failure to give a definite form to his manuscripts by his campaign against the atomic bomb: "I felt the duty to use all of the spiritual authority that I have in this world for this fight . . . also because I knew that Einstein counted on me . . . I really suffer from not being able to complete my works."

The sinological evaluation of Schweitzer's writings, too, did not encourage publication. Robert Kramers in 1969 recommended a partial edition, since the chapters on Confucius and Laozi were "very valuable," but too much of the text was "not up to date." Siegfried Englert in 1974 rejected the whole manuscript as "completely insufficient." What both sinologists missed was a sense of historical criticism in Schweitzer's presentation of Chinese philosophy. Kramers detected an idealizing tendency for which he made responsible the influence of Richard Wilhelm (the most prolific and famous German translator of Chinese philosophical writings) and Gu Hongming. However, although Schweitzer himself admitted that he "owes a lot to Richard Wilhelm" and that he "admires" him, his interpretation was inspired by his own philosophical convictions, and he depended only superficially on Wilhelm's translations. He claimed to interpret the philosophies of the East from the viewpoint of philosophy proper, which was something that Sinological literature itself did not provide, in his eyes. He missed the genuinely Philo-Sophia perspective, and he would have insisted on this perspective also against any kind of historical criticism of the ancient philosophical texts, which he wanted to give their proper place in "world philosophy" and to evaluate by the standards of world philosophy.

As for Gu who, because of his English writings (some of which were translated into German) during the first decades of the twentieth century, was by far the most popular Chinese author in Europe, Schweitzer noted in a hand-written remark of 1939 that he has "read his writings with deep emotion." However, Schweitzer explicitly rejected the contradiction of "civilization" and "culture" that was very famous in Germany at the time of World War I and that also stood behind Gu's enthusiastic reception in Germany. So, in the end one can say that Schweitzer was really independent of any trend or external influence in his interpretation of China.

### III. Heuristic Foundations

Schweitzer followed the hermeneutical principle of reading the Chinese texts, like other philosophical texts under the aspect of how they help to achieve the ideal of "ethical culture." For this reason, he also had a feeling for the history of thought, for the initiation of developments which in China itself had not yet come to an end. He made subtle distinctions between an idea itself and its formulation in Chinese texts and the implications that have implicitly already been acknowledged but are not yet fully realized by an author or a school of thought. In a parallel to a modern New Confucian position, he viewed the final coming-to-itself of Chinese ethics as a future project. In this project, Confucianism in particular had to overcome its historical "stagnation," "to become modern by its own power in a way that corresponds to its essence," and to "enter into a relation with other thought and with advanced knowledge," in order finally to "reshape reality after its own ideals." Historical China, according to Schweitzer, did not witness the realization of these "ideals"—above all the ideal of a "state of culture" (*Kulturstaat*) based on the individual ethos instead of on power, which has found its clearest expression in Mengzi, "the most modern of all thinkers of antiquity."

So, Schweitzer did not commit the mistake of many European assessments of

Chinese thought—to identify Chinese history with the effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) of Confucianism and to identify the effective history of Confucianism with the unfolding of the essence of that school of thought. He recognized that Confucian ethics in its very basic design reaches beyond that which Confucianism itself was ready to conceive and to defend in practice on the concrete social and political level. I think that such an approach is indeed the only way to conceptualize the relation of tradition and modernity in China without falling into iconoclasm on the one hand or regressive conservatism on the other, even if Schweitzer may have overestimated the practical possibilities of a modernized Confucianism.

The basic framework of Schweitzer's philosophical heuristic consisted in a differentiation of types of worldviews. He distinguished them according to their affirmation or negation of life and world, their ethical or nonethical nature, and their monistic or dualistic orientation. In combination, we get an interpretive scheme that does not do justice to every detail of the materials with which he dealt but that brings to light the great structures. However, Schweitzer was not interested in a mere taxonomy of worldviews. Despite some reminiscences of previous essentialistic views of "culture," the general orientation marks of his thought were not the particular cultural identities but the common moral progress of humankind. Though he sometimes tended to fix what he called "the Chinese mind" (*der chinesische Geist*) within certain limits and, accordingly, to attribute a tendency of "persisting in its original substance" (*in ihrer ursprünglichen Art zu verharren*) to China, this tendency was counterbalanced by a general idea of development. According to this latter idea, affirmation of the world and moralization are goals that are valid for any culture and thus are forces that combine all of them. This is because the alternative—world negation and amorality—must fail for practical reasons.

### IV. Ethics and Nature

Whereas in India the goal of affirmation is reached only through the gradual overcoming of the way of negation, Chinese philosophy, according to Schweitzer, already had in its early stage an affirmative stance to the world and to life. This affirmation represented a "natural" relationship toward the world. In Confucianism, and already earlier, it was present in a reflected and ethical form; in Yang Zhu's thought it was present in the nonethical form. Affirmation prevails in spite of the idea of transcending the world, as is to be found in Daoist mysticism and rooted in the experience of ecstasy, something that combines Daoism and Brahmanism. Daoism, more exactly, finds a way between the radical world negation of Brahmanism and the "natural" world affirmation of Confucianism: The Dao is a creative entity *within* the world, though its creativity is negatively construed as "inaction."

Why was it possible that a "culture based on ethical affirmation of life and the world" (*eine auf ethischer Lebens- und Weltbejahung beruhende Kultur*) developed in China at such an early stage? Schweitzer's somewhat mystifying answer to this phenomenon is that it is due to the sober reasonability of the "Chinese mind." It is this down-to-earth orientation of the "Chinese mind" that saved it from losing itself in mere speculation, but it also led to a preference for cosmology rather than

theology—it would simply have been too curious for such a kind of thinking to attribute the movement of the world to invisible persons rather than to objective forces. The absence of theology, however, had the consequence that China, in contrast to Christianity, did not make the final step toward the “un-limited”—“universal love.” At this point, we have a quite typical ambiguity in Schweitzer’s approach to China: The “naturalness” of Chinese thinking, which starts from the observable and shrinks back from speculation and is admired by Schweitzer, is not only a protection against wild fancy but also an obstacle for far-reaching imagination.

The relationship of ethics and nature constitutes the systematic core not only of Schweitzer’s interpretation of China (and, I would add, of Western theories on China, although with a different tendency) but also of his own philosophy. I would like to focus on this point.

It was Schweitzer’s conviction that ethics cannot be derived from nature, as this would simply neglect its destructiveness: “Ethics would no longer be ethics, if brought into accord with the natural process.” Ethical norms can only be formulated against nature and never derived descriptively. Yet, ethical norms would be suspended in mid-air if they did not take into account the natural conditions and possibilities. Moreover, in Schweitzer’s famous principle of “reverence for life” (*Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben*), nature is a first-rank ethical concern, although, as he said, “in free consideration” (*in freier Überlegung*). Thus, “in the human being, the process of nature gets into contradiction with itself” (*in der Ethik tritt das Naturgeschehen in dem Menschen . . . mit sich selbst in Wider-spruch*). It is within the context of this integration of monism and dualism that Schweitzer’s comments on the Chinese relationship to nature have to be read. In dealing with China, he simultaneously dealt with his own philosophy and its unsolved difficulties. “It is in the thought of humankind,” Schweitzer said, “that one’s own thought tries to understand itself.”

According to Schweitzer, Chinese ethics in general is monistic, inasmuch as it views a virtuous life as in accordance with the natural order and not against it, as in the dualistic monotheistic religions. “In the ancient Chinese view,” Schweitzer wrote, the ethical order should “correspond to the one which exists in the world at large,” and “this is meant when it is said that the Dao of man should be in accord with the Dao of Heaven.”

Schweitzer did not take into account here the Chinese tradition that separates the “way of Heaven,” *tian dao*, and the “way of humanity,” *Ren dao* (Xunzi), and he thought, as virtually all sinologists of his time did, that micro-macrocosmical correspondence theories were generally typical for Chinese thought. Still, contrary to sinological literature, Schweitzer realized that even within this allegedly holistic approach there is a rupture, a breach—inasmuch as only “action” (“*das Tun*”) is understood as something ethical, but not “events” (“*das Geschehen*”), the world process as a whole—because there is no divine authority behind this world process. Thus Schweitzer gave a very substantial specification to his thesis of Chinese monism, and he viewed Classical Confucianism, Daoism, and Neo-Confucianism as three significantly different models of conceiving of the relationship between ethics and the world.

What Schweitzer appreciated with Daoism was the uprooting of naive certain-

ties with regard to conventional morality and the “ordinary conceptions of good and bad.” Daoism destroys our ingenuousness, leads us away from what is obvious and simple, and, like Confucianism, encourages self-contemplation (*Selbstbesinnung*). Thus, Daoism participates in the rationality of Chinese philosophy, because *Selbstbesinnung* is the rational as such. However, it is not possible to reach this aim within Daoism itself. Because of its foundation in natural philosophy, it cannot give the same rank to the individual as a subject of judgment as is possible in Confucianism.

Schweitzer wrote that the Daoists, too, recognize the “deep difference between action and event.” However, they take the side of “events,” in that they give the final say to “ecstasy” instead of consideration, to “experience of life” (*Erleben*) instead of cognition (*Erkennen*). In abandoning all “action springing from intention,” the human being becomes a mere “organ of the Dao that prevails in the world process.” This program is equivalent to a misjudgment of the “individual being” in the name of “*Geschehen*.”

Since for Schweitzer, standing in the tradition of the European Enlightenment, the individual is the final mark of orientation, and culture is not possible if ethical ideals are not a subject of the “thought of the individual being,” he could not agree with this constituent of Daoism. When he preferred the Confucian position to the Daoist one, it was for the central role of the individual in its ethics. Behind the ideal of the Confucian “gentleman” Schweitzer identified the “ethical individual.”

Next to Daoism and classical Confucianism, Schweitzer also discussed the Neo-Confucian variant of the relationship to the world. It is only superficially, Schweitzer said, that Neo-Confucianism means a progress beyond the classical Confucian ethics. In reality, the Neo-Confucians under the influence of Buddhism provided Confucian ethics with a basically Daoist foundation and constructed a naturalistic “system.” What Zhu Xi postulated was nothing but an “ethical principle of events” (*ethisches Prinzip des Geschehens*).

If this had been the final conclusion, the quintessence of Chinese ethics, it would surely have been of little interest to Schweitzer. To him, to “bring ethics into accord with the process of nature” or even to “derive ethics from nature” was a “disaster” that had already come upon German philosophy. Moreover, the “closed system” of Song philosophy inhibited the future development of Chinese ethics. Thus, Schweitzer’s positive evaluation of the early Confucians implied that they had another relationship toward nature. Although they, too, regarded ethics as the “completion of that which is nature-like” (*Vollendung des Naturhaften*), they assumed only a weak link between both. The link between nature and ethics consists basically in the fact that nature brings forth the human being as an ethical being, which can be seen as its “goal.” Beyond this point, the link remains a secret that should not be explored, as can be seen from Confucius’ hesitation to speak about “final questions.” The taboo on these questions is to prevent the direct identification of ethics and philosophy of nature that characterizes later Confucianism. Thus, according to Schweitzer, in early Confucianism nature did not become a subject of fierce opposition, as in the monotheistic religions, but it also was not incorporated into ethics. The natural “ends in the ethical” (“*das Naturhafte endet im Ethischen*”), but the difference between them is, nevertheless, never abolished. Schweitzer even praised Confucius for being great in “basing ethics on nothing

else but itself and on the fact that it is necessary and true." Whether there is an ethical order in the world is up to humankind, not up to the "promordial powers," yin and yang.

The weakness of the cosmological backing of ethics together with the rejection of a religious foundation makes Confucian ethics a "risky" endeavor (*zum Wagnis*). It is because Confucius saw the necessity of this risk and answered in the affirmative the question whether ethics can "exist out of its own power" without religious belief that, in the eyes of Schweitzer, Confucius was "one of the really great thinkers." This is a remarkable assessment for a theologian, and it throws a light on the relationship of theology and philosophy in Schweitzer's own thought.

Thus, even without taking into account the Xunzi line of Confucianism, Schweitzer, contrary to the great majority of Western sinologists, had a feeling for the gap that opened between humanity and nature in ancient China and that can be bridged but cannot be closed again. Schweitzer wrote: "It is the peculiarity of Chinese thought that there is no deep linkage between its view of the world and ethics. . . . In Kongzi and Mengzi, ethics stands for itself. Ethics has the view of the world as its background rather than resulting from it." Further: "For the Chinese, the belief in an ethical world order (*sittliche Weltordnung*) stands in the background, but not in the sense that ethics would be dependent on it. The order of the world is a kind of basic harmony upon which the motifs of ethics freely develop (*eine Grundharmonie, auf der die Motive der Ethik sich frei entfalten*)."

By a musical metaphor—a device of which he made frequent use—Schweitzer characterized the relationship of Chinese ethics to nature as a kind of free boundedness. This is a very original and promising approach that is a true alternative to the great variety of simple, holistic readings of Chinese philosophy that dominate the field. It is an expression of a deep affinity between Chinese philosophy, as Schweitzer interpreted it, and his own philosophical thought, which was constantly shifting between the "natural world order" and "unconditional reasonable thinking" (*voraussetzungslosem Vernunftdenken*).

Without its separation from nature and the corresponding recognition of "having to stand on its own" and "having to be self-sufficient," Chinese ethics would not have reached any of the achievements that Schweitzer attributed to it. This is true, for example, for the radical rejection of utilitarianism that makes "Mengzi a forerunner of Kant." It is also true for the complementarity of personal self-fulfillment and "regard for one's fellow humans" that is inherent in Confucius's Golden Rule and that, according to Schweitzer, was the core of ethics in general and of the ethics of the *Lunyu* in particular.

By his specific understanding of the relation toward nature, Schweitzer thus found a perspective from which he was able to recognize the double-bottomed architecture of Chinese, in particular Confucian ethics. The thought figure of a free boundedness reappears in the relationship of Confucian ethics to tradition, which stands in a structural analogy to the relationship toward nature. In Schweitzer's eyes, Confucius, as all other Chinese philosophers, "only continues and develops tradition," but not in an uncritical manner. Rather, he scrutinized tradition by the yardstick of "true culture." Even if Chinese ethics, as Schweitzer said with reference to Confucianism, "did not want to be more than a preservation of the ethical life that had been formed in ancient times and handed down to the present," it had

"already recognized the insufficiency of that which can be prescribed by law and tradition." Accordingly, in Schweitzer's opinion Confucian ethics does not expect that the individual simply yields to the social order but that the individual "is part of with one's best convictions" (*ihr in der besten Gesinnung angehört*). At the same time, the "naturally given" social relations are complemented by a new relation into which one enters spontaneously—the relationship between friends, which is acknowledged by Mengzi as one of the basic human relationships. It is this relationship that brings China on the way toward unconditional "universal love." Thus, Schweitzer, unlike most interpreters of Chinese ethics, had a feeling for the explosive power of Mengzi's fifth relationship. The potential of Mengzi's ethics unfolds in his ethics of "universal compassion," which, for Schweitzer, was the climax of Chinese ethics.

### V. Conclusion

In this presentation, I have limited myself to describing the main architecture of Schweitzer's analysis of Chinese thought in order to demonstrate the explanatory power of his heuristic and to show how seriously and illuminatingly he dealt with China. Since he was not an expert in Chinese thought, his texts certainly also contain mistakes and deficiencies, and we will not follow some of his judgments today—for example, his rejection of the republican movement in China. The shortcomings of his work, however, are outweighed by far by his achievements. What he has presented, though in an unfinished form, is a conceptually and argumentatively demanding, densely written, and original interpretation of basic positions of Chinese philosophy, the whole richness of which has yet to be discovered and disclosed. It proves the productivity of well-founded interpretive ideas and, above all, of a normative interest of knowledge, something that is normally missing in philological research. Therefore, I would count Schweitzer's manuscripts among the few original Western interpretations of Chinese thought. Even in our time, when Confucianism is cast as a front in the "clash of civilizations" and as a spiritual blessing for a booming market economy, Schweitzer's cosmopolitan moral approach is still an important challenge.



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