



**WILEY-
BLACKWELL**



Review: [untitled]

Author(s): Yang Xiao

Source: *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 215 (Apr., 2004), pp. 327-330

Published by: [Blackwell Publishing](#) for [The Philosophical Quarterly](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3542830>

Accessed: 14/07/2011 11:20

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=black>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Blackwell Publishing and *The Philosophical Quarterly* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Philosophical Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

This book serves to prompt such a reconsideration, but it will not be especially helpful in the undertaking because it is (intentionally) a personal, not an intellectual biography. There are two chapters that provide some material for the assessment of Stewart's intellectual achievements as both teacher and philosopher, but they focus largely on the assessments of his own time. In some respects these were mixed, with the contention a recurrent one that Stewart was not an especially original thinker. But neither chapter seeks to engage with his writings critically from the point of view of contemporary philosophy. There are also two useful appendices, the first offering some assessment of his books, and the second samples of his writing. None of this, however, makes much of an inroad into this question: was Stewart a philosopher of sufficient substance for his ideas to warrant sustained re-examination? His great mentor Thomas Reid, also ignored by philosophers for over a century, has proved to be so. Perhaps Stewart will as well, though his tendency to leave central matters of dispute unresolved may militate against this.

However, the question needs to be answered by a different book from the one under review. This is not a criticism. Macintyre has no philosophical pretensions, and is quite clear about the purpose of his book. Still, he can claim full credit for being the first to fill out the context in which a properly philosophical assessment can most profitably be undertaken.

This book has the further merit of being an exercise in pure enquiry. Written in retirement and out of sheer interest, it demonstrates unmistakably the value of professionally conducted research untouched by the pressures of research assessment exercises.

University of Aberdeen

GORDON GRAHAM

Human Rights and Chinese Thought: a Cross-Cultural Inquiry. BY STEPHEN C. ANGLE.
(Cambridge UP, 2002. Pp. xvi + 285. Price £16.45.)

Towards the end of this groundbreaking book, Stephen Angle claims that 'thoughtful engagement between Western and Chinese thinkers, comparatively common seventy years ago, is only just beginning to be revived'. This is only half right. If there was 'engagement' seventy years ago, it was an entirely one-way process, consisting in Chinese philosophers learning from Western philosophers. The exciting trend we see today, of which Angle's book itself is part, is that more and more Western philosophers are taking non-Western philosophy seriously – not a revival, but a major improvement. One might still find it unsatisfactory, however, that so far the focus has been on *ancient* Chinese philosophy. Thus Angle's book is a particularly significant contribution in that he is really one of the first to take contemporary Chinese thinkers seriously. He has made a strong case for the thesis that there are important things we can learn from them, even though (as I explain below) I am not always in agreement with his particular claims.

The phrase 'human rights' in the title is rather misleading, since the book has a much broader concern, its real subject being what Angle calls 'Chinese rights discourse'. Herein lies the strength of the work. One might wonder 'Why another book

on human rights and Chinese thought?', seeing that several fine monographs and collections on the subject have appeared since the heyday of the 'human rights *versus* Asian values' debate of the 1990s. Angle's approach uniquely sidesteps the central question of that debate – whether the concept of human rights can be 'Asian' or 'Chinese' – by focusing on the fact that the concept of rights and human rights has already had a history in China. If one takes that history seriously, one should indeed be asking different questions. Specifically, Angle asks whether there is a distinctively Chinese concept of rights and human rights. This is a much more difficult question, demanding extraordinary historical knowledge; but few are as well equipped as Angle to take it on.

His book can be divided into two parts, of which the first deals with general philosophical and methodological issues in cross-cultural comparative studies. This should be read by all with comparativist interests. In the second part Angle argues for two theses: (1) there is a distinctive Chinese discourse about rights, just as there is also an American or a French discourse; (2) important things can be learned from contemporary Chinese rights discourse. While emphasizing that the Chinese discourse is diverse and dynamic, he insists that it 'remain[s] distinctively Chinese'. If he means that Chinese ideas about rights have developed in accordance with Chinese concerns and practices, this is obviously true, but not particularly distinctive, given that any culture's rights discourse will have developed in accordance with its cultures, concerns and practices. This might be why Angle wants to make some stronger claims, namely, that in terms of content, 'Chinese concepts of rights over the years have differed in important ways from many Western conceptions of rights', and that 'there are important continuities within Chinese rights discourse, even down to the present day'.

Most of the second part of the book is dedicated to one of these important continuities, characterized as follows: 'the dominant view of rights both now and through the history of Chinese rights discourse has been that rights are closely tied to interests'. Angle argues that the modern Chinese concept of interest can be traced back to the way several neo-Confucian thinkers sought to justify legitimate human desires before the concept of rights was introduced to China in the late nineteenth century. He then shows that under the influence of those neo-Confucians, Chinese thinkers from the late nineteenth century to 1949 have understood rights mainly in terms of interests. Angle's most original thesis is that contemporary Chinese thinkers of the 1990s regard rights as devices to protect interests, a view very similar to Joseph Raz's interest theory of rights.

Here Angle sharply disagrees with R.P. Peerenboom, the most influential authority on the contemporary Chinese concept of human rights. For Peerenboom, this concept is distinctively utilitarian, whereas its Western counterpart is deontological. I think Angle is correct to emphasize the diversity of Western rights discourse: as well as Dworkin's and Rawls' deontological theories, there is also Raz's interest theory, which is not exactly utilitarian. For Raz, a person may be said to have a right if some interests of his are considered of ultimate value so as to justify treating others as under a duty; Raz does not see overall utility as an ultimate value or as the only value. For example, personal autonomy or common good can also be

considered as of ultimate value. I believe Raz's theory is deliberately constructed as a perfectionist one which takes value pluralism seriously.

Angle has strong textual evidence to show that Peerenboom is wrong to read some Chinese authors as utilitarians. In fact, these authors 'clearly believe that we have rights because they are necessary to protect certain interests, and thus that rights have an extrinsic value, in that they are means to achieving valuable ends such as realizing our legitimate, non-selfish interests. Nowhere do these theorists suggest, though, that rights are justified solely by their contribution to overall utility. Instead, they tend to tie the idea of legitimate interests together with the notion of "being a person" or "achieving personality"' (p. 221). In other words, their sort of theory is better described as a species of 'perfectionism'. It is unfortunate that Angle and Peerenboom do not use this term, since they might have had a more engaging dialogue had they characterized the real issue in terms of perfectionism and anti-perfectionism.

This opposition is also at the centre of the debate in China in the 1990s between the 'Liberals' and the 'New Left'. Neither perfectionism nor anti-perfectionism can be said to be distinctively 'Chinese'. I think Angle should reject the thesis that there is a distinctively Chinese rights discourse. The Chinese interest-based theory of rights is indeed different from one kind of Western theory (developed by Dworkin and Rawls, who happen to be American), but it is similar to another sort of Western theory (developed by Raz and MacCormick, who happen to be, respectively, Israeli and Scottish). Perhaps here is where Angle's claim that there are different national discourses about rights comes in. This is not unlike the remark made by an anonymous Chinese author in 1903 that the English saw rights as interests, the German as power and strength, and the French as one's natural rights. However, even if we accept these stereotypes of different national conceptions, we should not forget that all three can be found in Chinese rights discourse (and in American discourse or British discourse as well). For example, we can find the German concept in Liang Qichao (as Angle himself shows), and the French one in several influential human rights activists such as Wei Jingsheng and Fang Lizhi. Angle tends either to overlook this 'French' concept (he does not mention Fang in the book), or to assimilate it to what he regards as the distinctively Chinese one.

I believe the main reason why Angle singles out the interest-based theory of rights as distinctively Chinese is that he thinks it can be traced to neo-Confucian thinkers earlier than the nineteenth century. (He seems to assume that if something is 'Confucian' and originated from the period before China had extensive contact with the West, it must be authentically 'Chinese'.) However, there is evidence that the concept of interest in contemporary Chinese thought is a direct borrowing from Marxism or Sino-Marxism. Angle's insistence on the existence of a 'distinctively Chinese' discourse is often responsible for his overlooking the evidence. For example, he quotes as follows from a contemporary Chinese author: 'The foundation of rights are interests. In essence, the relationship of rights and duties between people is a kind of interest-relationship.' But the author's very next sentence, which Angle does not include, is 'Marx said: "What men seek is inextricably connected to their interests"'.

Anyone who thought that nothing new can be said about the 'human rights *versus* Asian values' debate should be convinced by Angle's book that the opposite is true. One may, however, feel that his change of subject is insufficiently radical, because his question of whether there is a distinctively Chinese concept of rights still shares the debate's presuppositions and anxiety about 'Chineseness'. Even so, the book provokes many new questions, thereby bringing discussion much closer to the ideal of constructive engagement between Western and Chinese philosophers – which is precisely the goal that Angle sets out to achieve.

Kenyon College, Ohio

YANG XIAO

Thought and World: an Austere Portrayal of Truth, Reference and Semantic Correspondence. BY CHRISTOPHER HILL. (Cambridge UP, 2002. Pp. xi + 154. Price £40.00.)

The Correspondence Theory of Truth: an Essay on the Metaphysics of Predication. BY ANDREW NEWMAN. (Cambridge UP, 2002. Pp. xi + 251. Price £47.50.)

A hundred years ago, debates over truth were largely debates over whether its nature consisted in correspondence, coherence or pragmatic utility. Things have changed. Today, the field is just as much concerned with whether truth even has a nature as it is with what that nature is. Accordingly, philosophers working on truth fall into two broadly defined camps: the deflationists, who think that truth is either not a property or at least not a substantive property, and those who think that it is, and defend one version or another of a robust metaphysical theory of truth.

The division is amply illustrated by these two books from the Cambridge Studies in Philosophy series. On the surface, the theories each book defends could not be more different – one broadly deflationist, the other solidly within the more traditional correspondence camp. To use an art analogy, if Hill's 'Austere Portrayal' appears like a minimalist Mark Rothko, then Newman's 'Correspondence Theory' seems a baroque Tiepolo. But in philosophy, as in art, things are rarely so simple. Both accounts end up stealing a brushstroke or two from the other's canvas.

Christopher Hill's excellent *Thought and World* is a highly readable and important defence of a form of deflationism, in that it holds that 'truth is philosophically and empirically neutral, in the sense that its use carries no substantive and empirical commitments' (p. 4). The overall view that emerges, which Hill calls substitutionalism, is provocative and inventive on a range of subjects, including indexicals, states of affairs and meaning. It deserves, and will no doubt receive, careful study.

Substitutionalism has three distinctive features. First, it concerns the truth of thoughts or propositions and constituents of thoughts. Thus, in a sense, substitutionalism is much more rooted in the philosophy of mind than in the philosophy of language. Secondly, Hill argues that propositional truth and other semantic concepts can be 'reduced' to substitutional quantification (p. 23). Thirdly, he claims he can pay due homage to the ideas behind the correspondence theory without abandoning deflationism. Thus substitutionalism can be understood, he argues, as a sort of compromise between deflationary views and correspondence theories.