Guest Editor's Introduction

Rethinking 'Us' and 'Them':
The Origins and Problematics of Self and Other

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I. The Origins and The Problematics of Self and Other

The binary notion of Self-and-Other has existed as the basis of linguistic, epistemological, metaphysical, and psychological structuring of the world since the inception of thinking. It was assumed that the Self derives its meaning by its contrast with the Other — how it is defined and constructed. Understood broadly, the Other may refer to an individual or a group, a psychological element other than the normative self, or an alternative reality. "Self and Other," therefore, not only has rich layers of meanings throughout the history of philosophy but also carries important contemporary significance. In practical application, such a conceptual framework has functioned, implicitly or explicitly, as the hypothesis underlying theories and practices in self-knowledge, interpersonal relationships, morality, law, economics, distribution of resources, health care, governance, politics, social policies, as well as gender and race relations.

The "self-other" problematic appears again and again in the apparatus and vocabulary of a string of thinkers throughout the history of philosophy.

One finds, for example, Plato identifying the eternal unchanging transcendent World of Forms/Being/Truth (the intelligible world, the world of the divine) as the superior *other* — it exists separately from the changing World of material objects/becoming/illusion and yet sets an absolute norm for everything down below (*Republic* 472-80, 485, 507-09, 514-18, 526-27). Thus, the human self is a "self" that is caught in between the two "others," the superior other of the World of Being and the inferior other of the World of Becoming (*Phaedo* 65a-68b, 74e-75e). This is mirrored in Plato's famous theory of the tripartite structure of the soul (*Republic* 436-41) and the metaphor of the charioteer and the black and white horses (*Phaedrus* 253-54). In the human psyche, reason (the charioteer, the only mental faculty that can comprehend the Forms/Truth) must control the other two elements, passion and desire (the white and the black horses, the irrational elements that are more bound by the body, like the recalcitrant matter). This reasoning underpins Plato's social and political philosophy: the guardian class with the strongest element of reason, after undergoing rigorous training, must govern the spirited passion-driven auxiliary class and the desire-driven worker class. The best regime is the one governed by the philosophers — the true lovers of wisdom, who despise mundane fame, wealth, and earthly power, in pursuit of higher Truths (*Republic* 543-76, 581, 590).

The binary notion of self-other continues in Aristotle philosophy and is arguably made rigid in his three laws of categorical logic: the law of identity ($A = A$), the law of excluded middle (either A or ~A, there is no third term), and the law of non-contradiction (A is A; therefore, it is not ~A; thus, A and ~A cannot both be true) (*Metaphysics* 1005b19-20, 1005b23-24, 1011b13-14;

On Interpretation 19a27-28). The three laws of logic by inference endorse an exclusive dualism and value hierarchy: in favoring A (the I, the Us), ~A (the non-I, the Them) is devalued, which in turn unfortunately informs Aristotle's stance on the superiority of the Greeks and the slavish nature of the non-Greeks, and the necessity of the male ruling over the female, human over nature, as unmistakable Laws of Nature (*Politics* 1252a31-1252b9, 1254a29-b15, 125615-22, 1259b2-4; 1260a11-15; *Generation of Animals* 728a17-21, 737a27-28; *History of Animals* 608b1-14).

    In medieval philosophy rooted in the Abrahamic religions, God is revered as the transcendent, eternal, ubiquitous, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent Divine Other. God created human beings in his image, which defines the human essence as an image of God. Particularly in Christianity, the doctrine of the Triune God (God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three persons but one substance) lends metaphysical and existential support for a communal interpretation of God's divinity (See, for example, Augustine's *On Trinity* and *The City of God*). Christ's incarnation and suffering for humanity further supports the interpretation that God is not just out there in a transcendent realm as an impartial Law-Giver and Executor of Divine Law but immanently in this world as a merciful loving God participating in the unfolding of human history and redemption. Christology is therefore an important link to understand personhood, humanity's relationship with God, with other human beings, and with Nature and how morality, law, social policies, and government should be constructed (See, for example, Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Parts II and III).

    During the Enlightenment and modern periods, the notion of autonomy and rationality (in contrast with heteronomy and sentiment) gained wide

support. For example, in order to create a space for morality and free will by separating the noumenal world from the phenomenal world, Immanuel Kant moves the subject of ethics out of the realm of sciences in his first critique (the *Critique of Pure Reason*) and places it at the center of his second critique (the *Critique of Practical Reason*). As members of the community of rational beings ("the Kingdom of Ends"), Kant argues that humanity and persons have a moral responsibility to stipulate a universal moral law of categorical imperative. It would require each person treating her/his own self and other human selves as ends-in-themselves (as subjects whose dignity allows no comprise) rather than merely as means to an end (things that have a price-tag and can be easily disposed or replaced) (Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, first and second sections). Rational nature and its full development so as to be able to discern the categorical imperative is the only criterion that qualifies a human being as an autonomous moral lawgiver and an end-in-itself. And yet who should decide the standard of rational nature and its full development and thus determine the kind of human being who would qualify as the human subjects (the Self, the Us) rather than as the objects (the Other, the Them) remains a debatable and sensitive topic in Kantian deontology, modern liberalism, and their stance on disability, environment, nation-state relations, gender and race.

In contemporary philosophy of mind, the question of mind-body relation, other minds, the sub-conscious, and the unconscious continue to be contested grounds in our pursuit of self-knowledge and the production of knowledge of the other. Dualism, idealism, epiphenomenalism, reductive materialism, among others, each has its own set of advantages and challenges.

Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, critical theory, post-colonial studies, and post-modernism have called out the problematic of our accustomed thinking of the other and otherness (Derrida 1978; Glendinning 2011; Said 2003; Cixous 1976; Butler 2006; Spivak 1988; Mohanty 2003; De Beauvoir 2011). Their critical insights have brought to the foreground the problem of "othering" that results from the rigid binary notion of Self-versus-Other (Us-versus-Them) that has manifested in the tension and conflict in geo-political, ethnic, race, gender, and class relations. The act of othering occurs when the other is not regarded as an equal and when differences are essentialized, homogenized, reduced, marginalized, and stigmatized as the incomplete, the immature, and the lesser side in the polar opposite of Self-versus-Other and Us-versus-Them. Such mindsets, they argue, have generated cultural, economic, political, and technological domination of one nation over the other, one culture over the rest of the world. Thus, a new form of colonialism and imperialism in a world driven by the market economy and global capitalism is born and runs rampant. To turn the act of othering on its head, they argue, one must abandon the old self/other paradigm and recognize that there is no completely autonomous unchanging self (the self is but the other of the others) nor one permanent unconditioned center, for there are multiple centers. The center-margin relations remain fluid and infinite, subject to locality, perspective, and context.

With this in mind, cross-cultural studies beyond the Western traditions become especially interesting and fertile. Looking into Asian traditions, the self-other relation is also an important concept in multiple schools of thought. In a cursory survey, for example, in the Confucian tradition one reads in the

Lunyu《論語》(*Analects*), "What one does not desire do not impose on others (己所不欲，勿施于人。)" (15.23); "A humane person, in wishing oneself to be established, helps others to be established; in wishing oneself to be successful, help others to be successful (夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人。)" (6.28).[1] The *Liji* 《禮記》 (*Book of Ritual*), the *Quli Shang* 〈曲禮上〉 (Detailed Ritual Rules, Part I) chapter admonishes "*Li* (ritual) is to humble oneself and honor others (夫禮者, 自卑而尊人)." The *Mengzi* 《孟子》 (*Book of Mencius*) 1A:7 teaches: "Treat with respect the elders in my family, and then extend that respect to include the elders in other families. Treat with tenderness the young in my own family, and then extend that tenderness to include the young in other families. (老吾老，以及人之老；幼吾幼，以及人之幼。)" (Chan, 1973: 61) To practice the Confucian Golden Rule, the ritual/virtue of humility and social care, the distinction between the self (in its various terms, "*ji* 己" "*zi* 自" or "*wu* 吾") and the other ("*ren* 人") is hypothesized, for without the other, the self cannot practice the Golden Rule nor the ritual and virtue of humility nor any social care when no one is on the other end to receive the respect and care. The self-other distinction is posited rather than eliminated. And yet, what distinguishes the Confucian view of the self-other relation from the Western schools of philosophy is that the Confucian self and other are not in a belligerent hostile relation — the other is not a threat that may potentially annihilate the self nor an unenlightened mind that needs to be taught nor a burden to be tolerated or dispensed with. Rather, the other is an *extended* self that one should respect, care for, and care about. The point of self-cultivation is not for self-aggrandizement but to be able to care

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[1]   English translations of Chinese text are mine unless otherwise noted.

for the world — seeing others as the self, and others' families as one's families. Thus, a humane person (a morally exemplary person) does not narrowly focus on one's own moral perfection as an ultimate end. Rather, to be humane is to love others (*Analects* 12.22: 仁者，愛人也。).

　　In the same vein, in the Daoist tradition, for example, on reads in the *Daodejing*《道德經》, chapter 49: "The sage has no fixed ideas. / He regards the people's ideas as his own. / I treat those who are good with goodness. / And I also treat those who are not good with goodness. / Thus, goodness is attained. (聖人無常心，以百姓心為心。善者吾善之；不善者吾亦善之；德善。)" (Chan 1973: 162) A sage is non-judgmental and does not obsess about their own perspectives or ways of proceeding. Rather, they care for all, regarding people's heart/wish as their own heart/wish. Thus, the good is achieved impartially. The non-moralist reading of a sage's heart is echoed in numerous places in the *Daodejing*. Take, for example, chapter 8, where one reads: "It is best to be like water. / Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them. It dwells in (lowly) places that all people disdain. / This is why it is so near to Dao. (上善若水，水善利萬物而不爭，處為人之所惡，故幾於道。)" (Chan 1963, 143 with modification). Zhuangzi, taking one step further, argues for the total equalizing of opposites. One reads in the *Qiwu*〈齊物篇〉(Equalizing All Things) chapter of the *Zhuangzi*《莊子》:

　　　　There is nothing that is not the "that" [the other] and there is nothing that is not the "this" [the self]. Things do not know that they are the "that [the other]" of other things; they only know what they themselves know. Therefore, I say that the "that [the other]" is produced by the

"this [the self]" and the "this [the self]" is also caused by the "that [the other]." This is the theory of mutual production. ... Because of the right, there is the wrong, and because of the wrong, there is the right. Therefore, the sage does not proceed along these lines.... The "this [the self]" is also the "that [the other]." The "that [the other]" is also the "this [the self]." ... When "this [the self]" and "that [the other]" have no opposites, there is the very axis of Tao [*Dao*]. Only when the axis occupies the center of a circle can things in their infinite complexities be responded to. (*Zhuangzi*, chapter 2; Chan, 1973: 182-183 with modification)

物無非彼，物無非是。自彼則不見，自知則知之。故曰：彼出於是，是亦因彼。彼是方生之說也。〔……〕因是因非，因非因是。是以聖人不由…是亦彼也，彼亦是也。〔……〕彼是莫得其偶，謂之道樞。樞始得其環中，以應無窮。

Though two-thousand years earlier than contemporary post-modernism, Zhuangzi's analysis of self and other is remarkably original and stimulating. The birthing of opposites results from rigid binary thinking. And, yet from a multi-perspectival point of view, there are infinite numbers and layers of the self and selves, and there is an infinite number and layers of the other and others. Each gives rise to its own perspective of the world and meaning. "There are many worlds everywhere," as the 13th century Japanese Zen master, Dogen, once said (Heisig, et., 2011: 146). This relativizing (or equalizing) of opposites is not to eliminate difference or abandon truth, but to celebrate difference, to recognize its validity and its infinite possibility, and to revisit truth in its totality rather than in one-sidedness.

It is in this collaborative and inclusive spirit, the 2nd joint National Taiwan University and The University of Scranton Symposium presents to you this special issue with the following selected papers on the theme of "self and other" with corresponding commentary and author's reply to the commentary. Our hope is that this format will reenact the spirit of the symposium — a philosophical discourse and engagement that is participated communally.

II. Synopsis of the Keynote and Selected Essays

Keynote of the Symposium

L. A. Paul in her keynote speech, "At the Still Point of the Turning World" (based on her acclaimed book, *Transformative Experience*), explores how certain types of life experiences can be transformative. By transforming you, they change you, and in the process, they restructure the nature and meaning of your life and thus alter your first-person perspective. Using Karl Marlantes's powerful personal story, Paul analyzes and discusses the nature of transformative experience, the three elements involved in the transformative process, and how these changes involve a distinctive kind of uncertainty that cannot be exhaustively or fully rationally mapped out as suggested by traditional theories of action. Transformative experience comprises a radically new and drastically different kind of experience. This irreversibly life-changing experience fundamentally changes a person's self-identity, values, and their relationship to others and the world.

II.1 Ancient and Medieval

In "Asylum for the Shameless: Honor and Conciliatory Otherness in Plato's Symposium," **David Black** discusses two different kinds of poets distinguished by two different kinds of love and objects of love: the true poet, who is a lover of wisdom, inspired by divine eros and marked with an appropriate sense of modesty and shame, and the disingenuous shameless poet, a crowd pleaser and a suitor of earthly fame and honor. There is a symbiosis between the crowd (the mass with a corrupted conscience, who wants to be amused) and the disingenuous poets, who are eager to amuse, manipulate, and flatter the crowd indiscriminately in order to earn approval from the crowd and its accompanied earthly fame. The crowd and the lesser poets treat one another as the conciliatory other, provider of comfort for the lost selves who have forgotten or forsaken the spiritual realm and the importance of character. The *Symposium* therefore functions as a critical critique of Athenian intelligentsia and political shamelessness in Plato's time.

Christopher Hauser, in his "St. Thomas Aquinas's Concept of a Person," dives into a historical and philosophical investigation of what constitutes a person (a human self/hypostasis) in Thomas Aquinas's philosophical theology, a noted thinker of Medieval Scholasticism. Countering the interpretation of Richard Cross and Timothy Pawl, Hauser argues that Aquinas does maintain that there are some kinds of actions (activities proper to a rational nature), which he thinks only persons can perform — namely those involve the powers of "intellect" and "will." Aquinas' account of personhood has important philosophical implications for the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation and

the status of separated soul in the afterlife. Moreover, it anticipates what is a now widely accepted idea about personhood, namely that being a subject of sufficiently rich mental states (e.g., an individual which thinks, wills, reasons, chooses, and loves) is sufficient for being a person.

II.2 Modern and Contemporary

Moving into the Modern and Contemporary philosophy, in "The Lawgiving Self: Kant on the Natural Law Tradition and the Dignity of Others," **Christopher Fremaux** analyzes Kant's reasoning for according rational beings the status of ends-in-themselves because of their capacity for autonomy (rational nature) in giving universal moral law through their will. In focusing on *a priori* moral law and its universalizability, Kant rejects the natural law tradition, arguing that it places mistakenly the moral foundation on an *a posteriori* examination of human nature and conditions, which can only result in conditional hypothetical imperatives. But universal moral laws, including the principle of ends that stipulates the strict duty to treat the self and others always as ends-in-themselves, requires *a priori* categorical imperatives, which the natural law tradition fails to provide.

George Aulisio's "Epiphenomenal Minds and Philosophers' Zombies: Where Do Mental Properties Originate?" discusses the contemporary debate in philosophy of mind on property dualism, epiphenomenalism, and physicalism on the origins of mental property. Aulisio argues that the combination of physicalism and property dualism (understood as epiphenomenalism) encounters multiple epistemological dilemmas. First, if mental properties are causally and completely determined by physical origin (e.g., emergence, neurophysiological,

etc.), then we run into immense difficulty in favoring and accounting for the qualitatively distinct epiphenomenal minds of conscious human beings over human robotics (a.k.a. "philosophers' zombies"), who do not have mental life but have physical functionality just like humans. Second, if mental properties are fundamentally distinct, irreducible to physical origins, and causally incapable of causing physical changes, then we may run into difficulty of knowing other minds by physical signs. The article concludes that combining physicalism and property dualism requires hard choices and concessions. Ultimately, if one is committed to mental realism, it would require one to either abandon physicalism or drastically circumscribe it as a heuristic method rather than as a feasible worldview.

II.3 Chinese and Cross-Cultural

In "Moral Sensitivity, Emotion-Based Theory of Ethics, and Confucian Moral Psychology," **Rong-Lin Wang** challenges David Wong's reading of Mengzi's moral psychology. Wang argues against Wong's non-dichotomous model that seeks an integration of reason with emotion without giving priority to either. Wang argues that the Mengzian ethics should be characterized as emotion-based — it is neither a reason-based schema nor a non-dichotomous model without prioritization of emotion. Noting that in Mengzian ethics moral emotion plays a significant role as the source of moral motivation, as the foundation of moral knowledge, and as the guidance of moral cultivation, Wang argues that moral emotion is the measure of reasonableness, not the other way around. He draws on examples of moral insensitivity found in the

Book of Mencius to defend this thesis and shows how moral progress is enacted in this emotion-based ethics.

Jeu-Jenq Yuann, in his "An Interpretation of Confucian *Ren* (仁 humanness) through a Case Study of the Divergent Attitudes in the Preventative Measures of Covid-19 Pandemic in China and the US," investigates the phenomenon of drastically different attitudes toward the mask-wearing mandate in China and in the US at the onset of the pandemic. Given that the access to scientific data being equal and the scientific evidence seeming to mandate that everyone should react with an undivided voice, why did citizens of these two countries react so differently to the government mandate of mask-wearing? Yuann begins with a consideration and reflection on methodology and Chinese history and then moves into an investigation of the Chinese ideal of *ren* in theory and in practice through textual analysis and historical data in order to show that the divergence in the mask-wearing attitude may well be a result of historico-cultural embeddedness, a topic that deserves to be further researched.

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